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International Marketing Management

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**VIRAL MARKETING IN A FINNISH MEDIUM SIZED GAMING COMPANY:
DISCOVERING, ANALYZING AND BUILDING AN IMPROVED MANAGEMENT
PROCESS FOR VIRAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS, CASE: NITROGAMES**

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ABSTRACT

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The goal of this thesis is to build a viral marketing management framework for a Finnish medium sized gaming company. This is achieved by first finding and building a theoretical five step management process framework based on literature, analyzing current model and giving recommendations for the case company to develop its own management process. In addition, viral marketing research is still in early stage resulting this study to propose its own take on the definition in the theory part.

Empirical part is based on qualitative interviews, campaign material and secondary sources and is aimed to find out and analyze the case company's current viral marketing state and to give recommendations to it. The final outcome of the study is a general, theoretical management framework for viral marketing campaigns and specified recommendations for the case company.

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Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on rakentaa viitekehys viraalimarkkinointikampanjan johtamiselle suomalaisessa keskisuudessa peliyrityksessä. Tämä tapahtuu ensin löytämällä ja rakentamalla viisiportainen teoreettinen prosessikaavio perustuen kirjallisuuteen, analysoimalla nykyistä toimintamallia ja antamalla suosituksia case-yritykselle sen oman johtamisprosessin kehittämiseksi. Viraalimarkkinoinnin tutkimus on vielä kasvuvaiheessa, joten teoriaosuus ottaa myös kantaa sen oikeaoppiseen määrittelyyn.

Empiriaosuus perustuu kvalitatiiviseen haastattelu-, kampanja- ja vaihtoehtolähteiden hyväksikäyttöön ja pyrkii selvittämään sekä analysoimaan case-yrityksen nykyistä viraalimarkkinoinnin tilaa sekä antamaan suosituksia siihen. Lopputulemana tutkimuksella on yleisluontoinen, teoreettinen viitekehys viraalimarkkinointikampanjan johtamiselle ja seikkaperäinen case-yritykselle rakennettu viraalimarkkinointikampanjan suositusviitekehys.

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Moreover, this thesis would not have come clear if not my parents, brother and significant other. I am not maybe showing it too much, but I would be lost without you.

Along with the thesis, my student life is also over. It has offered its own advantages but now it is time to move on and start with the real life.

Lappeenranta, 24th February 2014,

Olli Ropponen

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1 Introduction

This study investigates viral marketing in a gaming industry. The introduction chapter describes the purpose, objectives, central constructs, methodologies and the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background of the study

Current recession and structural changes in our economy means the need for looking new business methods and fields to fuel future economic growth and well-being. Gaming industry as a whole has already surpassed for example movie industry (Baker 2011) and is still growing thanks to maturing technology and change in public opinion. In Finland gaming industry is booming especially thanks to mobile segment and born-global mentality. There are even reports indicating and hinting that making games could be the savior of Finnish economy in the future. However, there is still a long way to go and only time will tell what kind of industries will thrive in future, but the potential is clearly seen.

The recession and small video game companies results tight marketing budgets and demand for alternative possibilities to stand out. The Internet is natural way to market born-global games and it has huge potential to do marketing in completely new ways and reach new audiences. Particularly social, content sharing Internet we have today, called Web 2.0, allow companies to look new ways to make themselves visible in a global scale. This new version of Internet means that everyone can develop content, publish it and share it in different communities offering customers new power in information but also help small companies to stand out. (Juslén 2009; Scott 2007)

It can be said that Web 2.0 drives from Word-of-Mouth. Described as the most efficient influences on consumer behavior, WoM is still least understood marketing phenomenon according to Trusov et al. (2009). The basic idea of Word-of-Mouth involves consumers sharing information to each other about certain brand, product or service, revolving from the evidence that lack of trust in marketing communications has led potential customers to seek consulting from other sources. (Allsop et al. 2007) Because people trust their friends, they also trust in their friends' recommendations.

The strategy to create, distribute and control content and the WoM it develops is called viral marketing. The term viral comes from the contamination nature of a virus, referring to viral marketing campaigns ability to pass on news, information and entertainment to people who share them forward. (Cruz & Fill 2008) By marketing virally company builds, hopefully, positive WoM and therefore is able to stand out and reach massive amount of consumers with minimal investment.

Viral marketing research is still lagging behind its real life usage. There have been some studies focusing on the viral marketing itself (e.g. Cruz & Fill 2008; Petrescu & Korgaonkar 2011) and some of its details, like tools it uses, but campaign planning (e.g. Griffon et al. 2012) not to mention the overall campaign management have been studied by only but few or none. This study aims to clarify not just the viral marketing campaign management process and its features, but the viral marketing itself and its implementation in a company level. In addition, the video game industry and viral marketing together is a little researched context and therefore in dire need of scientific study.

In other words, this study aims to get coherent understanding on the subject of viral marketing, processes it is based on and the optimal way of managing it, helping practitioners' and future research alike. With the help of viral marketing all companies can benefit from Word-of-Mouth and all its

advantages. The case company in question, Nitrogames, to whom the optimal viral marketing campaign management structure is built for, presents well a typical small or medium sized Finnish gaming company. A gaming company without special viral marketing knowledge is an excellent subject to study and build a model for, namely because there is a need, but also because the case details are similar to other small and medium Finnish gaming companies.

1.2 Research problems and objectives

The topic in question is viral marketing in gaming industry. The ultimate purpose of this study is to build a viral marketing campaign management path and describe the optimal way of managing the viral marketing campaign in medium sized gaming companies. This is done by building an optimal theoretical process framework for viral marketing campaign management and then using and applying this information to a case company which presents a typical medium sized gaming company in Finland.

The sub-problems assist solving the main problem by defining viral marketing as a concept and describing what are the characteristics and the phases in viral marketing campaign management process.

The main research problem is:

- How viral marketing campaigns should be managed in a medium sized gaming company?

The sub-problems are:

- What is viral marketing?
- What are the characteristics of viral marketing?
- What are the phases of viral marketing campaign management process?

1.3 Research methodology

This study aims to create deeper understanding of viral marketing and ultimately find out how viral marketing campaigns should be managed by proposing a viral marketing managing framework and applying it to a Finnish gaming company called Nitrogames. Because the nature of the study, qualitative methods are chosen to provide answers to research problems. The primary method for this is to use case study and therefore focus on one case, find the facts out of information from various sources and compile the best practices.

The qualitative data is collected from the case company, its owner and its employees. With personal interviews data is collected on how marketing is handled, what viral marketing means for participants, how viral marketing campaigns are managed and what kind of opinions about the current situation interviewees have. There is also data provided by the case company in the form of previous marketing plans, marketing material and other marketing related documents.

Theory part first tries to explain the essence of viral marketing, its definition and characteristics, and to compile an overall managing framework for viral marketing campaigns in the form of phases derived from the literature. The empirical part then, after data gathering and analysis, proposes an improved way to the case company to manage its own viral marketing campaigns based on this theoretical framework.

1.4 Literature review

The Word-of-Mouth is relatively well studied subject and with a good reason as both Rosen (2000) and Silverman (2001) state WoM is the most powerful,

persuasive marketing weapon available because it drives consumers to try product or service more than any other marketing technique. The earliest articles on WoM were published as early as 1950's when e.g. Whyte (1954) explained how customers rely on WoM to make purchase decisions. The research has continued since and already in 1960's Dichter (1966) and Arndt (1967) made their studies which are cited even today. The research have approached the subject with themes such as consumer's motivation for WoM participation (Dichter 1966; Sundarum et al. 1998) and the impact of negative and positive WoM (Richins 1983; East et al. 2008) among many other topics.

In the mid-1990's eWoM became the most favorite object for WoM research following the eve of Internet era. The aspect of face-to-face communication were now transferred to online environment meaning larger reach and even more details to be considered. Researchers began to study, for example, the influence of eWoM on product sales (Duan et al. 2008) and motivations for participation (Henning-Thurau et al. 2004). Also, online communities (Godes & Mayzlin 2004) and how eWoM was done (Silverman 2001) were areas of interest.

Closing the 21st century the subject of viral marketing started to gain interest in marketing literature. (Juvertson & Draper 1997; Helm 2000) The widespread use of the Internet to aid and utilize shopping not only sparked interest on how to control eWoM and WoM but also how to manipulate and increase it by some means. However now, even over decade later Cruz & Fill (2008) and Petrescu & Korgaonkar (2011) still find that only a little is known, has agreed on and has been empirically studied on the nature, characteristics, details and dimensions of viral marketing.

The newest notable journal articles on viral marketing are done by Cruz & Fill (2008), Ferguson (2008), Cheung et al. (2008), Woerndl et al. (2008), Petrescu & Korgaonkar (2011) and Grifoni et al. (2012) in addition to number of books written on Internet marketing (e.g. Juslén 2009; Scott 2009; Smith & Zook

2011). Most of the viral marketing literature is based on the motivations and behavior of those passing on the content and the tools used in the process. Cruz & Fill (2008) bring in the table the idea of measuring the effectiveness of viral marketing campaigns as well as objective setting, which is extended by Grifoni et al. (2012). Ferguson (2008) also has studied the examples of viral marketing and WoM and their measurability. Cheung et al. (2008) and Woerndl et al. (2008) focuses on the typology and terminology of the viral marketing by identifying different viral marketing methods, subject which is also touched by Cruz & Fill (2008) and Petrescu & Korgaonkar (2011) who define the terms used in viral marketing.

The closest articles relating to this study are made by Grifoni et al. (2012) and Cruz & Fill (2008). Grifoni et al. (2012) suggest an integrated planning framework for viral marketing without going in to the details while Cruz & Fill (2008) identify, among other things, how viral marketing campaign should be evaluated by their proposed campaign objectives. However, there are no studies to be found which build a viral marketing campaign management framework and compare the real life situation to it, let alone from the gaming industry's view point on the subject. Also, because of the number of different terms and vagueness surrounding the term viral, this study presents its own opinion on the overall term and description called viral marketing. The management framework itself and the campaign management process in overall is in dire need of more research and the gaps are apparent, the thing which also future researchers must concentrate on to help practitioners and current marketing study.

1.5 Theoretical framework

Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework of the study. As a part of overall marketing branch, viral marketing is a way to develop, spread and nurture content and marketing messages which in turn lead to increased WoM, brand awareness and sales. The messages can be categorized on online and offline and placed and random messages. However, the online viral marketing campaigns are more appropriate for a gaming business due to its nature, resulting this study to focus more on online part. Also, intentional viral marketing is a more common way, as the randomness of any marketing message is questionable.

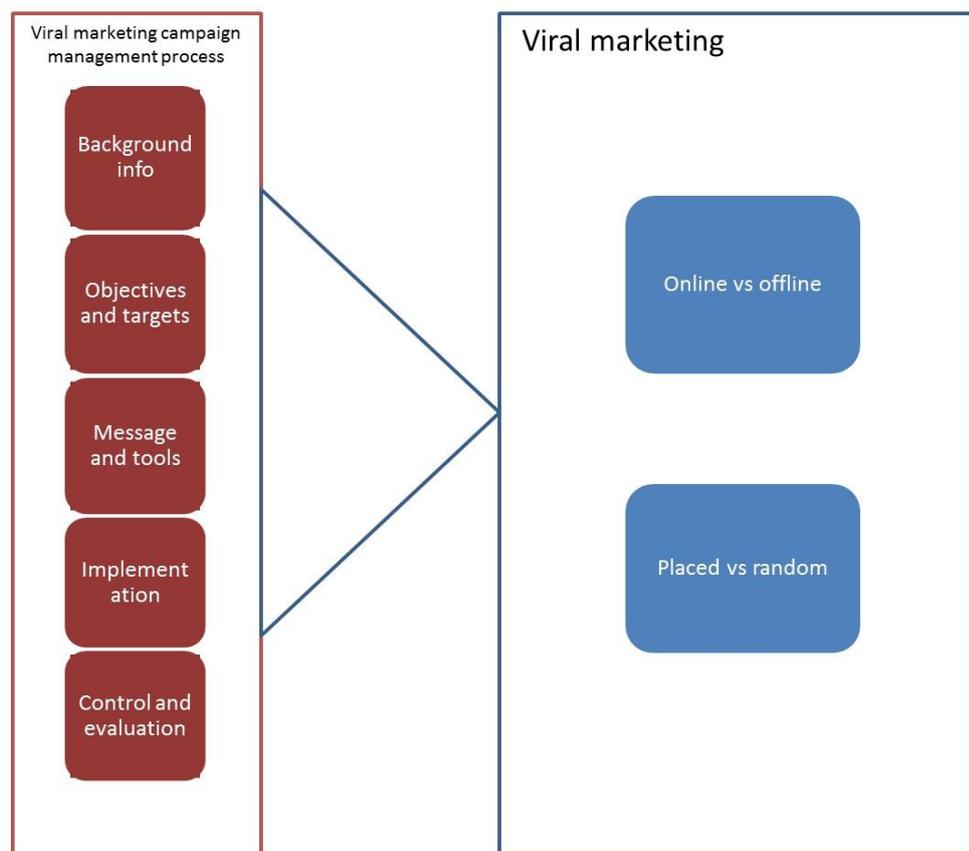


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

The actual management process of a viral marketing is the central part of this thesis. The management process, as found out in this study, includes five distinct phases: background info gathering and analysis, objective and target setting, message creation and tools selection, the actual implementation and evaluation and control. Finding, analyzing and composing these phases to an optimal way of managing viral marketing campaign is the key task of the theory part.

1.6 Delimitations

This study focuses on business-to-consumer viral marketing which is the primary market for gaming industry, although some of the theoretical part implications can also be applicable to business-to-business markets. The industry in question revolves around small and medium sized gaming companies. However, this study does not exclude entirely other B2C software firms because the theory part's found framework is more or less a general one. Focusing on small to medium sized gaming companies also results online emphasis which means that this study is centered on online environment of viral marketing.

The main idea of the study is to find out the management process and framework of viral marketing. Therefore the focus is on the process description and viral marketing definitions as well as recommendations for the case company. This means the other details associated with the concept of viral marketing has a lesser attention. These other details which are only covered briefly in the study are for example the outcomes of viral marketing, specific tools usable in campaigns and relation to marketing as a whole.

1.7 The key concepts

The key concepts of this study are word-of-mouth, viral marketing, web 2.0, video games and digital distribution which most of them are explained further in the theory part. The short definitions are listed below.

Word-of-Mouth

Word-of-Mouth (WoM) or electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WoM) means the passing of information from person to person by traditional or electronic communication. From a marketing perspective word-of-mouth is primarily a tool to influence customer's buying behavior or to customers to get information on products. In other words, WoM refers to any statement consumers share via person to person communication or via the Internet about product, service, brand or company. (Cruz & Fill 2008; Petrescu & Korgaonkar 2011; Arndt 1967)

Viral marketing

Viral marketing is a marketing tool that encourages consumers to forward marketing message to their friends, relatives or other people relying on messages' entertainment, utility or other value. The campaign itself can be both online and offline and the WoM it creates can be electronic or traditional. (Chiu et al. 2007; Dobele et al. 2007; Shukla 2010)

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is a concept which refers to traditional World Wide Web's development to customer-centric medium which is seen as a second phase of the Internet. Web 2.0 has made Internet to a medium where information flows in every direction, on contrary to primarily broadcast nature of the early

Internet and the traditional media. Web 2.0 in particular is customer-centric, interactive and dynamic, user-generated, emphasizes community participation and builds collective community intelligence. Web 2.0 allows people to discuss, produce and share content, participate people and use community knowledge in a hive mind. The tools characterized to Web 2.0 include social media such as blogs, video sharing sites, podcast, vodcast, social networks, search engines, and VOIP. (Eccleston & Griseri 2008; Meadow-Klue 2008)

Video games

A video game is an electronic game which is controlled by human with a user interface via visual and other feedback on a transmitting device. The systems where games are played are called platforms: examples of these are video game consoles, traditional computers and mobile handheld devices. The gaming itself is primarily a form of entertainment and today the gaming industry is a multi-billion business (Hiltunen et al. 2013, 6; Baker 2011).

Digital distribution

Digital distribution means a way to digitally distribute games or other software which allows dropping off retailers and publishers from the value chain (Beinisch et al. 2004). By focusing on digital distribution a game developer can acquire bigger share from the revenue and potentially have better negotiating power, finance options and command for the product including IP rights and marketing strategy. (e.g. Hiltunen et al. 2013) The biggest digital distribution channels from which the games are bought by customers are Valve's Steam, Sony's PSN store, Microsoft's Xbox Live and EA's Origin.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The rest of the study is divided into five chapters. Following the introduction of the thesis, the second chapter defines WoM and viral marketing, introduces viral marketing types and broadens the view by exploring reasons to market virally, challenges occurring, causes of virality and people who share content and messages. The third chapter introduces the literature derived viral marketing management process and presents it in a form of phases or steps.

After the theory part, the fourth chapter starts the empirical part by explaining the methodologies of the study and continues with industry and case company introduction along with the research findings listing and analysis. The fifth chapter continues this by building viral marketing management framework tailored for the case company and giving recommendations in it. The sixth and final chapter is including discussion and conclusions of the results along with the listing of theoretical contributions, limitations and further research suggestions.

2 The concept of viral

The goal of viral marketing is to use consumer-to-consumer communications to spread the message, content and information about product, brand or service, thereby leading to more rapid and cost effective adoption by the consumers. In other words, injecting interesting and viral, shareable content to public, marketers build Word-of-Mouth which in turn helps in brand recognition and ultimately affecting buying behavior. (Krishnamurthy 2001; Cruz & Fill 2008)

First I start by defining the concept of Word-of-Mouth and electronic Word-of-Mouth, which are closely related and sometimes overlapping to the subject of viral marketing explained after them. The types of viral marketing and typology behind it are also analyzed as well as the characteristics and the motivations related to the concept.

2.1 Word-of-Mouth (WoM)

People are keen on talking about their product and service purchases for many different reasons. These include the prestige and status that may arise through purchase, knowledge, ownership or the need of helping other people to make their purchase decisions. The information sharing is primarily done in social networks, not limited to web based ones. (Allsop et al. 2007; Berger & Milkman 2013) This reference process is known as WoM (Word-of-Mouth) communication which is highly powerful and influential form of communication, because the reference comes from a perceivably objective and credible source (Cruz & Fill 2008, 744).

The concept of Word-of-Mouth dates back to 1960's when Arndt (1967) described it as an "oral person to person communication between a receiver

and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or a service” (Arndt 1967, 291-295). The importance of WoM was not misunderstood by Arndt (1967, 291-295): “Word of mouth emerges as one of the most important, if not the most important source of information for the consumer”.

Word-of-Mouth can be divided into two different terms WoM and e-WoM (electronic word-of-Mouth). The WoM as an overall term, as stated above, simply means non-commercial person to person communication about brand, product or service. Distinct from other marketing communication types, it is verbal, voluntarily communication through different medium (Datta et al. 2005). Unlike for example ads or other marketing communication it represents an informal form of communication among family, friends and other consumers based on individuals’ personal experiences on firms, brands or products (Petrescu & Korgaonkar 2011, 215).

The wide use of the Internet has increased the influence of WoM dramatically. As the name suggest e-WoM is WoM done online offering diffusion benefits, viral potential and some control opportunities. Electronic WoM or “word-of-mouse” is “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, 39). The messages are sent by the customers in different platforms such as reviews, blogs, e-mail, social media, chat rooms or forums, contrary to verbal one-to-one nature of the traditional WoM. Therefore e-WoM is user generated, consumer to consumer transmitted and has unlimited potential to reach other customers. (Petrescu & Korgaonkar 2011, 219).

Today traditional WoM and e-WoM are hard to separate. The multitude of ways to communicate, both offline and online, means that the line between these two terms is vague. The information can be passed through traditional

offline channels such as face-to-face, telephone, traditional mail, fax etc. but also via online means (emails, social networks, instant messaging, chats, forums etc) In this study WoM and e-WoM are in the end differentiated by their characteristics: the nature of eWoM communication and the tools used. E-WoM is done primarily among people who do not know each other, meaning they can share their opinions without embarrassment unlike in traditional WoM (Goldsmith 2006, 3-14) and it is using platforms embracing this anonymity such as forums, blogs, social networks and websites where traditional WoM uses person to person communication methods.

2.2 Viral marketing

The term viral marketing is developed by Juvertson & Draper (1997) who used it to explain how free email service Hotmail was marketed by adding small advertising message in each e-mail sent through the service. The viral term is seen as a derivate from the biological world where virus replicates itself and grows in strength in each interaction. Wilson (2000, 1) even argues that viral marketing shares the characteristics of the actual virus also in a sense that it is uncontrollable force, not just infectious.

The concept of viral marketing is rather new. Because the number of different terms associated with or used as an alternative explainable definitions for viral marketing such as electronic word-of-mouth (Dwyer 2007; Cheung et al. 2008; Hung & Li 2007), word of mouse (Breazeale 2009), Internet Word-of-Mouth (Goldenberg et al. 2001), interactive marketing (Blattberg & Deighton 1991), referral marketing (De Bruyn & lilien 2004) and stealth marketing (Kaikati & Kaikati 2004) there has been terminology and definition controversies in the literature about the precise definition of viral marketing. (Cruz & Fill 2008; Bambo et al. 2008; Petrescu & Korgaonkar 2011, 216)

However, it seems that these studies are talking more or less about the same subject even though words used to describe viral marketing vary.

Besides discussing a same thing with different terms, the problem of having too broad spectrum for viral marketing definitions is also a problem. This can be seen for example from several studies which use viral advertising and viral marketing interchangeably. For instance, Petrescu & Korgaonkar (2011) and Porter & Golan (2006) find differences between these two terms. While viral marketing is a broader concept, viral advertising is specified, according to Petrescu & Korgaonkar (2011), to unpaid advertising messages made by companies or users. In other words, viral advertising shares the same characteristics as the marketing, but the term is used to focus on the ad making and distribution.

Some researches see also buzz marketing as a synonym to viral marketing. However general consensus states that buzz or buzz marketing is, as WoM to viral marketing, an output or consequence of the viral marketing efforts. Thomas (2004, 64) puts it like this: buzz marketing is “the amplification of initial marketing efforts by third parties through their passive or active influence”. All in all buzz is the overall consumer to consumer transmittable brand discussion regarding new products and experiences and it can happen in both online and offline. (Petrescu & Korgaonkar 2011, 218-219)

In addition to viral marketing being described with different terms and mixed up with other phenomena, the exact definition also varies. There seems to be five different methods in the literature to define viral marketing. First explaining viral marketing to be the way message is spreading and the second telling it is the Internet version of Word-of-Mouth. Third “school” define it to be combination of formers and the fourth and fifth describing it as referral marketing or the helping of message sharing.

To Kotler et al. (2008) viral marketing is an electronic form of WoM involving passing on or referring news, information or entertainment to another person

about certain product or service. There seems to be nothing new in the process, comparing to WoM, rather than its happening more in the online environment. This mentality is shared by Pastore (2000) and Shirky (2000) who both understand viral marketing as an explanation how messages are spreading and that it is highly comparable to WoM as known for decades.

Woerndl et al. (2008) also acknowledge viral marketing to be a technique using the Internet to spread and transmit messages to people who passes the information to others and helping to nurture this sharing environment. Broader explanation is offered by Cruz & Fill (2008) who state that viral marketing concerns all the informal, electronic messaging about product, brand or service. Mason (2008) concurs, adding that viral marketing should help to create an experience so compelling that people voluntarily and independently share that to their social circle.

More conventional definition is offered by Ugbah & Evuleocha (2007) who use the term referral marketing to describe viral marketing. Consumers seek information about a product or service from experts through local social networks or Internet reviews. Comparing to WoM this kind of viral marketing method uses all kinds of information and data available to consumers, making it wider information gathering method. Jalkala (2009) shares the idea of reference marketing and emphasizes the importance of the customer experience.

The fifth method of helping message sharing seems to have most footing in the literature if content creation is included to definition. For example according to Plummer et al. (2007, 263) Viral marketing is a “marketing strategy that encourages consumers to pass along messages to others in order to generate added exposure “, where Helm (2000, 158) describes it as a “company’s activities to make use of customers’ communication networks to promote and distribute products” relying on customers to pass the message using digital means.

This study defines the viral marketing based on the discussion above and Petrescu & Korgaonkar's (2011) study explaining the differences between WoM, E-WoM and viral marketing. Petrescu & Korgaonkar (2011) see WoM as a local and slow reference method where viral marketing is fast, global and online. The biggest difference comes from reasoning that WoM is more of a cause and effect of viral marketing. By marketing virally company builds awareness and buzz which in turn creates word-of-mouth, preferably in a positive way. Therefore this positive WoM started by the company's viral marketing may lead to trial and acquisition.

In other words, viral marketing is a marketing tool that encourages consumers to forward marketing message to their friends, relatives or other people relying on messages' entertainment, utility or other value. The campaign itself can be both online and offline and the WoM it creates can be electronic or traditional. It is also good to understand that WoM can happen even without any viral marketing. What makes the viral marketing effective is its diffusional abilities to reach large number of people in relatively small time and cost (Chiu et al. 2007; Dobele et al. 2007; Shukla 2010).

In addition, the original source of the content in viral marketing is a company, the owner of the marketed brand, product or service or in some cases company's customer. It relies on people to share the information it provides by making it interesting and appealing or aiding with the distribution. It can happen both online and offline and its main idea is to encourage positive WoM in all its forms. In short, viral marketing makes shareable content, helps the sharing of information and participates in discussions in order to create positive Word-of-Mouth. The goal of viral marketing is to use peer to peer or consumer to consumer communications to spread the information about product or service, leading to fast and cost effective adoption by the markets which should be seen as a network of consumers rather than an anonymous mass (Krishnamurthy 2001).

2.3 The types of viral marketing

Viral marketing can be categorized in many different ways: from the intentionality and the environment point of views, how message is disseminated and what kind of viral is used. This study divides viral marketing mainly on the basis of how it is condoned and where it is done.

According to Dasari (2010) there are four types of viral marketing campaigns: "Pass-along", "incentivized viral", "undercover marketing" and "edgy gossip/buzz marketing". The pass-along is a message which encourages the user to forward it to others. For example the simplest form is chain letters which incline that with passing on the letter there will be rewards or in refusal there will be punishments.

In Incentivized viral there is a reward or other incentive offered for either passing the message or providing third person's contact information. For example in social media such as Facebook, companies' offer prizes for those who suggest fan pages to others or share links to their home pages. Undercover marketing is a form of marketing where it is not immediately apparent that anything is being marketed. A viral message can be presented as an exciting or unusual page, activity, event or news without obvious incitement to pass it along. Edgy gossip/buzz marketing relies on the controversy of advertising or other message. Discussion revolving around the content can generate massive buzz. The result can be positive or negative WoM but in certain situations any publicity is good publicity.

Woerndl et al. (2008) have the same kind of an idea in their typology. They divide viral marketing in three categories: "social interaction", "unintentional" and "commercial" which are in turn determined from the motive for the action, visibility of the product, service or organization, intention of the originating source and communication basis perspectives.

In short, the social interaction is all about message sharing between individuals who are not directly discussing any product or brand, where in unintentional type of viral marketing the brand is discussed but the aim of the message shared is not to market it. The commercial type is the traditional one in which the message contains the product, service or organization and the aim of that message is promote that brand.

The concept of random and placed virals is used in the study of Cruzz & Fill (2008) which shares the basis with above. One view is that all viral messages should be commercially free, or in other words random. Naturally this is not the norm in the business world, but both types are seen in the wild; however the randomness of any viral message can be questioned.

Another way to classify viral marketing is to divide it to offline and online types. This study focuses on the online part of the campaigns. Riegner (2007) thinks Internet has changed consumers' perception on how media works. The interaction, growth in participation and the vast amount of information available mean that consumers have greater influence over the products and brands and user generated content has become one of the most important influencers in buying habits.

Especially the development of Web 2.0 has made Internet to a medium where information flows in every direction, on contrary to primarily broadcast nature of the early Internet and the traditional media. Web 2.0 in particular is customer-centric, interactive and dynamic, user-generated, emphasizes community participation and builds collective community intelligence. Web 2.0 allows people to discuss, produce and share content, participate people and use community knowledge in a hive mind. The tools characterized to Web 2.0 include social media such as blogs, video sharing sites, podcast, vodcast, social networks, search engines, and VOIP. (Eccleston & Griseri 2008; Meadow-Klue 2008)

Web 2.0 influences also how people buy and how e-WoM form. Reviews, peer or expert; price information; easiness of comparing and other evaluation is more available, easier and even existing because of the Web 2.0. The unequal information exchange between buyers and seller is declining. (Varadarajan & Yadav 2002) The e-WoM seems to take shape particularly in community forums and other buying centric avenues. Discussion boards organized around a particular brand or product are not uncommon and are popular places to gather information, leading to conclusion that generating successful electronic Word-of-Mouth includes targeting these forums and their members because message credibility increases when sender and receiver are known, even in reputational sense, and are unconnected to marketer. (Fong & Burton 2006; Pitta 2008)

2.4 The characteristics of viral marketing

In this section the characteristics of the viral marketing are explained. Especially why marketers use viral marketing, what are the problems and challenges arising from it, what causes company-made content to go viral and who are the ones who help to share the message. The part is closely related to actual management process chapter which refers to this information.

2.4.1 Reasons to market virally

The reason why WoM and viral marketing has increased in importance in marketing strategies is a result of customer distrust on companies' advertising messages. The main source of perceived reliable information comes from other consumers, preferably known ones. There is also a need for sharing experiences and information with peers, be it positive or negative. The sense

of belonging to a certain group is also a growing phenomenon and it is among the previous aspects a thing which companies should aim by influencing opinion leaders, making contagious content and contacting consumers via more informal ways such as social media. (O'Brien 2010, 38; Berger & Milkman 2013)

The concept of word of mouth is not new. Long before modern marketing, the only way to brand to be known was through positive information sharing among current and potential customers; phenomenon which is becoming also today's effective strategy thanks to saturated markets and already mentioned distrust. Therefore ability to successfully influence customers and get the brand known for the right people is crucial also in a modern world. Content sharing, customer referrals and getting the brand known are a recipe for successful marketing and business. This generation shop according to WoM in Internet. (Ferguson 2008; Rosen 2000)

Henning-Thurau et al. (2004) sees the most significant benefit of viral marketing its potential to reach a large number of people in a short amount of time. Viral marketing can be also be fairly cheap method of creating brand awareness and even generic brands or products can benefit from successful viral marketing as consumers' interest can rely on the campaign itself (Kirby 2006).

2.4.2 Challenges

The impact of the WoM or viral message is dependent on receivers and senders relationship which in turn influences how the message is perceived and noted. However, trial and acquisition is not automatic even though relationship is close. (De Bruyn & Lilien 2008, 160) Also, viral marketing is definitely not easy to control and once released it can create positive or

negative WoM which in turn spreads uncontrollably. Therefore virally influencing on the networks of customers and their opinions about products and services can be highly rewarding but also risky (Forsgård & Frey 2010, 46).

There have been studies indicating that people are keen on talking about brands, products and services. (Ferguson 2008, 180) However, the main challenges for the marketer are to get the people talk about **their** brand and the question of how to measure the impact of the viral marketing campaign. Without definite metrics viral marketing faces the same problem as the traditional marketing, how to show the factual outcome and ROI of viral campaign effort?

Ferguson (2008) discusses about the importance of the customer data and the ability to understand the individuals sharing the content company makes or passes on. Without the knowledge of the customer segment and the most loyal customers (the people talking and sharing the information about the brand), viral marketing campaign is just blind shooting. Kirby (2006) states that the biggest problem of viral marketing is the saturation of markets; as it gets more popular the number of different campaigns rise making consumers overwhelmed. This can be countered with bigger budgets and creativity, but as a never-ending wheel it is creating its problems too.

2.4.3 Causes of virality

What makes content go viral? Berger & Milkman (2013) demonstrates multiple reasons why people share content and what kind of message is the best. They suggest that emotional content and usefulness of the shared information are the key points; especially anger, awe, anxiety and practical value are traits in the most forwarded articles in newspapers, but the sadness or bad news are the opposite. Their research also condone that WoM is

practically done by two extreme sides: the most dis- and the most highly satisfied customers.

In overall Berger & Milkman's (2013) study suggests number of points for marketers to increase the virality of their material or message. The amusement seems to be the high point, making customers aroused about the message or brand rather than making them content or relaxed springs up more sharing. Arousing can be done also with negative emotions if they are made to activate and cause hope and anxiety. However, the pure sadness without high emotional touch is a no go: public health information is more likely to be shared if it is done to promote anger or anxiety rather than sadness or surrender. Finally, because of the nature of angry customer's actions such as reviews, blog posts and videos, they are more popular than pure positive ones, simply because they appeal more. Managing, participating and answering these negative customers in their content can help the situation and even increase brand awareness because, again, this kind of often emotional content is shared more.

Some products or product types also tend to produce more discussion and are more influenced by WoM. People talk and buzz about products that somehow create high involvement. For example books, music, movies and games are discussed widely because they are exciting. New innovations particularly are talked because they may provide new benefits and the novel ideas of their creators can be awed. Also personal experiences in product or service increases buzz: hotels, airliners and services as well as complex products such as software and medical devices are discussed mainly because talking about them reduces risk. Same thing occurs when the product in question is expensive or hard to understand, to reduce the risk of buying hard-to-understand products, like computers or consumer electronics, people talk about them. Another motivation for discussion is also the observability of the products: cars, clothes and cell phones are interesting to talk about. If product

is invisible or operated without others seeing it, people are less likely to share information about it. (Rosen 2000)

The type of products and the buying channels can also affect how people talk about products or services. For example online purchases are almost twice as likely to be influenced by user generated reviews or opinions as products purchased offline. The ability to better review attributes and other aspects of the product as well as the complexity of them increases the investigation people are willing to do before they buy. Of course some products, such as products which are relatively cheap, personal or are confidential in nature and have the “try” aspect in them are less likely to be influenced by someone else. Also the younger people are keener on turn on user-generated content sites to seek information than older customers. (Riegner 2007)

In addition, apart from business or product side Silverman (2001) proposes other requirements to market successfully virally. Some ideas, products and conditions generate more Word-of-Mouth than others. Meaning product, service or content must be something intriguing and compelling, something that the consumer would want to try or is some other way desirable. It must be easy to try without a risk or time lag. Use of the marketed content or product should be as easy as possible and the people must be in close contact, not necessarily physically. The best way seem to be to offer free trials or snapshots, which has become increasingly easy with Internet.

2.4.4 People who share

It is very important to know who is disseminating opinions about certain product category, how the spreading of information is done and the most crucially why. Marketers have known for ages the idea of influencers or opinion leaders; a few influencing many by distributing compelling ideas and

information. Businesses should identify these individuals in order to have their brand known and maximize their own opportunities. (Eccleston & Griseri 2008) The people who influence others are described by Silverman (2001); Luminaries, experts, gurus, mavens or network hubs influence others worldwide, nationally or locally. They are trusted to filter, distill and objectively evaluating the vast amount of information circling certain product categories, make sense of it and present it in a recommendation that is ought to be right.

These influencers can be also categorized in three different classes. Company representatives give information about product, claiming attributes and benefits. Experts confirm the upsides and downsides of the products and the peers of the customers verify the real world expectations. Therefore the process of getting information about certain product or service is three-step process. First, company makes a claim, then potential customer seeks confirmation from the experts who review or hold the perceived higher information about the subject and finally, in some cases, customers turn to peer information by hearing one's own level information or direct experience in certain conditions. (Silverman 2001)

Rosen (2000) describes these influent people as network hubs which can be divided to two categories: regular hubs and mega-hubs. Mega-hubs are referring to press, celebrities, analysts and politicians while regular hubs refer to regular people who share information and have influence on certain product categories. The Internet is blurring this diversion, as on the web people can publish information more freely and widespread.

Mavens, connectors and salesman type of sharers are identified by Gladwell (2002). They are the people who are in actively participating in network hubs and help the spread of Word-of-Mouth. Mavens are people who develop a large knowledge about products or ideas, usually on specific product categories, and love to share their opinions with others. Connectors are social

people who have a lot of relatively weak relationships with people in many different communities and contexts. They share their information about certain products or brands to hefty amount of different people in different circles. Finally, salesmen are natural persuaders who are able to explain new innovations and encourage their friends, colleagues or other people to adopt new ideas or try new products.

In order to influence these highly important people to refer company's product to their audience, several things are to be considered. First, these people should get aroused of the product and they have to like it, a lot. There should also be asymmetric influence on the networks, if network is symmetrically influential, the network should be treated as a one entity. Choosing the influential people for viral campaign should be based on the product's attributes and nature and knowledge on how different network hubs interact with each other. By getting known of the audience, specifying the correct network hubs and tailoring the viral message for them there is a good chance that company's message will be heard.

3 The management of viral marketing campaign process

In this chapter author is presenting a viral marketing management framework for companies, derived from the literature. The initial structure of the framework is based on the only available scientific viral marketing planning model by Grifoni et al. (2012) and it is completed with information gained from general marketing planning and management process literature, namely Kotler & Keller (2012), Porter (2006) and some specific articles on specific issues in viral marketing or marketing management (e.g. Cruz & Fill 2008; Gabrielsson et al. 2008; Spencer & Giles 2000; Kumar & Reinartz 2012).

Proper management can help to conquer the viral marketing shortcomings such as technical problems or poor implementation, lack of control over messages and reach, legal issues and content specific questions. (Bernoff & Li 2008; Grifoni et al. 2012; Chaffey 2006; Cruz & Fill, 2008; Berger & Milkman 2013) It is also a starting point for successful on-line viral campaign which aims to reach company's target customers and provide valuable tool to redirect resources to an often seen vague like marketing effort.

The most common way to describe management process of marketing campaign is to divide it to campaign planning & development, execution and analysis & control stages (e.g. Kumar & Reinartz 2012; Spencer & Giles 2000). This kind of campaign management process definition is certainly influenced by more broad way of describing marketing management, which includes, as stated by Kotler et al. (2012), planning, organizing, leadership and controlling.

Grifoni et al. (2012) present their integrated framework for on-line viral marketing campaign as a four phase process:

- phase 1: company, business context and virtual campaigns already done are analyzed;
- phase 2: objects and target are defined;

- phase 3: message is created and tools are selected;
- phase 4: the on-line viral marketing campaign is implemented;

However, as we can see from past marketing campaign management literature (e.g. Kotler et al. 2012; Porter 2006), also feedback and control should be incorporated to this framework.

- phase 5: feedback and control

Therefore viral marketing campaign management process can be said to include information gathering and analysis, object and target setting, message and tools selection, implementation and finally evaluation and control.

3.1 Phase one: gathering background info

The phase one of the framework is based on the idea presented by Gabrielsson et al. (2008). Their take is that a viral campaign should start with an analysis of the company and its business context, including both internal and external factors. The internal factors to be considered are products, internal strategy and resources, while external factors are related to competitors, market prospects, consumer needs and brand positioning. According to Griffon et al. (2012) special care should be given to product analysis, where their main features and benefits, pricing, accessibility, promotional and advertising strategies and the support offered are discussed and researched. Also financial planning and resources should have special attention to determine the feasibility of the future strategy. The external factors analysis should in turn to focus on competitors' products and services, market shares, marketing strategies and reputation.

In detail, the internal side of the plan is needed in order to determine the available internal resources and show the viability of the viral marketing plan

to finance department. It helps the company to show where they financially are and where they want to be. After gathering information about the products company is currently offering and to what grounds viral marketing campaign is based on, financial planning step takes notes on financial data available for example income and expenses, debt level, commitments, the company overall goals and objectives and any problems regarding finance and the monetary situation. The internal planning phase also should include the analysis of the past campaigns done for every product. (Griffon et al. 2012)

Besides looking other companies viral campaigns, the external factors analysis takes notes on competitors' products, how often they are improved or replaced and what are their winning attributes, what are their market share, how competitors promote their products, what kind of reach do they have in their campaigns and what is their reputation among customers. The key issue to be in mind in the planning process, according to Griffon et al. (2012), is the fact that customer is in the center of everything, especially in viral campaign. After all, a strong brand positioning directs viral marketing campaign by explaining the brand uniqueness and superior and differentiated attributes.

In a more general way, a good background analysis contains also traditional SWOT and market opportunity analysis (Kotler et al. 2012). Inner and outer strengths and weaknesses are needed, not only to harness the capabilities of the firm but to find the right tools for the future viral marketing campaign. Finding the competitive advantages, inner knowledge or skills and winning product attributes is a key to a successful viral campaign.

3.2 Phase two: definition of objectives and targets

The second phase involves the definition of the objectives and target selection. Cruz & Fill's (2008) study presents a framework for setting

objectives for viral marketing campaign. This framework presents three categories for objectives which also define the evaluation criteria of the campaign and influence the choice of target audience, message, media and tools used: **cognitive**, evaluated in terms of reach and awareness, **behavioral**, evaluated in terms of hits or downloads and **financial**, evaluated in terms of brand building and ROI. (Griffon et al. 2012, 26)

These objectives or goals should be established in the very beginning of the campaign as they provide the backbone for it. They help to keep track on the project, provide benchmarks and can be used to reflect the campaign process. Therefore during the campaign they should be used to measure up the performance, evaluate the content and its success and make decisions to abandon current project or reorganize or prolong it, for example. This process is illustrated in figure 2 (Cruz & Fill 2008, 754).

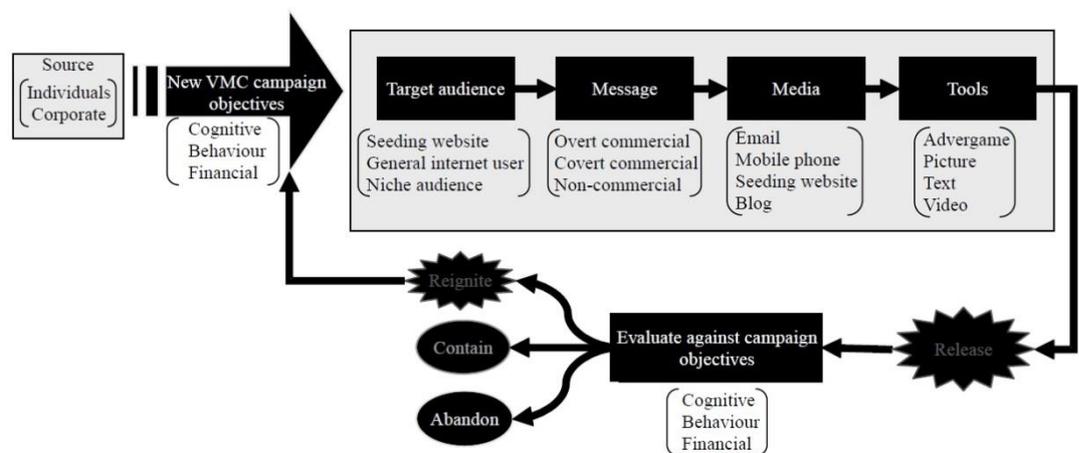


Figure 2. VMC evaluation framework (Cruz & Fill 2008, 754)

According to Kotler & Keller (2012, 72) a good goal formulation could include several distinct objectives, for example profitability, sales growth, market share improvement, risk containment, innovation and reputation, but they

should be prioritized. They also suggest that goals should be quantitative whenever possible, realistic and consistent as it is not possible to maximize reach and target niche audience at the same time. What can be also derived from the general marketing planning perspective to viral marketing campaign management is the trade-offs needed, deep penetration of existing markets versus development of new ones, profit goals versus non-profit goals and no-risk and low growth versus high risk and maximum reach are decisions what should be clear at the very beginning.

After defining the goals of the campaign, comes the target selection. There are two ways to target audience, according to Cruz & Fill (2008), reaching niche audience or directing efforts to masses. Because of the nature of the viral, this is crucial step and without good starting point created with choosing the right people, campaign can stop in the very beginning (Dobele et al. 2007).

Target choosing can be based on the Griffon et al. (2012) model on three consumer classes: profile, psychological and behavioral class. By allocating potential consumers on different classes, different customer groups can be established and then utilized in targeting. However, it seems that online targeting is more efficient if it is done based on the groups' enthusiasm, interest or issues (Spencer & Giles 2000) and the targeting can also be made based on the key audience members identified in chapter 2.4.4.

After the potential target customers are identified and put on the appropriate classes, the customer groups can be established and the right ones for the campaign can be chosen. The choosing of the group primarily depends on the nature of the brand or the product being marketed as well as the objectives chosen.

Phase two of the campaign management process can also be seen to include strategic formulation step which is a more generally accepted phase before actual content creation and tools selection, as every business needs to design a strategy to meets its goals (Kotler & Keller 2012, 72). Porter's (2006) generic

strategies for example could give a hint of what to pursue with the campaign: overall cost leadership (a more generic, low risk viral campaign), differentiation (High risk, high potential approach) or focus (targeting special niche group of consumers and trendsetters).

This could also be a point where the company must stop and think its possibilities. If after the background analysis and goal setting, a firm finds itself in a position that there is no knowhow inside the company, the campaign could be outsourced. Also, if opportunity presents itself, some kind of co-operation could be possibility. Kotler & Keller (2012) presents 3 different strategic alliance models which are maybe too wide to be used in a single campaign, but can be utilized as a guideline; The message creation alliance, help for the distribution of the message or co-joint production could be for example in order, if the company finds itself too limited in resources.

3.3 Phase three: message creation and tools selection

After selecting objectives, audience and the overall strategy, the phase three deals with the creation of the message and the choosing of the tools used in viral marketing campaign. The message itself should be emotionally attractive, include humor and surprise and/or have some kind of utility. To ease the spread of the message it also should be tailored to target audience in mind and have brand visibility, in order to be favorable to the brand it represents. (More on chapter 2.3.3) (Berger & Milkman 2013; Chaffey 2006) The choosing of the tools used in the campaign should be based on the usability, easiness and the needs of the customers. There are a number of different methods to distribute content or make a viral message known, for example:

- free software or service to be used by customers

- writing content and publishing it in company's or other party's website

- influencing on visibility in formal sources of information, for example newspapers, different articles and news
- creating e-books
- content creation and participation in forums, blogs and social media
- making and publishing videos and music
- competitions (requiring participants forwarding message) and embedding content sharing on company's website
- web 2.0 bookmarking and other content sharing service participation
- mixing offline events with online
- influence marketing and brand evangelists
- community building portals
- street level guerilla campaigns (Griffon et al. 2012; Cruz & Fill 2008; Ferguson 2008)

The most known viral campaigns are based on the free service or products, in online or offline. For example Hotmail service was marketed by putting in the end of each message a tag telling from which service the message was sent from (Griffon et al. 2012). The other popular example is making the content and publishing it in company's own website, social media or newsletter and pushing it through different channels to consumers to share. The traditional way of using forums and blogs means offering them to be used, influencing the writers or actively participating discussions. Also videos, music and other interactive content are gaining popularity and are a good way to make easily shareable content (Ferguson 2008).

3.4 Phase four: the implementation

The final phase Griffon et al. (2012) presents in viral campaign planning is the actual implementation which involves testing and seeding the chosen content with the chosen tools. The testing should be done before the actual launch with a testing group (Gabrielsson et al. 2008) which can inform or make a suggestion for the company on the reception of the campaign (Spencer & Giles 2000).

The actual seeding, planting the campaign material on initial group, happens with the chosen tools or other methods mentioned. The best way to seed the content is to start with key customers, who can provide feedback and suggestions and after that a solid path to sharing the message. These key customers should be influential people who are already interested and are easily excited such as Mavens, connectors and salesmen (more on chapter 2.4.4). (Hollensen 2007, 566) Kirby (2006) also suggest that the campaign should be seeded in places where these influencers already gather and share their enthusiasm.

The implementation or content seeding should also be scheduled and the overall program needs to be clear to all involved. (Kumar & Reinartz 2012, 227-228) With a good timetable and favorable timing there is good chance of successful viral effect. As with the clear campaign program, all employees are aware of the situations and action models.

3.5 Phase five: control and evaluation

What Griffon et al. (2012) fails to mention is the evaluation and nurturing of the campaign after the launch. It is vital for any good plan and campaign to properly estimate the impact the marketing efforts has in the brand, how the

campaign is affecting the customers and where future campaigns can be improved. Therefore the fifth phase should be the after launch evaluation, benchmarking, monitoring and control.

Control can mean choosing other tools or responding to media or user feedback. The final phase should also be the last point where decisions about prolonging, abandoning and modifying the campaign are made. In other words, if the campaign has been failure to the point it is affecting the brand image, it should be contained or if it is wildly popular there should be discussions whether the campaign should be reignited with revised objectives.

As Cruz & Fill (2008) point out, the evaluation should be based on the objectives which are set in the very beginning. However, there are also two factual means to measure the viral marketing performance: measurement of awareness and reach and the combination of different metrics such as REAN and WoM metrics. As stated before, evaluating viral marketing campaign is a difficult and mainly obscure task. The main challenge is that viral marketing can appear in many different forms and the impact it makes is not clear. The current evaluation of successfulness of a viral marketing campaign (VMC) relies generally on hits, downloads or impressions of the users, (Cruz & Fill 2008) however this does only measure the level of activity surrounding the campaign.

There are number of different takes on what should be the target or objective of a viral campaign. Helm (2000) suggests that VMC target is to maximize reach, where Juvertson (2000, 2) takes contrary approach of goal being the number of new converts through the viral message meaning evaluation criteria should be penetration, loyalty and frequency. Welker (2002) indicates the speed of transmissions, persistence of the content and the transmission convenience should be the key targets.

Cruz & Fill (2008, 747) also bring up the subject of opinion leadership importance, meaning the people willing and able to influence other's opinions

on their own family and friends circle, forums and blogs. However, there are no direct means to estimate or calculate these individuals and their actions even though Mayzlin (2004) used the number conversations of online communities to measure e-WoM and suggesting that frequency, volume and informativeness are the key indicators of successful WoM.

What this diversification of different evaluation methods means is that there is no generally accepted criteria to define the successfulness of VMC or WoM. In their study Cruz & Fill (2008) conclude that evaluation criteria depend on the objectives, which are explained further in chapter 3.2 and are being the closest of general idea of evaluation of VMC. However, the actual tools used to calculate the criteria derived from the objectives are not explained. The Word of Mouth Marketing Association formed in 2004 has established metrics and practices, for example WOMUnits, Polarity, Source Diversity, Clarity and Depth but they have received only a little attention and are not used widely in the literature.

One way to counter this lack of direct evaluation metrics of viral marketing campaign is using REAN and WoM metrics in combination (Cruz & Fill 2008; Jackson 2009). WoM metrics being the ones different researches are suggesting, such as brand reach, mentions, polarity, volume and dispersion, and REAN referring to originally Satama interactive's model of web measuring metrics, reorganized by Web Analytics Association (Jackson 2009).

Reach metrics, Engagement metrics, Activation metrics and Nurture metrics forming the REAN concept is presented in table 1. (Jackson 2009) However, they should only be regarded as one example of how to measure online viral marketing campaign effectiveness and how different metrics can be categorized.

Reach metrics	Engagement metrics	Activation metrics	Nurture metrics
Traffic sources (owned media traffic from company's other websites; earned traffic from ads, search engine optimizations, blogs, social media links; bought traffic from ads and unknown traffic)	Unique visitors	Number of downloads	Number of people reading newsletter
Geographical reach (from where the content is accessed)	Average time per visit	Registrations	Number of leads to CRM
Awareness (ad exposure, ad impressions, clicks, page views, visits)	Average time per unique visitor	Subscriptions	Customers requesting additional information or services
consumer profiles (how individual visitors are using content or pages)	Returning visitors	Logins	
	Frequency	Survey responses	

Table 1. Reach metrics, Engagement metrics, Activation metrics and Nurture metrics forming the REAN concept

According to Jackson (2009) WoM indicators should also fall into REAN categories, but because the importance and profoundly support they have in the literature WoM metrics are discussed separately in this study.

4 Empirical part

The empirical part describes research methodologies, industry and company background information and the findings of the study. First the chosen methodologies are introduced and justified which is followed by game industry overlook and case company introduction. The case company introduction also answers why the company in question was chosen to be the part of this study, in data gathering sense but also in the subject of development. After that there is the description of data gathering followed by discussion of validity, reliability and the ability to generalize the results. Lastly the findings are presented and analyzed.

4.1 Research methodologies

The methods and approaches used in a study should be dictated by the research question (Yin 2009). As this study aims to get deep and coherent understanding of the viral marketing campaign management process, its real life usage scenario and especially how it should be implemented, qualitative methods are in order. By researching the subject in qualitative and descriptive manner, the research questions should be answered in the most accurate way (Yin 2009; Denzin et al. 1994).

Qualitative research strives to study and describe real life. The viewpoint is often wide and the aim is more than often to study functions and processes. The subjective knowledge and information of the subjects of the study are emphasized meaning that the study aims to get deep knowledge and understand root causes of the dilemmas. Researcher must mostly rely on his/her own perceptions about the subject, and understand the viewpoints of the people researched. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008) Especially good qualitative

research is in studying intercommunication between people, acquiring facts out of somewhat vague information and describing real life situation. In other words, it aspires to find and reveal facts. With careful examination of a sporadic case, the researcher finds out what is important in the phenomenon and how it fits in the general view. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008; Yin 2009)

Case study is one of the qualitative research methods. It fits well with the goal of this study, because the aim is to understand characteristics of one special case (Metsämuuronen 2008). It also helps to answer all of the research questions well, according to Hirsjärvi et al. (2008), by focusing on phenomenon's roots, causes and processes behind it and ultimately acts as a tool to develop the subject further. The basic principle of a case study is the quality of science, not the amount of it (Eskola & Suoranta 2003).

4.2 Finnish gaming industry

This study focuses on viral marketing in gaming business in Finnish context. Finnish gaming industry has been booming since the early 2000, but the history itself has begun early 80's when global and Finnish gaming culture formed up primarily due to personal computer development. The first professional game studios or gaming companies, however, can be said to have started in 90's, when some of the companies existing even today were established by enthusiast hobbyists. (Hiltunen et al. 2013)

Today video games are played on and developed for mobile platforms such as Apple's IOS, Google's Android or Microsoft's Windows Mobile, gaming consoles from Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo and personal computers (PC). The industry itself has become close to 100 billion business (Hiltunen et al. 2013, 6; Baker 2011) and it is still growing as new customers find themselves playing on their mobile phones or social media Internet sites, which were non-existing as monetized gaming platforms just 5 years ago.

Most of the Finnish gaming companies focus on this mobile and social media gaming due to lower development costs, shorter development time, less saturated markets and potential new customers (MobileGameArch 2013). However, because of the rise of the digital distribution and increase in potential gamers, the traditional gaming platforms such as PCs and gaming consoles are getting their share of developer interest again.

Digital distribution means a way to digitally distribute games or other software which allows dropping off retailers and publishers from the value chain (Beinisch et al. 2004). By focusing on digital distribution a game developer can acquire bigger share from the revenue and potentially have better negotiating power, finance options and command for the product including IP rights and marketing strategy. Even though many Finnish gaming companies still have big global publishers doing their non-development related functions, digital distribution has meant more freedom for choosing partners and strategies and even allowed breaking the traditional developer-publisher chain, enabling game studios to independently handle everything from development and distribution to marketing.

Digital distribution has helped many small developers to publish their small budget games, made small-time development profitable and therefore brought new competition to market; Without physical printing fees and traditional value chain, game development has become cheaper and easier for start-ups. Digital distribution as a method and a way of doing business has also facilitated multi-platform publishing, new business model development and marketing tactics refinement (Hiltunen et al. 2013).

New business models have been one of the key issues for growth in Finnish gaming companies. Besides relying on physical retailing or paid downloads in digital distribution networks, there have been new ways of profitizing gaming: monthly paid license fees and “freemium” models. Especially free-to-play (F2P) or freemium games business model have been very successful for

Finnish gaming companies. As the name suggest free-to-play games are games which can be played without paying. The revenue comes from in-app purchases, meaning that players can buy something inside the game for example facilitating the progress, or from in-game ads in addition to demo or trial model where trying the game is free, but to continue a player must pay.

Digital distribution, new business models and increased competition mean that the marketing is in higher importance than ever in gaming business. Especially demand for cheap, digital and phenomenon-making marketing is needed. One of the best ways for independent game studio to market its games is viral marketing which utilizes gaming industry's details like highly digital customers, enthusiastic fans and gaming communities. By applying cheap and potentially huge reach of a viral, preferably already in the development process, gaming studios can ultimately stand out and create a buzz which nurtures itself and provides a pathway to the best available outcomes: positive Word of Mouth and visibility.

4.3 Case company introduction

The case company in question, Nitrogames, is an independent game studio located in Kotka, Finland. Founded in 2007, the company has developed six games to this day and has been one of the fastest growing gaming companies in Finland. Today it employs 29 game developers and marketing experts and has got itself familiarized with different platforms such as PC, mobile and Sony's and Microsoft's consoles. Company's CEO is Jussi Tähtinen who runs marketing with Henri Lindgren.

Nitrogames' first games were distributed and marketed by publisher, but recently the company has embraced the digital distribution and mobile games segment. The games the company has recently digitally published are "Charlie Chucker" and "Sink' em all!" made for WP and IOS and "Pirates of the black

cove” for PC. The marketing strategy of Nitrogames is also under a review of the board and should be renewed in 2014. This new strategy is planned to make big changes to marketing side of the business as Free-to-play models and independent development is putting pressure on it, making Nitrogames ideal for a case company.

Nitrogames primary products have been PC games revolving the theme of pirates. Even though the target customer segment, as indicated by Tähtinen (2013), is “hardcore” PC-strategy gamers in their 30-40’s, the games recently published and under development are now pointing towards casual action gamers on mobile segment. Also, the free-to-play business model, which is according to Tähtinen (2013) company’s future way, is seen as a more casual way of doing publishing, indicating that the focus could be shifting.

In overall Nitrogames presents well a general Finnish gaming company; Founded by hobbyist and with born-global mentality it has been following the trends of gaming industry changing from purely development studio to include also some kind of marketing department, shifting focus from hardcore to casual, moving physical distribution to digital one and making games also to mobile devices. With the new marketing strategy on its way and the changes company is now facing, Nitrogames is in situation where new ideas for marketing are needed. By presenting a way to manage viral marketing, this research aims to help the company to acquire important information about cheap but effective way of doing marketing and suggest in which direction the new strategy should be heading.

4.4 Data collection

In a qualitative research interviews are usually the primary method of acquiring data (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008, 200). This was the case in this study also, because of the research question and the holistic information the answer

needs. By interviewing people who are doing the marketing in the company, good image of how things are done now and how they should be done in the future can be gathered.

It was paramount that the persons interviewed were chosen so that they presented a view which offered deep knowledge and experience based information about the subject in order to understand, comprehend and describe the phenomena in question. The interviewees were chosen with a tool called elite sampling, which in contrary to random choosing, favors the subjects which are thought have the most viable information in hand (Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2009).

Because of the history and the nature of the company, basically two of the company's employees were able to answer thoroughly to questions about marketing. These were Jussi Tähtinen, Nitrogames' CEO and Henri Lindgren, company's most active marketer. There is also periodically changing trainee in position of maintaining day-to-day social media interactions and game producers who are part of the marketing planning process for individual games. However they were deemed to have lesser holistic information about the whole process of managing marketing, especially the viral side of it.

The two interviews with Jussi Tähtinen and Henri Lindgren were almost identical in their structure. The interviews were semi structured with open ended questions, but the order of the questions varied depending on the flow of the conversation and some specifying questions were asked. The first interview with Jussi Tähtinen was made in November and the second with Henri Lindgren in December 2013. Interviews took 30-45 minutes each, and they were conducted in phone. The situation in phone interviews were tried to make as comfortable as possible and with a calm environment. There were only a little pre-information about the questions, and interviewees' background, positions and history in organization were briefly discussed. Both

interviews were transcribed during and after the interviews. Specifying questions and further inquiries were made with emails.

Material triangulation is a way of combining different methods of research material acquiring (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 69). Besides interviews, documents about past marketing plans, marketing material and other marketing related information were provided by the company and used to make conclusions and fill the gaps. By observing also how company actually has done marketing and viral marketing in the media, conclusions can be made if the interviews are factual, in addition to cross referring to different sources if the people or the company is acting like they are stating (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008, 207).

4.5 Reliability, validity and generalization

Research's reliability refers to the ability of repetition of the results while the validity means that the research measures what it is supposed to measure (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008). The baseline for qualitative research is the acknowledgement that the researcher itself is a tool of the study. So, the author him or herself is an important criteria for reliability evaluation in addition to the whole process (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 209-211). Therefore, besides keeping objective mindset, reliability is tried to ensure by ready-made interview structure which is based on the theory and with the right handling of the material: transcription was made and environment was controlled.

Viral marketing campaign management in Nitrogames was not a straightforward to get information from. There were no actual viral marketing campaign management material and different actors had their own opinions and expectations on viral marketing and its execution in the firm. Answers were subjective and limited at best; therefore the interpretation of the answers fell to the researcher. The validity of the research is tried to ensure

by cross-referencing the answers and other material and by justifying the conclusions. Also constructive validation was used: results were checked from interviewees with supporting questions.

In qualitative research, cases or study material are often so small in numbers that the generalization of results is questionable from the viewpoint of a classic statistics (Koskinen et al. 2005, 265-267). This study is not necessarily even meant to have results generalized, but to understand the viral marketing phenomenon and form up a management process framework for the case company in order to have a better standpoint for effective viral marketing. However, as the background data gathering and the actual research have proven, the situation in which the Finnish gaming companies generally are today are similar to Nitrogames: marketing is underappreciated and – understood, viral marketing is very little known and the need for cost effective and wide reaching marketing is needed along with the proper management of the processes. Therefore the details and all suggestions in recommendations may not be the same for every company, but the general framework and some of the suggestions can also help other companies to develop their viral marketing campaign management.

4.6 Research findings

To find out what is the role of viral and traditional marketing, how viral marketing is managed and what are the points of interest in developing the viral marketing management process in Nitrogames, two key marketing actors of Nitrogames have been interviewed along with the analysis of company provided marketing material and publicly found information on campaigns. The two interviewees are Nitrogames' CEO Jussi Tähtinen who mainly participates on the planning and decisions side of the marketing and Henri Lindgren, the company's primary marketing operator.

4.6.1 Marketing in case company

According to Tähtinen (2013), Nitrogames' yearly marketing budget is 50 000€ to 100 000€, while single campaigns seem to be usually around 1000€ each. This is in line with other similar sized companies, but can be also viewed small to business-to-consumer markets. However, the budget is not the best indicator in gaming business, as Nitrogames' primary channels for marketing is advertising in social media, web pages and free interviews which are all fairly cost effective and widely used in gaming industry to reach traditional target audience (males in their 20-35) not necessarily reachable with traditional and more costly media such as TV, radio or magazines.

The strategy is changing in the company following the overall trend of mass market gaming. Mobile and casual gaming has increased exponentially in the recent years (Hiltunen et al. 2013), and this is a market which the Nitrogames has also set its future target to. Casual gamers in their 15-30 are the new masses and the current mobile games are targeted for them, also in case company. This means that the marketing budget, according to Tähtinen (2013), has to be increased to be able to reach casual gamers who need more attention in the traditional media.

However, the current in-house marketing communications is still relying on social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, advertising in some magazines and web pages in the form of ads and banners, press releases and media relationship management. There are also digital events in existing games, Google ads and direct marketing to certain target audiences.

The main idea of marketing in Nitrogames is described by Tähtinen (2013):

"In every quarter we have a new thing to distribute to our marketing partners. Social media is used to contact people and buzz is generated to increase interest, this is done via traditional and digital marketing."

Lindgren (2013) details the actions:

“Facebook is updated somewhat regularly along with the Twitter and Instagram; --this is mostly done by an intern who has no special rules or strategy. Ads are bought from web pages and some traditional marketing [communication] is performed.”

The marketing strategy formulation in Nitrogames is similarly straightforward as the actual implementation. Marketing and market data is acquired constantly and they are used to either to make own marketing campaigns whole or to buy single marketing campaigns' planning from outside (mainly social media marketing agency). The final decision for new campaigns or overall strategy to be modified is made by the board and the budget is calculated after the outsider or in-house team has made the plan.

The objective of marketing actions in Nitrogames is primarily to get direct new downloads of games. Visibility, storytelling (brand) and finding new channels are secondary objectives. The brand the company presents, or would like to present, is energetic, youthful and innovative while different games may have their own brand images. The marketing is also already adjusting to new business models such as free-to-play by making in-app purchases more attractive. The details of these actions, however, are scarce.

Nitrogames' marketing objectives also dictate the evaluation of marketing which is in line with Griffon et al.'s (2012) study. New customers and downloads are the only indication of how campaign has performed. Still, the indicator is not only checked in the end of the campaign, but after certain ads visibility or otherwise during the campaign.

The actual implementation and management is basically a two phase process. Board, consisting CEO, individual game producers and some others, decide of making a campaign which is then passed to the outside marketing firm or made in-house, depending on the difficulty of the planned campaign. Planning

seems to be rather small in role, as the campaigns are mostly simple and straightforward.

Both of the interviewees think marketing is crucial to the success of the company, but acknowledge more is needed.

“—marketing is crucial for us, especially now that we have embraced the free-to-play model; however it needs more attention from us.” (Tähtinen 2013)

“—marketing knowledge is important – and at the moment it is not maybe handled the best way, as most of our staff is self-learned.—one person in charge of marketing could be a good improvement.” (Lindgren 2013)

The main problem seems to be that there is no single person in charge or responsible of the company’s marketing. This results quite basic marketing efforts, narrow variety of tools and somewhat uncertain marketing strategy. In other hand there is no indication that the marketing the company is now making would be inherently bad or problematic; it uses digital means and the tools used have proven to be working at least partly with the previous main target group. Nevertheless, the full potential is nowhere to be reached with the current methods, as the company has seen in their market reach estimates.

4.6.2 Viral marketing and campaign management process in case company

“In my opinion viral marketing is and consist of active communication and enhancing the activity in social media, for example by in-game recording of gameplay, in-game advertising and social aspects of games.” (Tähtinen 2013)

“Viral marketing is more or less social media marketing.” (Lindgren 2013)

The opinions about the definition of viral marketing varies between two interviewees and presents in its own right the difficulty of planning marketing

in the case company. But even though definitions are different between responders, the viral marketing tools described are more or less same: Facebook integration in games, social media communication, banners, in-game advertising and integration between games and same platforms in different games allowing rankings and social media sharing.

In addition to interviewees' answers on viral marketing implementation, the company has made advertising games, such as "Sink em all" which became full game only afterwards, participated in forum discussion, made gameplay videos and organized in-game events. There have been also paid theme numbers in magazines and attempts to influence the visibility on digital channels.

What seems to be missing from the tools, when comparing to for example Ferguson's (2008) or Cruz & Fills (2012) listings are offline campaigns, content creation tools and full potential community and brand building with platforms or viral content. Most of the mentioned viral implementations of Nitrogames rely on traditional advertising or social media which in right context can be included in viral marketing tools, but are notably straightforward and traditional in nature, lacking an overall strategy of brand, content and community building and targeting.

The actual viral marketing management process in Nitrogames may not follow completely the phases or ideas presented in chapter 3, but there are of course similarities. In general, viral marketing campaigns in the company are managed by selecting targets or purpose, choosing tools and monitoring the progress.

"The phases [of viral marketing] include finding the right targets of a campaign such as selling more games or getting new customers. Or in the short term: reacting to the product and its success by maybe enhancing something. --after that we choose the tools which are pretty much built around the live events in games. --the success of these actions is measured

[based on new customers] and the timetable is managed in Excel based document --." (Tähtinen 2013)

When comparing to the literature derived management process, Nitrogames phases are following same guidelines, but are simpler in their execution. For example background info research, detailed target settings and end campaign evaluation is missing from the current process. However, objective selection, tools selection and implementation are more or less handled with same principles and could be even seen as more flexible in nature:

"Evaluation is happening throughout the campaign with the help of checkpoints. Wording, pictures and even reach can be modified if needed during a campaign.—there is no special after report on campaigns" (Lindgren 2013)

All in all, traditional and viral marketing are not different things in Nitrogames. Both are planned in same way and the people who are doing marketing are doing everything related to it, including viral. Both of the interviewees understand the importance and advantages of viral marketing, but it has the same problems as the traditional marketing side: lack of dedicated employee, knowledge and coherent strategy leading to a shallow management, ineffective reach and missing potential.

"Viral marketing is maybe the most important way of doing marketing [for us] – it is cost effective -- scalable – and no money is wasted. However, it is not going to replace the traditional marketing, because I do not see it reaching whole potential target group. -- It could help with brand building but only with co-operation with other methods" (Tähtinen 2013)

"Maybe with more effort it could be better; there is need of more capital. – viral itself is cheaper, and maybe even as efficient when done right, but I see it still as a supportive to traditional one – the most preferably way is some kind of a fusion of them two." (Lindgren 2013)

5 Recommendations for case company

In this chapter the key findings of the empirical part are analyzed and formed up as recommendations for the case company to develop its viral marketing campaign management. The next chapter further discusses these recommendations and makes overall conclusions.

5.1 Marketing recommendations for case company

Even though this study focuses on viral marketing campaign management, some overall marketing recommendations should be given to case company to accommodate viral marketing suggestions. First of all, the targeting and segmenting of customers should be more complete and accurate. Without clear indication of target audience, no coherent brand image or story telling can be achieved. Sex and age are good, but basic criteria and should be further developed by analyzing for example what are the typical players for certain games, how players are different according to their game taste, what kind of behavior they present in-game and in buying habits and what are their opinions on other Nitrogames' products.

The more pressing matter is, however, the lack of person in charge of marketing in the company. Currently there are a board that makes marketing decisions and some marketers who do their best to execute those orders, but skillful and accountable manager is in dire need so the company can reach its potential in marketing, make efforts professional and so justifiable and to make marketing an integral part of the company's actions. After all, almost every company's decision should be done in marketing in mind to ensure continuity of the brand and overall marketing messages. Also, with some experienced help, the company can also further develop its tool set on

marketing actions, expand and ultimately and in best case scenario, make better games as customers are known better.

5.2 Viral marketing management framework for case company

The current viral marketing management framework, formed up by analyzing interview answers and marketing campaign materials of Nitrogames, was presented in chapter 4.6.2. It shows how viral marketing campaigns are managed in the company by mainly choosing purpose of the campaign which is almost every time to get more sales, selecting what kind of tools are used and monitoring the campaign progress and maybe altering it somehow, if necessary. With only 1-3 employees conducting and no one in actually in charge of the campaigns, the management was deemed to be inefficient and missing potential.

The management process of viral marketing campaign is best described in form of phases as in chapter 3's theoretical, literature derived framework. It is, however, presuming that the campaign is also more or less planned in-house which is not always the case in Nitrogames. As found out from the interview, the planning could have been outsourced to outside social media marketing agency if the board would have deemed it appropriate based on campaign's level of presumed difficulty. This study comes to a conclusion that outsourcing viral marketing campaign planning and then conducting itself is rather pointless besides in the cases where special knowledge is needed or the whole viral marketing is decided to be outsourced. With the right people planning and leading the campaigns and retaining the already talented marketers and graphical designers, making the campaign fully in-house should not pose a problem for Nitrogames.

Next there are recommendations for enhancing and adapting the different phases of viral marketing campaign management in the company. The phases are following the same order as in chapter 3.

5.2.1 Gathering background info

The process of managing viral marketing in Nitrogames is currently lacking background info research and analysis. However, some of the elements of Griffon et al.'s (2012) background info phase can be found, such as budgeting, probability of success evaluation and past campaigns analysis. The main things which should be implemented in the company are more broad internal capability and product analysis and external competition and campaign research.

With internal capability and product analysis, Nitrogames can find out what unique aspects of the company they can use in a campaign. Analyzing employees capabilities in producing interesting content or other material for a viral campaign, searching for product attributes that can be used in some form or utilizing for example games special features in current topics could be crucial in finding one of a kind expertise or input in making, publishing or arranging viral marketing and its content.

The external competition and campaign analysis is in other hand focusing on competitors' campaigns and how they are implemented as well as understanding who the company is competing with and what are their capabilities, products and objectives. Countering, reacting, utilizing and taking notes of competitors' campaigns may result excellent results, as mistakes can be found out beforehand and the success or failures of competitors can be utilized.

The background info features Nitrogames are already using, budgeting, probability of success evaluation and past campaign analysis can also be enhanced. Making clear lines for marketing budget and what kind of results is needed in order to get certain amount of funding for a single campaign, budgeting can become easier and more professional. The evaluation of probable success of a campaign is in its current state based more or less on a hunch of board members. It can be upgraded for example utilizing past campaign analysis and evaluation and consulting the viral marketing employee in charge, after hiring him or her of course. The past campaign analysis can also be upgraded by utilizing the implemented better evaluation reporting of the viral marketing campaigns discussed in 5.2.5.

5.2.2 Definition of objectives and targets

According the interviews, Nitrogames is currently defining its viral and traditional marketing campaign objectives in the beginning of the campaign, and it can be increase in downloads, better brand awareness and finding new channels. In reality, the main objective of getting more downloads of games is the main thing considered, taken note of and evaluated. In other words, Griffon et al.'s (2012) behavioral category is the most prominent criteria for objectives and evaluation and therefore influencer of content, tools and target audience in Nitrogames' viral marketing campaigns.

Because the choosing of objectives is affecting in all the management aspects, it is crucial to choose the right ones. Goal of getting new downloads or customers is understandable from a company viewpoint, but it is missing a longer term approach. Maybe implementing cognitive, meaning brand reach and awareness and financial, evaluated in terms of brand building (Griffon et al. 2012) approaches could help building a stronger brand for a company and aid in designing more unique campaigns, resulting a wider reach in a long run.

This can mean managing multiple campaigns with different goals in mind, but still resulting a coherent brand image and therefore better financial results as more customers are brought up by wider WoM than the current plain sale increase campaigns.

The target selection is what is lacking in Nitrogames. Having a target audience for specific campaign and especially for content going to be created, results better results in reach, market penetration and the overall success. Making segmentation is already covered in overall marketing recommendations, but the viral marketing campaign targets should be more specified. The best way to a small gaming company like Nitrogames would be targeting online groups' enthusiasm, interest or issues (Spencer & Giles 2000) and choosing the special customer groups or types for initial seeding, as described in chapter 2.4.4 (Silverman 2001; Rosen 2000; Gladwell 2002) because the characteristics of a game industry: enthusiasm of its fan base and massive online culture and community attributes.

In addition, if after background info analysis and definition of objectives it is clear that the chosen objectives cannot be met with the resources in hand, outsourcing of whole or parts of the campaign could be considered. However, Nitrogames is in unique position of having numerous artistic and content making talents, making outsourcing a less sound choice. With a person in charge and in the best case, a marketing manager, there is a good chance that the company can produce a viral marketing campaign which harness its own best capabilities and does it in cost effective way.

5.2.3 Message creation and tools selection

Message creation and selection of tools to publish and distribute it is maybe the most time consuming phase in viral marketing campaign management. To have a content which becomes viral, meaning people to willingly sharing it to

others and generating positive WoM is not an easy task, but still the very essence of viral marketing. As described in chapter 2.3.3 and 3.3 the message should be tailored to target audience, follow the guidelines and objectives and be, in essence, viral by being emotionally attractive, include humor and surprise or have some kind of utility to a receiver (Berger & Milkman 2013; Chaffey 2006).

The current messages of viral marketing in Nitrogames are more or less social media discussion, in-game advertising, in-game events and interviews for media. These can be categorized as viral, but pale in a comparison to most successful viral marketing campaigns done by for example Microsoft with their Hotmail marketing or various YouTube videos such as BWM commercials (Griffon et al. 2012; Ferguson 2008). The most common way of doing viral content is publishing YouTube videos which include humor or other required attributes, but not being obviously commercial. Viral video content can be made with even a small budget, in addition to other common ways such as forum discussion, writing a full scale social media content, street level guerilla campaigns and participating in discussion in various online communities (Cruz & Fill 2008; Griffon et al. 2012).

The best way to influence gaming communities: fans and players seem to be participating actively in platforms they are using. Digital distribution networks, forums and even other games can be good places to share content or make it just by being involved. Good thing to remember is that the content, however, is not necessarily have to be top notch or with a high production value. Inbound marketing by luring people in your site is one thing, but viral marketing can occur even with good customer service, discussions and joining the communities. What Nitrogames is maybe lacking is bold tactics, unique content and active participation from a company. With diverse content, different elements, objects and various tools, viral marketing can be enhanced

from more a traditional way of doing marketing to a viral strategy which incorporates industry leading methods of making and publishing content.

5.2.4 The implementation

If a company is making viral marketing, it is also implementing it. However, the actual implementation process can vary and be surprisingly crucial (Griffon et al. 2012). The seeding, planting the campaign material or content created to right people with chosen tools is the key thing in implementation. Implementation itself can be easy if the targets are already defined, strategy to distribute content is clear and the first targets are known to be receptive.

For Nitrogames best way to make this phase better, is to test the content first in a test group and if there are various aspects or details in the distribution strategy, to schedule it. Utilizing already mentioned information on right content, typical targets for viral messages and content customization, implementation can be started with seeding and, if needed, continued with the facilitation of spread by increasing seeding points or with other means according to a situation in hand.

5.2.5 Control and evaluation

Based on the interviews, Nitrogames has been fairly active in controlling and evaluating its campaigns. Marketing actions have been redirected if needed, publishing has been adjusted and content itself has been modified to get more response from the audience during the campaigns. However, what is missing here is the evaluation and reporting of the post-campaign.

The evaluation should be based on the objectives set in the beginning of the planning (Cruz & Fill 2008). Be it new downloads, brand awareness or reach,

there should be clear tools to monitor how campaign has been doing regarding its objectives. This helps planning next campaigns, justifying expenses and redirect efforts.

The best way to use evaluation metrics is use them in combination and according to objectives, and keeping in mind that marketing evaluation is not the most exact or accurate. For example using reach, engagement, activation and nurture REAN metrics introduced in chapter 3.5 in conjunction, could help in explaining the actions not purely from the view point of direct sales, but from different perspectives.

The after campaign reporting includes summaries of these evaluations, analysis of the campaign and recommendations for future endeavors. If Nitrogames is able to establish a tradition on making good evaluation and reporting after every campaign, the chances are the next campaigns will be more accurate and successful.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The final chapter discusses study's theoretical contributions and concludes the managerial implications and general remarks. Also further research topic avenues and suggestions are offered.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

The theoretical objective of this study is to define viral marketing and its details and to create and describe a general viral marketing management process path. The concept of viral marketing is rather new. Because the number of different terms associated with or used as an alternative explainable definitions for viral marketing such as electronic word-of-mouth (Dwyer 2007; Cheung et al. 2008; Hung & Li 2007), word of mouse (Breazeale 2009), Internet Word-of-Mouth (Goldenberg et al. 2001), interactive marketing (Blattberg & Deighton 1991), referral marketing (De Bruyn & lilien 2004) and stealth marketing (Kaikati & Kaikati 2004) there has been terminology and definition controversies in the literature about the precise definition of viral marketing. (Cruz & Fill 2008; Bambo et al. 2008; Petrescu & Korgaonkar 2011, 216) However, it seems that these studies are talking more or less about the same subject even though words used to describe viral marketing vary.

In addition that these terms can be identified defining viral marketing as an overall concept in many ways, the exact descriptions can also vary. There seems to be five different methods in the literature to describe viral marketing. First explaining viral marketing to be the way message is spreading and the second telling it is the Internet version of Word-of-Mouth. Third "school" define it to be combination of formers and the fourth and fifth describing it as referral marketing or the helping of message sharing.

This study defines viral marketing as a combination of these different descriptions and includes characteristics from WoM and general online marketing. Therefore viral marketing can be seen as a marketing tool that encourages consumers to forward marketing message to their friends, relatives or other people relying on messages' entertainment, utility or other value. The campaign itself can be both online and offline and the WoM it creates can be electronic or traditional, a topic which is discussed in Petrescu & Korgaonkar's (2011) study. What makes the viral marketing effective is its diffusional abilities to reach large number of people in relatively small time and cost.

In other words, viral marketing is one of the marketing tools that rely on customers to share company's indirect message and has been further facilitated by the concept of Web 2.0, describing how Internet has become a network of information in which information flows to multiple directions. The shareable content the company makes can be unintentional, but the majority of the actions the company makes should be intentional as was found out from analyzing Dasari's (2010), Cruz & Fill's (2008) and Woerndl et al.'s (2008) research on the subject. The tools used can be based on online and offline worlds, but this study focuses on online ones. These include, but are not limited to: video and music sharing sites, services and products, forums, social media, digital networks and communities which are partly mentioned in Cruz & Fill's (2008) and griffon et al. (2012) articles and were found out during the research.

The thesis also describes the characteristics of the viral marketing which include reasons to share, people who are likely to share and the problems arising from it. Why people share and how this phenomenon can be increased is a typical question for viral marketing. The main source for reliable information comes from other consumers or customers. There is a need for sharing information and belonging to a group, which both encourage

consumers to share their information and content they have received. This is concluded from the O'Brien (2010) and Berger & Milkman's (2013) studies, but also from research conducted to this thesis; particularly gaming communities are places where people share their findings, videos and opinions about anything related to gaming with enthusiasm. This can be seen best from the forums or product-centric web pages which tell the same story: people e-shop based on the WoM on Internet.

To increase this consumer to consumer WoM, viral marketing is the best tool; cheap, wide reaching and potentially phenomenon making. The content the companies should be making is touched in many publications, academic and others. The most recent academic one is Berger & Milkman's (2013) paper on different causes of virality of content. Emotions, usefulness and the most positive experiences are the key points which are also found out during this research along with the different details and nuances of these emotions. Interesting enough, it seems that answering negative feedback can create even better positive WoM when done with care. According to Rosen (2000), Riegner (2007) and Silverman (2001) the type of a product in question effects also how people react to it. Some are more interesting and develop more buzz around them than others, for example high technology products and new innovations. This can be applied to games; the audience is enthusiastic, games can be and are reviewed by many and they have many innovation aspects in them, resulting a good ground for viral marketing efforts.

This enthusiastic crowd of people interested in gaming has their own opinion leaders and hubs of information which are also source of information for general public, as confirmed by Eccleston & Griseri (2008), Silverman (2001), Rosen (2000) and Gladwell (2002) who have studied the different kinds of people who are the source of WoM, content sharing and information dissemination. Therefore viral marketing campaign should be targeted

primarily to these influential individuals or groups and use products' or other content's unique attributes.

The main problem in practicing viral marketing, however, is the content making, choosing right tools and audience and difficulty to control campaigns after launch along with the evaluation, problems shared partly by De Bruyn & Lilien (2008) and Forsgård & Frey (2010). Kirby (2006) have also identified saturations of the markets a problem: viral marketing is not anymore a new thing. In addition to these, the problems regarding viral marketing can also be more fundamental as found out in this study: lack of knowledge in executing campaign or marketing in overall in companies, lack of information on markets and a problem of identifying the attributes which are making content or product successful.

In addition to participating in discussion defining viral marketing and its details, this thesis' main theoretical objective is to build a theoretical process framework for viral marketing campaign management. The result is a new framework with five phases based on the viral marketing planning process made by Grifoni et al. (2012), and it is augmented, enhanced and broadened with information gathered from different sources such as Cruz & Fill's (2008), Gabrielsson et al.'s (2008), Kotler et al.'s (2012) and Porter's (2006) studies with similar or adjacent themes and which is concretized in a new phase and individual details in each of the steps. These five phases are presented in figure 3 and in detail figure 4.



Figure 3: Overall viral marketing campaign management process framework



Figure 4: viral marketing campaign management process phases and their details

Without going into full individual details, as they can be found from chapter 3, this framework presents multiple new ideas to manage viral marketing campaign on a general level. In short, it explains what information should be gathered, what are the points to remember in each phase, what should be done, suggestions on execution and how the phases are connected to each other. By proposing this framework, author is inviting more research on the topic, individual phases and to the whole concept.

6.2 Managerial conclusions

Besides discussing on definitions and building a theoretical framework of managing viral marketing campaign, this study also analyses the case company's viral marketing campaign management and provides suggestions to enhance it. In conclusion, the case company, Nitrogames, is given overall marketing recommendations and detailed viral marketing campaign management suggestions incorporated in the process phases built in the theory part and which are based on the interviews, marketing material provided, analytics, theory and cross-reference.

The biggest issues Nitrogames now have in its marketing is the lack of accountable marketing manager, up to date marketing strategy and clear targeting or segmentation of its customers, resulting inefficient use of resources, missing potential and unprofessional, incoherent marketing efforts. Therefore the recommendations for the company is to acquire a dedicated marketing manager specialized in gaming industry and to make a clear marketing strategy including, but not limited to, segmentation, resource management and tools selection.

Outsourcing the marketing planning has been used before, and the attraction of outsourcing the whole marketing department can be clearly seen and is somewhat understandable. However, this study comes to a conclusion that,

besides some special individual marketing details or individual campaigns, handling the marketing in-house is a better way because of the talented content makers, enthusiastic employees and more manageable result and resources management.

Another big issue derivable from the interviews is the stance towards marketing. In its current state marketing is treated as a simple tool of getting new customers and sales in short term. In its revised strategy Nitrogames should get rid of the idea of evaluating all efforts solely based on the direct sales increases, as it is only one side of the coin and a vague metric to understand the whole impact of a campaign. Brand image and awareness, buzz and for example followers should be included as other goals of the marketing effort, in order to increase them and to build a long term relationship to customers and other stakeholders. The metrics to calculate these other goals are introduced in chapter 3.5.

Same change in stance should be extended also to the whole business. Marketing should be a major part of all business aspects and at least be a part of all decision making. After all, almost every company's decision should be done in marketing in mind to ensure continuity of the brand and overall marketing messages. In short, marketing helps in product and business development as well as understanding the customer and the markets overall.

Chapter 5's recommendations for viral marketing management in Nitrogames are the climax of this study. These recommendations follow the order of the management process phases found in the theory part, and are focusing on a single phase at the time. The viral marketing management seems to suffer from the same problems as the overall marketing: lack of accountable manager and coherent strategy resulting very basic and inefficient campaigns. Therefore most of the problems discovered in different phases could be countered with revised strategy and new allocation of resources and capabilities.

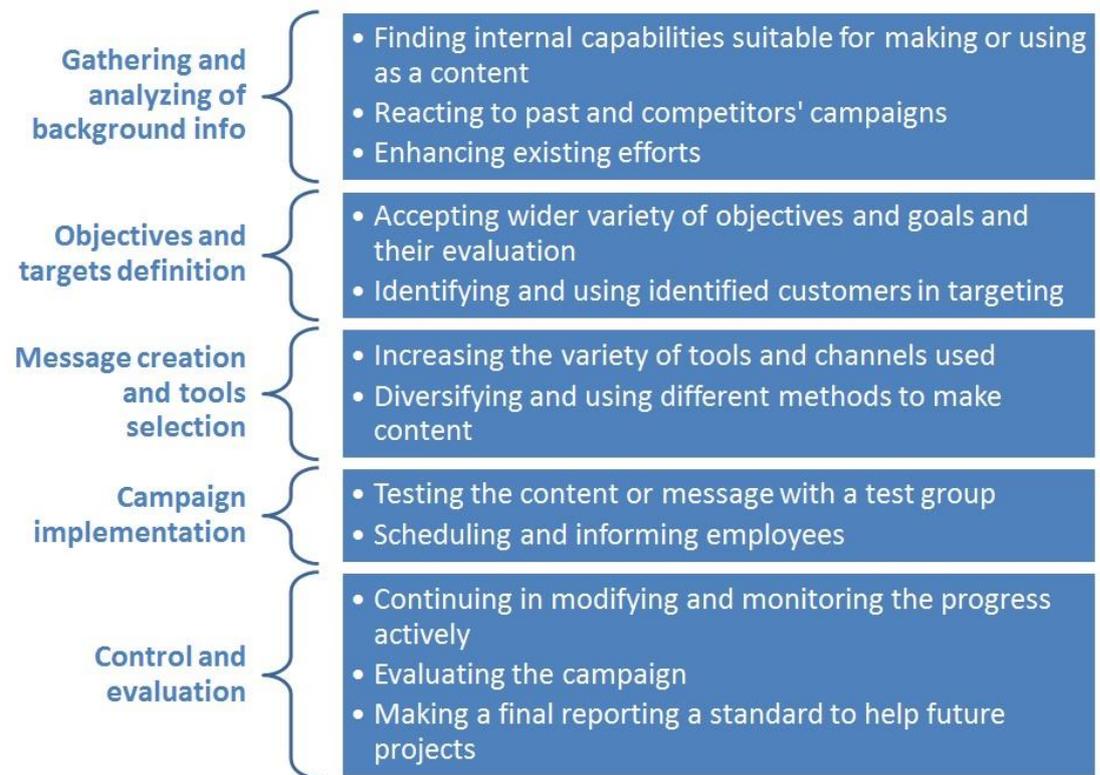


Figure 5: viral marketing campaign management process phases and suggestions for the case company

The figure 5 summarizes the recommendations offered in chapter 5. The picture which is based on the theory framework (and figure 4), is missing the details, reasoning and the original framework's ideas, however, it gives a clear and short indication on what are the points needing improvement and how they are linked to the viral marketing management framework's phases. In contrary to previous viral marketing planning and therefore managing models, it extends them in steps as well as broadens the details.

6.3 Overall conclusions

In addition to Nitrogames' recommendations, some overall conclusions for executing viral marketing in Finnish gaming companies can be drawn when analyzing case company and the overall market situation. Even though the case data acquired may not be applicable to all companies, the general homogeneity and characteristics make Finnish gaming companies resembling each other, allowing some form of generalization. By observing market place actions, other companies and overall situation, it is safe to assume that the state of marketing, viral marketing and managerial execution is more or less the same in an average Finnish game studio. For example, it seems that gaming industry in Finland in general is need of courage in executing viral marketing. Flashy and clever campaigns done by Finnish companies are hard to find and those few are limited only to a handful of biggest firms. This is shame because creativity and digital knowledge are plenty in gaming companies and should be used more broadly to achieve customer awareness with a minimal investment.

Lack of appreciation of marketing seems also to be a broader phenomenon. In many Finnish gaming studios marketing comes last in the pecking order, as was found out during the initial background research. Marketing knowledge is in many cases non-existing and executions of marketing actions are limited in many gaming companies to advertising or sending press releases. However, there is a possibility of a study error as the knowledge is lacking and the company representatives may not even be aware what is considered to be a marketing action, a thing which further emphasizes the need for more marketing knowledge in companies. After all, as stated, professional marketing strategy is needed in every phase of the decision making to ensure that the company is functioning as the markets dictate and signals.

Naturally this lack knowledge and appreciation towards marketing means the same things for viral marketing. One of the biggest derivable of this research

is the viral marketing campaign management framework which can be used as a starting point to develop a professional viral marketing campaigns. Other point of interest is finding proper channels to practice it. Participating gaming audience in making content or even products, actively taking part to communities and developing supporting services are examples of unconventional viral marketing tools and channels. These are actively utilized by foreign gaming companies which are already exhausted the more traditional tools, such as YouTube videos or “exclusive” interviews. This kind of tools adaptation along with professional managerial models and acceptance that viral and marketing in general are ways to making companies successful are needed also in Finnish gaming companies to achieve the expectations placed on them.

6.4 Limitations and further research suggestions

This research studies viral marketing and viral marketing campaign management in the context of gaming business on online environment. The case data itself is based on a Finnish company and its situation. Therefore, as described in chapter 4.5, case related generalization is hard or even impossible unless further studies can find similarities between companies with same background and situation. However, the viral marketing campaign management framework found in the theory part of this thesis is a general one and thereby applicable to use in other contexts.

An interesting theme for further studies, besides searching similarities in gaming companies, is viral marketing campaign’s connection between its successfulness and the tools used. Especially the more unconventional tools, such as those which are based on digital networks and communities should be further searched. Quantitative research could also be done to find out viral marketing potential to reach people.

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