THE EFFECTS OF MARKETING AUTOMATION ON A COMPANY'S BUSINESS

ABSTRACT

Marketing automation as a research topic has begun to attract researchers, but there is still relatively little information about the real impact of marketing automation on companies. The purpose of this study is to open up more about the real benefits of using marketing automation but also about the pitfalls it causes. In addition to this, the study focuses on the motivators of companies that drive them to adopt marketing automation.

The empirical part of this study has been conducted through semi-structured interviews where interviews have been conducted with individuals who work with marketing automation in sales, marketing, and consulting roles. Thus, the study has been conducted as a multiple case study. The findings of the work show that the motivating factors for the introduction of marketing automation are diverse. The growth of a company, the desire to produce scalable marketing, and the measurability of marketing results are among the things that support the acquisition of marketing automation to improve the company's marketing. The benefits of marketing automation for the company are reflected in the improved cooperation between sales and marketing teams and the measurement of results. However, the results of the study show that with poor design, marketing automation does not benefit but can become just one extra system for a company that remains unused.

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Markkinoinnin automaatio on alkanut houkutella tutkijoita, mutta markkinoinnin automaation todellisista vaikutuksista yrityksiin on vielä suhteellisen vähän tietoa. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on avata enemmän markkinoinnin automaation käytön todellisia etuja, mutta myös sen aiheuttamia sudenkuoppia. Tämän lisäksi tutkimuksessa keskitytään yrityksiä motivoiviin tekijöihin, jotka puoltavat markkinoinnin automaation käyttöönottoa.

Tutkimuksen empiirinen osa on toteutettu puolistrukturoiduilla haastatteluilla, joissa on haastateltu henkilöitä, jotka työskentelevät markkinoinnin automaation parissa myynnin, markkinoinnin ja konsultin rooleissa. Työn tulokset osoittavat, että markkinoinnin automaation käyttöönoton motivaatiotekijät ovat yrityksen kasvu, halu tuottaa skaalautuvaa markkinointia sekä markkinoinnin tulosten mitattavuus, jotka tukevat markkinoinnin automaation hankintaa. Markkinoinnin automaation hyödyt yritykselle näkyvät myynti- ja markkinointitiimien yhteistyön ja tulosten mittaamisen parantumisena. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat kuitenkin, että huonolla käyttöönoton suunnittelulla markkinoinnin automaatiosta ei hyödytä, vaan siitä voi tulla vain yksi uusi järjestelmä yritykselle, jolle ei löydetä todellista käyttötarkoitusta.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRM - Customer Relationship Management

CKM - Customer Knowledge Management

B2B - Business-to-Business

B2C - Business-to-Consumer

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1 Introduction

The world has changed dramatically in just over two decades and this change has been reflected in business. One of the biggest reasons for the change has been the proliferation of the internet (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016). Things around us are happening faster and this also means responding to challenges as they require. In marketing, this change has been reflected as well, as the activities are no longer only decision-supported, but they are also automated (Bucklin, Lehmann & Little 1998) which meets modern challenges even in a fast-paced business environment.

Marketing automation is a multi-billion business today, and it has become one of the most important ways to handle marketing, among others. It takes advantage of things that technology has made possible, such as targeted marketing based on customer behavior and orientation. As a result, the use of marketing automation has become more common (Turkanik & Johnson 2020) and can very often be used, for example, integrated into Customer Relationship Management software. This makes it possible to combine marketing and sales, which is an ideal situation that improves overall sales and makes it possible to maintain long and profitable relationships with clients (Chen & Popovich 2003).

Several large companies such as Microsoft and Salesforce have integrated marketing automation into their CRM systems (Redding 2015). In addition to marketing automation, CRM software also enables the sharing of information within an organization which facilitates Customer Knowledge Management. (Gibbert, Leibold & Probst 2002) Therefore, the process which starts with marketing automation can increase sales but also benefits the organization in other areas. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out how marketing automation is affecting business.

To achieve the goal of this work, the first thing is to get acquainted with the existing literature that allows the creation of a framework for the work. In the empirical part of the work,

marketing automation professionals are interviewed. Interviews are recorded and transcribed. Based on these six interviews, it is intended to answer the research question and the three sub-questions.

This research is structured as follows. It begins with an introduction to the topic followed by the background of the work. After this, the thesis introduces the literature review and what is written about the topic of the study before, an introduction to research questions and research delimitations. This is followed by a review of the theoretical framework of the work, from which it moves on to the research methodology and data collection plan, more specifically, why qualitative research methods have been used in this study as well as the work structure is introduced. Then the theoretical part of the work and research design and methods are introduced. After this, the work reviews the findings, the theoretical contributions of the work, practical implications, and future research directions.

1.1 Literature review

The literature review consists of an overview of previous literature related to marketing automation, business development, and how these two are connected with knowledge and relationship management. The learning most current technologies and practices is one of the main keys to being successful in the business environment. Marketing automation is a somewhat fresh thing that has become more common since the turn of the millennium and with the proliferation of the internet. Nowadays it is a crucial part of developing any business activities so that businesses can improve decision making, better efficiency, and offer individually targeted marketing methods (Järvinen, Tarkiainen & Tobon 2020).

Peter et al. (2018) write that the advantages of marketing technologies were debated for the first time in the 1960s within organizations. Bucklin et al. (1998) write two decades ago that marketing activities are no longer only decision-supported but also automated. They also write that already long before the turn of the millennium, there was a clear desire to strive for better decision-making, which also helped to understand better the business environment.

The existing literature consists of information on the logic behind marketing automation but also conceptualizing it (Järvinen, Tarkiainen & Tobon 2020). Especially the internet plays a key role during this digitalization era which allows better use of marketing automation and thus the buyer and the product or service provider are more closely connected. Marketing automation includes both passive and active ways to understand the mindset of possible customers. More precisely, an active way to approach means directly asked questions and passive is all about learning from previous transactions the buyer has made. (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016) Also, advances in communications technology have provided companies with improved ways to progress from mass marketing, which was the main marketing philosophy during the 20th century to individually targeted marketing methods (Turkanik & Johnson 2020).

Previous literature says that the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) tools are considered to be a link between sales and marketing. Some years ago, marketing was seen only as a tool to reduce expensive sales expenses. It is not easy to say where is the border between sales and marketing and how these two function together. However, giant companies such as Microsoft and Salesforce have adapted their marketing tools into CRM and the literature has also reviewed how marketing automation can be combined into CRM tools. (Redding 2015)

CRM is a joint effort to identify, build, and maintain a network with a person or company and this should be to the benefit of both parties (Bueren et. al 2004). The first CRM platform was introduced around the 1990s and this can be calculated as the time when marketing automation became invented. So, it is a rather new invention that made possible the general development of information technology, among other things, in the form of the internet. (Biegel 2009)

As mentioned, CRM stands for customer relationship management but at the same time, it contains potentially really a lot of more or less critical information about customers. That leads to wider knowledge of customers and Gibbert, Leibold & Probst (2002) write that

customer-oriented companies must use and increase their competencies to achieve the information of those who are their current and who would be their potential customers.

Rowley (2002) described almost two decades ago that customer knowledge management focuses on things such as who are customers, where they are, what they expect, how they behave, how will their behavior change over the next decade, etc. Previous literature also states the difference between customer relationship management and customer knowledge management (CKM). Customer relationship management mostly focuses on the knowledge *about* customers whereas knowledge management focuses on knowledge *from* the customers. Generally, in relationship management, smart companies seek information about their customers with straight collaboration with their buying clients. Likewise, in CKM, the companies are trying to encourage their employees to share the knowledge instead of keeping it to themselves. (Gibbert, Leibold & Probst 2002)

In addition to CRM and CKM, it is important to give attention to knowledge management. It is discussed that customer knowledge management is a combination of customer relationship management and knowledge management. It is already mentioned what CRM stands for but KM and CKM are relatively close to each other. Often, knowledge management focuses on the systematic management of the information needed to operate a company or organization. The information required in this context is thought to consist of both tacit knowledge and explicit information. (Bueren et. al 2004)

Marketing automation enables the increasingly effortless data collection from customers and effective dissemination of information within the company plays a key role in developing business opportunities. Developing current business and creating new opportunities are the main target for companies and thereby grow their business. Marketing automation is multidimensional in business. Turkanik & Johnson (2020) describes the conversion rate as one of the dimensions of how to measure business profitability. However, marketing automation also enables to target tailor offerings for customers to meet their needs. Also, within the company and between the companies, it develops the processes, activities, and

services, as well as helps in structural changes in the company. Additionally, it makes changes between different roles easier to implement and increases accountability. (Aldin et. al 2004)

There are several dimensions discussed that include marketing automation, but in this research, the topic needs to be addressed holistically. Marketing automation initiates the process of collecting data from the customer base and processing it within the company. This is followed by a step in which the collected data is used in business development. CRM systems play a main role as a marketing tool in this research since it covers the whole funnel to collect the data, spread the data, and also measure development. CRM systems do not exclude any potential customers, as the system offers equal opportunities to develop business opportunities with existing customers as well as to acquire new customers. However, the system itself is a very versatile tool that offers several integration possibilities to other systems.

1.2   Research questions and aim of the research

The purpose of this work is to obtain information about the capabilities of marketing automation and how marketing automation can be used to influence a company's business. Advances in technology have made it possible to respond quickly to customer requirements, and current tools offer the ability to do things more efficiently and quickly. Marketing automation sounds like a product that can connect to a large number of customers easily and quickly. The question is how a company benefits from marketing automation and what makes companies use the system. The introduction of new technology usually involves risks as well, which means that the benefits sought from the system will not be achieved, so this aspect is also taken into account in the work. The research questions for this work are as follows:

The main research question of the research is:

How does marketing automation benefit the company's business?

Sub-research questions are:

Q1. How marketing automation tools and features are useful?

Q2. What motivates companies to use marketing automation?

Q3. What are the pitfalls in marketing automation?

1.3   Delimitations

This study focuses on private sector B2B companies located in Finland and Estonia. This means that geographical limitations must be taken into account in the results of the study but also B2C companies are excluded from this study.

1.4   Theoretical framework

The purpose of the theoretical framework is to illustrate the theoretical perspectives of the research. Firstly, the definition of marketing automation is explained. This part includes also the functionality of marketing automation meaning how marketing automation works in practice. Companies can have different motivations and purposes to use marketing automation systems and therefore the aim is to find current information for those purposes. Motivation to adopt marketing automation can be the result of a problem or business failure, or then simply that company sees potential to grow with it, and therefore this will be addressed in the study.

This study concentrates on B2B marketing automation, so part of it is to understand how do the companies benefit from the use of marketing automation. Therefore, the main concepts are customer relationship management and customer knowledge management, and the

theory concentrates also to make a clear difference between those two. After the company noticed that they would require automating at least some of their marketing activities, and defining clearly where they use and what they do the data they have, it is crucial to calculate the benefits of using marketing automation. Finally, it's important to remember that marketing automation isn't necessarily a silver bullet, it can even make a business more difficult. Therefore, this work will also address the pitfalls of marketing automation. Overall, the thesis is designed to proceed through the process which is summarized in Figure 1.
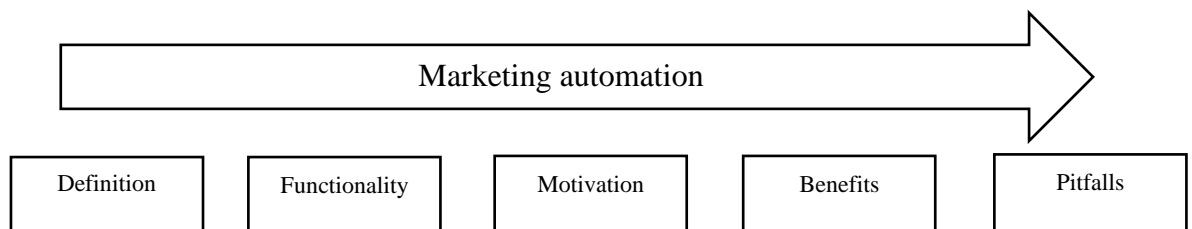
Figure 1 Theoretical framework of the thesis

Customer Relationship Management

CRM is a technology-enabled joint effort to categorize, build, and sustain a network with a person or company and this should benefit all stakeholders (Bueren et. al 2004). Customer relationship management (CRM) is the core of a company's business where relationships with the customers are managed. Therefore, it is not just an IT program, but for example, in the supplier-customer relationship, it sustains lucrative relationships with the client during the life cycle of the customer. (Buttle & Maklan 2019) This has shifted from a transaction-oriented relationship, which focuses on growing the number of sales with new customers to maintaining long and profitable relationships with acquired customers (Chen & Popovich 2003).

The life cycle of the customer simply contains, in this case, the phases from acquiring the new customer, maintaining a profitable relationship with existing customers, and the termination of the customer relationship. CRM contains important information related to the customer, starting with basic data such as address information, but also more specific data for sales organizations, for example, about the customer's purchasing behavior. (Buttle & Maklan 2019) More broadly, CRM is a mixture of persons, processes, and knowledge (Figure 2) that helps the company understand its clients. Implementing the CRM successfully rewards its users with long-lasting profitability, and with loyal customers. (Chen & Popovich 2003)
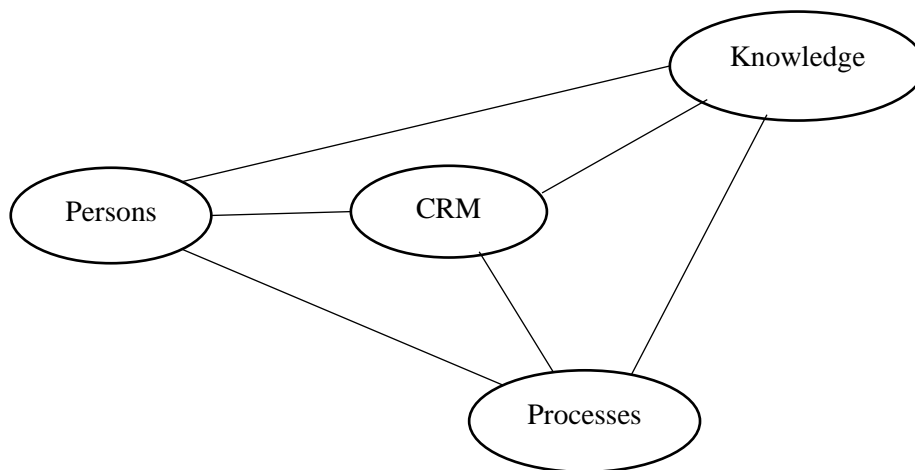
Figure 2 CRM environment

First-class customer relationship information supports planned decisions made in CRM, like serving the most profitable customers, but also operational decisions related to offerings and channels to meet customers' needs. This all is enabled by information technology which supports a modern remote partnership between the business partners, whereas, back in the days it was more common to maintain relationships with face-to-face meetings to gather information about the business partner and their needs. (Buttle & Maklan 2019) Information technology has dramatically changed the business processes of the firms, which has led to improvements in performance. CRM is one advanced, technology-enabled method to

connect the company with customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. (Chen & Popovich 2003)

Summarizing the CRM, it is enabled by the technology which allows gathering extensive information about customers based, among other things, on their past purchasing behavior but also based on their online behavior. For other organizations that do not base their operations on sales but, for example, on maintaining a customer register, CRM facilitates communication with these individuals, enabling marketing and customer service with a single tool. (Buttle & Maklan 2019)

Customer knowledge management

Customer knowledge management differentiates from CRM. When CRM concentrates to gather information from the customers, customer knowledge management focuses to spread the information inside the company, collected about the customer. In other words, CKM encourages people to share knowledge rather than keeping it to themselves. (Gibbert, Leibold & Probst 2002) The company's data bank from the customers is an intangible asset, but with a high value, that benefits the growth, organizational learning, and creates bigger customer value. Using this information inside the company is most probably key to the company's long-term success. By sharing the information, CKM helps the companies systematically improve their awareness related to business. (Wilde 2011)

Business development

Developing a business is the core of any successful company. While customer needs, technology, and the business environment is changing, the companies must keep up with the change and convert their strategies to match needs and meet with success in tomorrow's world as well. Prerequisites to develop a business are knowledge resources such as CRM, as

well as financing the development, physical capabilities, and individual and organizational resources (Aldin et. al 2004).

Customer knowledge processing

Knowledge, among many other things, is recognized to be a tactically important resource for companies that contributes to the performance, Nevertheless, the achievement is reliant on the competencies of firms to create and exploit knowledge, which empowers firms to achieve a long-lasting competitive advantage for their business. Processing the knowledge benefits both the firm and the customer with the customer-orientated attitude in comparison to process orientation. (Choon-Yin et. al 2020)

1.5   Research methodology & Data collection plan

The research method in this study is qualitative research. Marketing automation is a somewhat young topic to make research. For this reason, the most appropriate way to do research is to interview individuals who are involved in marketing automation at their work. The interviewees have been selected so that the study can be conducted as a multiple case study. Case studies are used to study unknown phenomena but also test the theory. The phenomena in this research are not unknown, but so far it has not been extensively studied. It should be noted that more than one case must be used in a case study to make the study valid and to highlight recurring findings. In the case study, the topic must also be narrowed down precisely so that the results are comparable (Gammelgaard 2017).

Interviews are conducted with semi-structured questions. The purpose is to seek the interviewees' opinions about the impact of marketing automation on business. In semi-structured interviews, the questions are specified to cover a specific topic, but the questions can be formulated differently in interview situations. Semi-structured interviews allow gain information from experienced professionals during the discussion and it provides the best

perspective on how the interviewees have experienced and appreciated the functionality of the object being studied (Stephens 2007).

1.6   Structure of the study

This study is structured into five main chapters. The first part is an introduction to the study, which contains research questions, a preliminary literature review, a theoretical framework, general definitions, and research methodology. After that study moves on to the theoretical part which serves as a foundation for the empirical part of the work. The theoretical part reviews previous studies related to marketing automation. More specifically, its definition, functionality, and functions, as well as what is already written about marketing automation. In terms of motivation to use it and its benefits

After the theory, we move on to chapter three. It is an overview of the research methods used in the research, the methods of analyzing research data, and how reliability can be measured. Chapter four contains the empirical part and the findings of the research. The last chapter is a summary of the research. It contains theoretical contributions for future studies, as well as practical implications. Limitations of this research, and directions for future research are addressed also in the last chapter of this study.

2 Marketing automation

This part introduces the theoretical background of this research. First, it reviews market automation as a concept, followed by an introduction to the functionality of marketing automation. Often, companies have some triggers to establish new functions into their business so we will look at the motivations and advantages of why marketing automation is worth taking into consideration. After that, we go through the cases and examples in which marketing automation should be used and finally we concentrate on the benefits to use marketing automation.

2.1 Definition of marketing automation

Peter et al. (2018) write that the advantages of marketing technologies were debated for the first time in the 1960s within organizations. It was argued somewhat that "automation can help the gathering and analysis of facts and therefore enables automated functions and forecasts and facilitates transactions". Over the past two decades, marketing has shifted from data-based decision making to information technology-supported activities and this was forecasted by Bucklin et al. (1998) At the time, their main interpretation was that by 2020, marketing activities will be increasingly automated. Their argument was based on several claims. Firstly, technology will take a bigger role and this will make it easier to gain and process information like the number of products, services, and market growth. Therefore, they didn't see that a man-made decision was not needed especially with current products and services.

Nowadays workflows will do the work and decisions which were made by a man earlier. (Peter et al. 2018) Secondly, automation will make marketing activities faster and more efficient by creating behavioral analyses about the clients. They also predicted that automation in decision-making is key to success when a big amount of decisions have to be made immediately. However, according to them, this only applies to existing products and services on the market, to the exclusion of new and innovative products. (Bucklin et al. 1998)

Today, as we live in 2022, we can say that the prediction has come true, and nowadays marketing automation is widely used, although systems and processes are still evolving at a rapid pace. Its operations are based on computer-based solutions that can be used, for example, to perform customer segmentation, manage multi-channel campaigns, lead processing, automation of emails, production, sending of digital content, analyze customer journeys, and consider strategies. (Turkanik & Johnson 2020; Peter et al. 2018) Globally there have been lots of studies related to marketing automation, but Turkanik & Johnson (2020) writes the topic is still understudied and its real impact on the operations of companies is still unexplored, although it is a multi-billion business globally.

Generally speaking, marketing automation follows the process where clients' behavior in the marketer's online environment is being monitored (Turkanik & Johnson 2020). Marketing automation is not just a series of activities performed by a marketer, but it requires the active involvement of the customer in these activities. Thus, it can be said to be a cooperation that benefits both parties. (Bucklin et al. 2002) Depending on the marketing tool, it collects the clients' demographic data and their behavior while their online presence. For example in email marketing, data like unique clicks, and hard- and soft bounces are collected. Additionally, keywords, purchases, content responses, and other communication data are collectible, just to name a few. (Turkanik & Johnson 2020; Peter et al. 2018)

Previous encounters between the marketer and consumer shape the following interactions. For example, the consumer who receives an email clicks the link on the email and which leads her to the next site. All those clicks before the purchase can be monitored, which provides more information for the marketer who, therefore can make slight changes to upcoming marketing campaigns regarding the previous behavior of a consumer. This kind of behavior is dynamic, which means it is changing and generating new data for the marketer compared to static marketing, which is made for example at the trade show or supermarket with fixed marketing activities. (Bucklin et al. 2002) Data collected about the customers can be used for segmenting them, and therefore, the provision of services and products, which are delivered on social media platforms, by email, or simply shown on the website becomes

easier when they are personalized to certain segments. Turkanik & Johnson (2020) identify three necessary things for marketing automation.

1. Detailed information about the client
2. Data about the behavior and purchasing history
3. Marketing automation software (e.g. CRM)

As technology has had rapid changes and all the time new marketing methods are invented, there are not too many studies yet about email marketing, for instance. Peter et al. (2018) write that email marketing is defined as the most effective way and tool to gather new customers and following to the customer journey. This means that it allows you to be in the shoes of the customer and refers to the customers' touchpoints from the initial email to the purchase. The advantages of email marketing are that email can be sent by the marketers at the best possible time to get the attention of customers. If necessary, the customer can also be sent a follow-up message after making the purchase or the marketer would like to thank the customer for other cooperation.

2.2 Functionality and features

Marketing automation contains several functions and features (Figure 3) that can be automated and these are lead management, campaign management, analytics and reporting, marketing planning and budgeting, website tracking, lists and segmentation, and marketing resource management. However, functionality depends on how well these features are applied to work together and how they function with firms' business processes. (Keens & Bartker 2009; Engelen & Mannel 2019) Moreover, as earlier mentioned email marketing plays a major role in marketing automation acting as a trigger to process and create additional data about the customer for analysis (Peter et al. 2018).
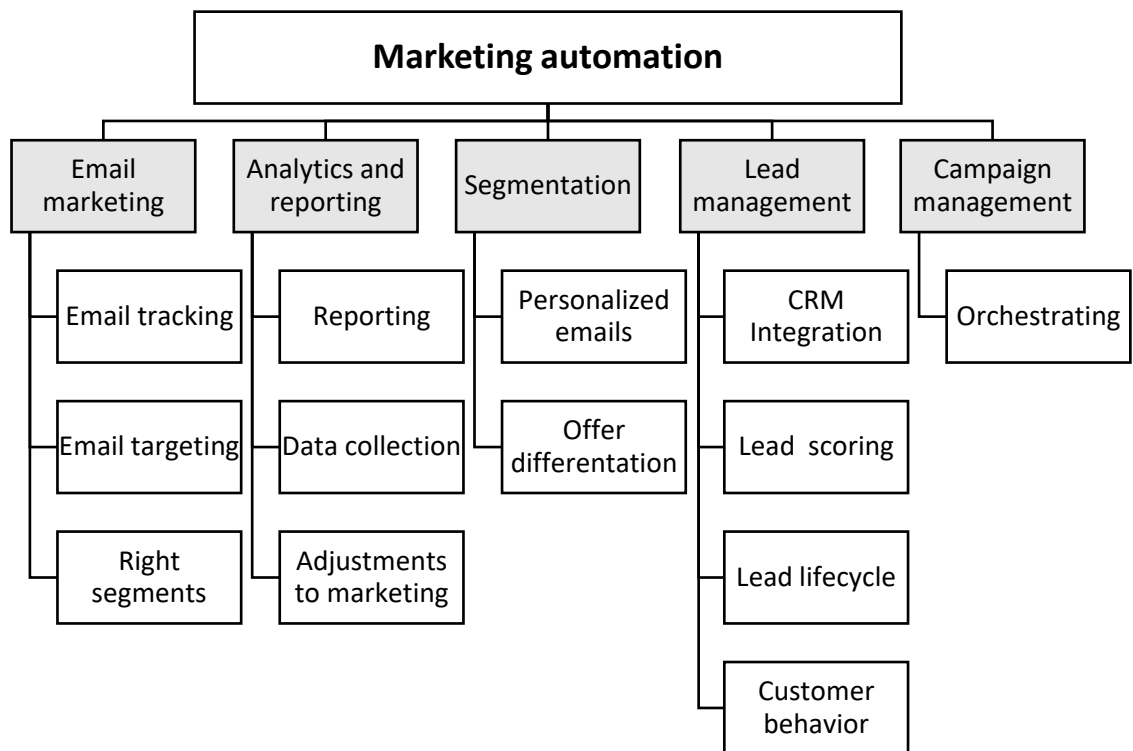
Figure 3 Functionality and features

2.2.1   Email marketing

Email marketing is one of the most effective ways to do online marketing and there are several advantages to it. Jenkins (2008) writes that email marketing is low-cost, and easily targeted if customer segmentation is done correctly and its impact is measurable. Especially if a marketer wants to create a long-term relationship, email marketing content is easy to build depending on the interest of the individual client. Therefore, a marketer can create brand loyalty when he knows what things the customer is interested in and store this data in CRM, which has many advantages. From CRM, the advertiser can send bulk emails to segmented customers. Deliveries can be sent as scheduled so that they arrive at the customer at the best possible time, and therefore they stand out from the rest of the email. (Peter et al. 2018) When doing email marketing, it is good for the marketer to understand that the content of the email must pass through spam filters and this scourge of our time poses its own challenges to modern marketing.

Researchers have stated that personalized emails add value to both customers and the advertiser. Of course, it is important to understand through segmentation what customer likes and what products and services they might be interested in, but sometimes adding the customer's name at the beginning of the email can make the customer pay more attention to the message. (Sahni et. al 2018) However, email can also give hints to the marketers about what customers like, by their responses, as well as what customers are not interested in (Jenkins 2008).

From the customers' point of view, email marketing is a good form to do marketing as they can always unsubscribe (opt-out) themselves from the mailing list if the client has a feeling that receiving messages does not benefit them. On the other hand, the customer also has the opportunity to influence the content of the messages by interacting with the advertiser, and therefore the content of the messages can be made relevant to the customer. (Hartemo 2016) However, the marketer needs to study customers' touchpoints so that they can make interpretations based on them and redefine content if needed (Peter et al. 2018).

2.2.2   Lead management

Previous studies show that the use of an up-to-date CRM and integrated marketing automation system is can be used in lead processing as it significantly speeds up lead processing and gives detailed data to the marketer. Leads processed in marketing automation are online leads and these should be processed as soon as possible if the lead is to be converted into a buying customer and marketing automation tool is one effective way to answer this problem and therefore, create more sales for the company (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016). From the CKM point of view, CRM serves as a platform for disseminating customer information within the organization. However, it is good to remember that access to information can be restricted, among other things, depending on the roles of the users. (Gibbert, Leibold & Probst 2002)

The leads go step by step through a lead funnel with several different steps before the leads turn into customers. However, this requires well-organized lead management and nurturing so that the leads can be led step by step in the lead funnel. (Singh et al. 2014) When a marketer has successfully collected leads then the next step is to find out how to manage them. CRM is a great way to store data and process the leads but the marketer can also profile the leads, score them, put leads into segments in CRM as well as start processing them towards opportunity. (Durga 2015) In other words, lead management is a process starting from acquiring and generating leads and prospects. One strategy is to generate leads as many as possible to fill the first phase of the lead funnel and this can be made by tracking views of the company's website or tracking people who download any material from the company's website. (Singh et al. 2014) Also, sending emails to unknown people might create leads, but there can be many disagreements about its functionality and it may turn out to be a useless job. Of course, depending on the business and the product offered, this can also be effective marketing.

Leads can be converted into customers, but before that potential customer has shown some interest to a marketer that they are interested to make purchases. However, the process involves that the customer behind the lead has to get known better so that the lead can be evaluated, meaning that the marketer has to put effort to learn how do the customer behaves, and what are their interests. (BigCommerce 2020) Sometimes lead nurturing is needed which allows a marketer to build a relationship with a lead by providing information about the offerings which creates demand for the offerings (Singh et al. 2014). In the next phase, leads can be scored. Leads with higher grading are more likely to be prioritized over casual customers since they are believed to offer higher value to the advertiser (BigCommerce 2020). On the other hand lead scoring does not tell how committed the customer is to purchase, but higher rate means better chance for that (Sweezey 2014).

Once the leads have been grated, the leads are handed over to sales teams, but some lost opportunities are returned back to earlier phases for further nurturing. The whole interaction may end up in a purchase and at the same time it is possible to create more information for marketers about a customer and potentially make other offerings that might be interesting

for a client. (BigCommerce 2020) However, Singh et al. (2014) write that it is not only about selling but also about creating experiences for the customer, Therefore, it is important to put effort into good customer service. In best cases, the customer is doing marketing on behalf of your company by spreading the word but they are willing to buy more inspired by the experience.

2.2.3 Analytics and reporting

Producing, reviewing, and understanding analyzes and reports is a very important part of marketing automation. For instance, doing marketing automation with CRM, the marketer receives data throughout the customer's life cycle, collects information about potential new customers, researches purchase history, monitors online activities, and customer behavior. (Todor 2016) More detailed information about an individual marketing campaign can be collected from, for example, unique clicks, opened emails, emails that have not reached their destination, click-through rate, open rate, and new leads you have created. Analytics tell the marketer who has opened an email and which links have been opened and by who, which, therefore creates always more information about leads for the marketer. (Turkanik & Johnson 2020)

Successful marketing automation campaigns are reflected in the fact that, for example, sales organizations increase their sales and this figure is compared to the investments they have made (Todor 2016). In the second case, the associations or organization calculates the success of the marketing campaign based on how much they have attracted new people to the organization. This fact serves as an indication that marketing automation and its impact on business can be used in a variety of ways, whether it is a pure sales organization or, for example, an organization that oversees the interests of its members and aim is to improve customer service.

2.2.4   Segmentation

Doing segmentation is one of the greatest functionalities of marketing automation. Segmentation divides customers into groups according to their interests and specifications and it allows marketers to reach customers precisely regarding their needs and wishes and as well, at the right time. Segments can be defined geographically (country, region, or city), according to age, by income group, or by industry. (Singh et al. 2014) Segmentation can be made also regarding opened email links, which is showing that the email receiver is interested in a linked topic. Clicking on links gives the marketer information about the lead's interest in the product or service, and the level of interest, and helps transfer leads to other campaigns. In addition to this, segmentation can also be done based on website visits or, based on content downloads. (Sweezey 2014) Segmentation needs to be done more accurately if the marketer has a wide selection of products or services to offer to customer groups (Singh et al. 2014).

The main focus of segmentation is to generate a profile of the customers which means that as much data as possible should be collected about their characteristics. This means collecting data from a variety of sources in order to draw the clearest possible conclusions about the customer, regardless of the angle from which the customer is viewed (Singh et al. 2014). For example, if a marketer has a segment for individuals who have shown interest in a high-tech product X and Y and the age range of those individuals is 30-40 years. Therefore, a marketer should include in this segment people who have searched for products X and Y and are 30-40 years old. (Sweezey 2014) This shows that the more information is collected about people, the better they can be segmented and at some point, we may already start talking about micro-segmentation.

CRM and marketing automation systems have a role in this to shape a profile for clients and leads entered into the system, as well as, helping to identify their qualities. When it comes to the benefits to the business, segmentation, and profiling help a company to make more sales when products and services can be targeted to the customer. This means that a company can differentiate itself with properly targeted products and services, thus giving it a

competitive advantage and gaining more market share from its competitors. (Singh et al. 2014) In segmentation, as in many other functions related to marketing automation, it is important to understand that the system itself is not the silver bullet. In this case, for example, a company needs to understand the environment in which they are competing in order to stand out from their competitors.

2.2.5 Campaign management

Campaign management involves a series of activities that should be made within the time limits set for them. Within a campaign, these process phases include campaign planning, campaign execution, and analysis using statistics and reports (Todor 2016). CRM helps you plan your campaign, as you can select the appropriate segments for your campaign at this phase. The campaign has to be carefully designed which involves selecting segments, creating content, creating the right kind of templates, budgeting, and defining campaign objectives. Once these preparations are completed then the next step is to create a campaign and execute it. (Durga 2015) When executing a campaign, it aims to reach its target group, so it has to be timed for the time when people are available (Peter et al. 2018).

CRM includes analytics tools to track how much of the submitted material has been opened or how much of the submitted material has not reached its destination. A marketer can do the tracking and analyze actions like delivery, unique email opens, and click-through rates. (Durga 2015) Additionally, a marketer can collect data related to purchases, content responses, and any other communication with the customer. This data can be used to create new campaigns with complementary products. (Turkanik & Johnson 2020) Analytics tells how the campaign succeeded in generating traffic. In addition to this, campaign management involves examining financial reports, i.e. what has been the return on investment for the campaign. (Todor 2016)

2.3 Motivation to introduce marketing automation

Sometimes the reasons for introducing marketing automation may be unclear to the company itself. Sometimes the reason for the introduction is that it has been heard that marketing automation is used by a competing or otherwise familiar company. Whatever the reason is, the motivators for the introduction of marketing automation should be considered analytically and the purchase should be counted and planned as a long-term asset for the company (Berghofer et. al 2018). The companies may have a massive amount of information about their customers, but they lack proper ideas to use it. The information consists of digital traces that customers leave in the online environment, and this information can later be utilized in targeted marketing. By analyzing these traces and drawing the right kind of conclusions, it is possible to influence customers' purchasing process by doing predictive analysis regarding these traces. (Berghofer et. al 2018) In addition to this, there are a lot of marketing-related decisions that companies may not agree to make for one reason or another or do not want to make. The reason for that may be, for example, the unknownness of the market and the resulting uncertainty in support of the decision. (Bucklin et al. 1998) However, data based on online activities, or purchase history plays an important role in marketing customizations. Good data contains a lot of information about the customer's preferences and buying behavior. Based on history and comparing customer data, the customer can also be offered something "they didn't know they needed before" (Berghofer et. al 2018; Heimbach et al. 2015).

The use of market automation helps the company to have better productivity and better decision-making and increases the profitability of marketing investments. In addition to this, the company's customers become more satisfied when the company has been able to produce targeted marketing and the clients become loyal to the company. (Heimbach et al. 2015) Improving marketing productivity means that company employees have to make several repetitive marketing decisions. The more data a company has in its database about its customers, the more it would take time to process the data manually. Marketing automation can free up employees' working time for other tasks and this is certainly one of the motivators for using marketing automation. (Taylor 2021) In this case, it is good to

understand that the time freed up for other tasks is the result of successful system acquisition and training to use the system.

The amount of existing data can be much larger than what could be processed. Then this can cause problems in handling the data and can be very devastating and time-consuming (Aquino 2013). However, In the middle of a large amount of data, human errors are often highlighted, often due to impatience, lack of time, and multi-tasking. No matter how carefully the existing data is managed, there is always the possibility of human error. Thus, automated data processing can be a solution to what kind of decisions can be made based on existing data. Here, however, one must remember the different iteration rounds when the automation is created and it can be compared to some extent, for example, when tuning a sports car to a certain track. So, after all, it's about finding a balance for automation (Bucklin et al. 1998).

The ability to target marketing activities more precisely and to smaller and smaller customer groups is one of the greatest capabilities of marketing automation. For example, imagine a small store with a very limited amount of shelf space. This again means that large quantities of products cannot be displayed in the store, but that existing products must serve a specific, narrow segment of buyers. The marketing automation platform may store thousands of products to offer to customers (Berghofer et. al 2018), but of course, it must be remembered that the products are also available for example on the website. Sometimes attempts are made to attract buyers by offering products tailored specifically to them, such as products suitable for people with food allergies. However, such a narrow group of buyers may have more similar places to make their purchases so customers may face a competition between companies. Therefore, with the help of detailed customer data and automation, it is possible to find a target audience suitable for a small store in the first place (Aquino 2013). Secondly, custom automation, which is the core of the whole process, can first and foremost provide them with something that will make them come to the store and remain loyal customers (Bucklin et al. 1998).

As mentioned, improving a company's productivity, better and clearer decision-making, and the ability to target marketing activities more accurately are things that support the idea that marketing automation can accomplish useful things. However, the most important thing that can be achieved with it (along with the other things mentioned above) is, of course, satisfied customers and their loyalty to the company. This in turn enables the customer's life cycle to be as long as possible and a partnership that benefits both the company and the customer. (Heimbach et al. 2015) Figure 4 below demonstrates the motivators to acquire a marketing automation system.

Figure 4 Motivators to acquire marketing automation.

2.4 Benefits of the marketing automation platform

Throughout history, efforts have been made to work more efficiently in order to be able to do more and free up time for as many tasks as possible. Marketing automation offers a great number of benefits to its user and one of its most important elements is that it can save time and direct work to things that cannot be automated yet. (Wood 2015) Of course, learning new things, such as learning software related to automation, takes time at first. However, at

some point, the learning curve becomes steeper and things start to improve until, after all, it is enough to make just small changes to the processes. One good example of saving time is working on a common platform that allows automation-related tasks to be done together with the team and the work is transparent. For this reason, among other things, team absences or job changes do not slow down the pace of work and so-called tacit information cannot be lost from the company when all this information is stored on the platform. (Riserbato 2021) In this case, too, it must be keep in mind that only a functioning system benefits its user. Making the system useful requires investments from the company and its employees that may interfere with other work.

Marketing and sales alignment - data management

Working on a common platform also enables us to connect several functions to it. Sharing information within an organization, also known as customer knowledge management, strives to make the information available within the organization (Gibbert, et al. 2002). As marketing automation is integrated into CRM, it provides a platform for disseminating information between the organization's marketing and sales departments (Krush et al. 2013). Sometimes it can be a little difficult to draw the line between marketing and sales and combining these on the same platform further narrows this gap. In addition to these, the platform can also perform customer service-related tasks, and in that case, we are already talking about a complete customer relationship management system that serves all areas equally. In this case, it is no longer just a matter of using marketing automation, but if the company wishes, it can gather information about the customer based on all the above-mentioned aspects (Todor 2016). In practice, this happens so that once the marketing has received a qualified lead, it is transferred within the organization, but still using the same system to the sales team. The sales team does its job and gets the goods or services sold to the customer, after which the customer's possible inquiries related to the product are handled by the customer service team (Riserbato 2021). Throughout this process, information remains in the same place, but the tasks associated with the process are shared between the teams and their employees.

Lead Scoring

With the help of marketing automation, scoring leads may be easier but if you wanted to do this as manual work, it may take an extremely long time, especially if a large number of leads have accumulated. The purpose of scoring leads is to score leads according to a pre-agreed scale. The higher the number the lead gets, they should be passed to the sales team, and the more likely it is that the lead will provide some benefit to the company, most often in the form of generated sales. (Nygård & Mezei 2020) This serves as an indication of how marketing automation narrows the gap between marketing and sales, brings collaboration closer together, and improves work efficiency and profitability (Riserbato 2021). If, on the other hand, the lead score is low, it can be sent back to the lead nurturing campaign. In scoring leads, one of the most important steps is to set variables based on what leads are scored. This information can be implicit or explicit data that is obtained from the customer in direct interaction with them, but in addition to this, it should be possible to collect information on leads based on their actions. (Nygård & Mezei 2020)

Improved conversion rate

Improving the conversion rate is one of the most advanced features of marketing automation. A conversion occurs when a customer clicks on a link or advertisement that accompanies a marketing message. Conversion can mean, for example, completing online purchases, subscribing to a newsletter, or receiving a phone call which can be counted as a conversion. In other words, it can be anything that is considered valuable to a company's business. (Nabi-Abdolyousefi 2015) It is possible to increase the conversion rate in several ways. The analysis tools used together with marketing automation enable the marketer to monitor the activities of leads and customers, for example with marketing emails sent to them. Analysis tools provide the ability to a so-called screen record that allows you to see where a user has moved their cursor or what ads they have clicked. In addition, the marketer has the opportunity to see if the user jumps over an offer or starts filling out the newsletter subscription form but decides to leave it out. Analysis tools benefit from a heat map that

allows you to see which part of a marketing letter is interesting to its reader, but also what part of the marketing letter should be developed to increase the conversion rate. (Riserbato 2021)

Personalized marketing strategy

Today, we are far from the days when the local clothing store offered only one type of jeans that all people wore. Instead, people's interest in things and buying behavior are spread over an ever-widening area, posing challenges for people working in marketing, which is why a personalized marketing strategy needs to be designed for customer groups or sometimes even an individual customer. Marketing automation allows marketers to target their marketing activities according to buyers' interests and buying behavior, which in some cases helps the marketer to achieve excellent business performance. Creating personalized marketing strategies requires the company to be proactive, as it requires a deep knowledge of the lead (potential prospective customer). This allows the company to gain a competitive advantage in the market by meeting their requirements, assessing their future aspirations, and creating value for the customer. (Brege & Kindström 2020)

In practice, doing marketing strategy requires knowledge of a potential purchasing customer. However, platforms that offer marketing automation are able to show for example if a potential prospective customer, i.e. a lead, has opened an email sent to him informing him of the upcoming movies. Under the guise of this information, it is reasonable to assume that a person may be interested in movies and can be targeted for movie-related email advertising in the future. The next step in managing a lead would be to find out at this stage, for example, what kind of movies the target person likes. (Riserbato 2021) However, according to Sweezey (2014), simply opening emails does not work as a very reliable way to do segmentation. Instead, if the email includes links and the available software allows you to see that the marketing target has opened those links, then they are a stronger indicator for the marketer. In other words, this is a factor that facilitates segmentation. With the help of these indicators, marketing can be carried out in such a way that the marketer can put

together people with common interests in the marketing list. This allows to send targeted marketing to these people on the list and these actions are likely to lead to better marketing results.

Reporting

Reporting is important in any job, but especially those working in marketing should be able to measure marketing inputs. Hulland et al. (2021) write that marketing automation systems are multidimensional control systems capable of measuring marketing performance. The system allows marketing to be chained into smaller parts which allows seeing which part of the marketing works and which does not. In addition to traditional reports, the system's dashboards provide a quick overview of marketing activities and results. The reporting needs of each company are individual, which are influenced by several different things such as the company's industry, its size, and products. Reporting can be done at the level of the entire organization for various marketing activities, but in addition, it is possible to perform it on a campaign-by-campaign basis when you want to see, for example, the return on investment of a campaign (Todor 2016). However, there are recurring needs in marketing automation reporting. These include tracking the number of leads at a very basic level. A more in-depth analysis can be produced on, among other things, lead scoring, leads and opportunities at different stages of the sales process, sales revenue at the company level, and per vendor. (Riserbato 2021)

Measuring customer satisfaction with the Net Promoter Score is one of the most important things to predict the duration of a customer relationship (Hulland et al. 2021). This may not be a direct marketing action but an important signal to customers that the company is interested in how satisfied its customers are. Generally, reporting provides an excellent opportunity to witness the success or failure of a company. In addition to this, reporting also gives the company an indication of what functions can be improved. (Riserbato 2021)

Costs and income

Marketing is often perceived as expensive, but the successful implementation of marketing automation can have a direct impact on a company's financial performance. Firstly it is possible to reduce marketing costs by doing marketing on a simple platform, but with this, the company can have a higher return on marketing investments. (Trainor et al. 2011) Combining marketing, sales, and customer service on the same platform allows you to reduce costs per hour worked. In other words, working becomes more efficient and the employer gets more value for the investment, such as the paid wages. (Krush et al. 2013)

2.5   Pitfalls of marketing automation

Science is not an absolute truth, but science and facts have been able to prove that marketing automation has numerous benefits for a company that improves its business. However, it is not always the solution to all of a company's problems, but it can have the opposite effect. Many problems can have their roots deep before the actual product is introduced. The introduction of marketing automation has certainly been considered within the company, but the problem is that resources have to be transferred from employees' working hours to implement the software. Murphy (2018) writes that before marketing automation is to be introduced, the company should evaluate how its current marketing processes have been managed. Modernizing marketing is likely to require the company to make changes to the internal processes in the department responsible for marketing. After this, one can start thinking about what the introduction of marketing automation requires from the company strategically, technologically, and from the personnel. (Chou et al. 2002) A company acquiring marketing automation should become familiar with the needs of the company because it is possible that once the acquisition decision has been made, the firm will acquire something that it will never need. So it is highly recommended to think about needs in advance and make the purchase in several stages if possible. (Burnes 2013) Implementation scheduled for several stages provides an opportunity to examine whether there is a need for additional functions and thus cancel further development. In addition, the company avoids

paying for things it does not need and the system remains as simple as possible. A complex system could affect the motivation of employees to use the system.

2.5.1 Before the implementation

A lack of senior management participation and assistance negatively affects software projects. Brinker et al. (2018) write that marketing management cannot be overemphasized even when new tools are being introduced to the company. By understanding the changes in business processes required by the new system, a competitive advantage over other similar players can be achieved. This means for example that the company's management is ultimately responsible for ensuring that sufficient time and skills are allocated to the implementation of marketing automation. Rather than too few employees, sufficient resources should be set aside for the implementation of marketing automation, not least because there may always be delays in the project for reasons beyond the company's control. Whittaker (1999) continues that under-sizing of resourcesof implementation phase is seen as a common reason why software deployment fails or at least takes too much time from the employee's normal daily work.

The system implementation process requires a realistic project plan, which is led by dedicated and determined senior management. Project planning includes a business case that is made before the project and, which can be used to ensure that there is a necessary foundation for starting the project. The purpose of the business case is to evaluate the costs, benefits, and risks of a future project. A weak business case that fails to demonstrate the benefits of an ongoing project or alternative solutions may indicate that the software does not deliver the results the company wants. (Murphy 2018) Foss et al. (2008) write that a weak deployment plan, a lack of understanding of business needs, and unclear goals hinder the deployment of marketing automation. The introduction of marketing automation often involves people from the supplier's side whose professional skills should be used at the planning stage. This requires that the needs and objectives are clear to the system supplier and they can assist in product deployment or use scenarios that the project client has not come up with. This requires that the supplier has enough time to focus on the customer's

project and the customer must again be willing to invest in the supplier's expertise. (Whittaker 1999) If the customer is only a small source of money for the system supplier among other similar customers, then it is assumed that the result of the project does not correspond to what the customer initially hoped to receive from the project. This is something that one should pay attention to when choosing a project supplier.

2.5.2 After the implementation

Once the deployment project is completed, end-user training is particularly important. It is a good idea to use system suppliers for training who already have knowledge of the system and are aware of possible customizations to what has been done to the marketing automation system. Erffmeyer & Johnson (2001); Foss et al. (2008) writes that one of the most common reasons for failure to introduce new systems is the lack of training. Poorly organized training, rush, or some other reason that prevents end-users from accessing the system in peace can, at worst, decreases employees' motivation to use the system and result in the newly acquired system not being used at all, but the acquiring organization sticking to its old ways and unlikely to ever make a difference in marketing results.

When the system is up and running and employees are trained to use it, the next step is to gather leads and customers into the system and produce content that interests them. Content marketing has become more common with the internet revolution and many social media channels offer countless options to reach customers through them. Järvinen & Taiminen (2016) writes that even 86% of marketing professionals use content marketing as a part of their marketing strategy in B2B marketing. It is easy to assume that the figure in B2C marketing is even higher. Content that is interesting to the customer base generates high-quality leads for the company and converts them into won opportunities. Murphy (2018) lists digital webinars marketed through marketing automation as attractive content, in addition to normal online content. The issue can be looked at the other way around. When the content is not relevant that leads can be attracted in such a way as to achieve financial gain, then the result is unnecessary marketing that causes leads to leave mailing lists, for example. In addition to content, timely marketing is something that affects people's response

to marketing activities. Attractive content at the right time affects the quality of leads (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016) and in addition to these, the marketer should invest in the personalization of email content over the content with a similar general appearance (Sahni et. al 2018). However, Heddleston & Cespedes (2018) write that there is no right day to send content, but the visits to the website are equally distributed between each day during the workweek. It is good to note that, for example, marketing material you send at night will probably not reach its target audience, but will easily be buried among other similar emails.

Good content gathers information about customer preferences. Various questions (e.g. "Would you like to see more information about this product?") allow customers to express their wishes and thus the company has received valuable first-hand information to produce the right kind of content. (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016) If, on the other hand, the content of the marketing is not interactive with the customer, then it may end up merely promoting the product or service without a clear picture of whether the potential customer is interested in it. Thus, a company may have difficulty collecting data from potential customers to use marketing automation analytics to deliver content that pleases the customers. (Murphy 2018)

One of the more common ways to get disappointed with marketing automation is to set expectations too high for the immediate benefits it brings. The user must remember that rarely with any new system the benefits are immediately visible, especially when talking about a direct monetary benefit. It is understandable that if a company has spent a lot of money and time implementing a new system and training staff, then it is hoped that the system will also give the company something in return. The above-mentioned things i.e. data collection, data analysis, and content creation based on the collected data, are time-consuming work. (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016) Continuity is a core issue in the use of marketing automation and only by enriching existing data is it possible to find first-class leads for a company and thereby develop the company's business.

The introduction of marketing automation is not a sprint, but rather a marathon that will continue to be developed throughout its life. Opportunities for better marketing increase with

the use of the product as the company is able to collect more data into the system from potential prospects, but the system also needs to be developed over time. This ensures that the company has the latest technology in use. Many companies that offer marketing automation solutions bring updates to their products up to several times a year (Microsoft 2021) and a marketing company needs to adopt new technologies as new releases are made. However, this requires resources from the company both in terms of staff time, and possibly financial resources in terms of training and customization. Developing the system can be seen in the company as more of a challenge than an opportunity, and if no investment is made in continuous development, the system may become worthless to the company over time. (Jena & Panda 2017)

As a final pitfall, company employees may change their behavior after the introduction of marketing automation, which has an impact on what kind of information the system is able to create. This can be seen so that the system's performance is more important than being able to truly track the effects of marketing. As a result, the customer is not the most important, but the user of the system only focuses on the fact that the statistics appear to be positive, which may not be in line with the marketing performance. (Hulland et al. 2021)

Each deployment of market automation is unique and users often have individual needs. In any case, there is always the possibility that marketing automation will not bring the desired result and mistakes can be made both during and after implementation. For the sake of repetition, table 1 lists the pitfalls mentioned in this chapter before and after the introduction of marketing automation, which may have a negative impact on the company.

Table 1 Marketing automation pitfalls before and after implementation

Marketing automation pitfalls	
Before the implementation	After the implementation
◦ No evaluation of existing processes	◦ No end-user training
◦ Lack of planning	◦ Content is not relevant
◦ Acquiring all functions at once	◦ No personalized messages
◦ Lack of management participation	◦ Send messages at a wrong time
◦ Wrong supplier	◦ No attention to customer preferences
◦ No business case	◦ Rush
◦ Not enough resources	◦ Too high expectations

3 Research design and methods

This chapter describes the research method, research context, data collection, and data analysis methods of this thesis. The first paragraph describes the qualitative research that has been used as the research method of this thesis. The following paragraphs review the context and the methods used to collect and analyze the research data. A qualitative research method has been used in this study because there is still quite limited information on the effects of marketing automation on companies. Sure, the topic has been increasingly discussed, thanks to technology, but the actual research data has not yet reached the point where the results of the research would begin to replicate each other.

3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research methods are used as the research method in this study. Qualitative research is based on making observations and interacting with people. In that case, data can be collected through interviews either between two people, in focus groups, or by telephone calls or e-mails, for example. Due to the data collection methods, qualitative research is usually transcripted into text format. It is very common for a research design to vary when research is made by using qualitative research methods. A good researcher is also able to look at things from the perspective of the person being researched. Research is effective when the researcher can repeat the research, collect data and analyze it until new data is saturated and new research data is no longer generated. (Khan 2014)

A qualitative research method is useful especially when there is not yet much information on the research topic. In addition, with qualitative methods, it is possible to study the phenomena which have been already studied, but the existing research results are not yet repetitive and it has been recognized that there are still unresolved issues in the research topic under investigation. (Jamshed 2014) The reason for this is that qualitative research methods, such as interviews, do not exclude any research spending directions. In other words, during the investigation, issues may arise that have not been known to affect the

matter under investigation in the past. (Adler et al 2017) New issues related to the research may arise especially when the persons participating in the research are allowed to share their own experiences on the subject of the research. With this, the research continues all the time which means that the researcher can always have new things to research. Thus, it differs significantly from the quantitative research method, which, based on the data, provides more detailed information about what has happened. Compared to the previous one, the qualitative research method aims to understand people's experiences and find insights from the experiences. (Denny & Weckesser 2019)

3.2   Research context

The purpose of this study is to gather information on the impact of marketing automation on a company's business. That is, for example, does marketing automation have an impact on a company's financial results, or how has the marketing automation platform affected the company's operations from a knowledge management perspective. In addition, this study seeks to explore how marketing automation has impacted customer relationship management. The persons and companies to be interviewed in this study are mainly located in Finland, except for one company and an employee of the company located in Estonia and whose business is focused on the Estonian market. Although the geographical location of Finland and Estonia is very close to each other, these countries differ in their culture quite differently. It would be important for the outcome of the study if the impact of cultural differences on the results of marketing automation could be studied in more detail, but this is the kind of thing that will be excluded from this study.

The participants in this study either work in companies where marketing automation is used or they work as external experts and have been, for example, helping companies to implement marketing automation. Individuals who work in companies where marketing automation is used provide first-hand information on how the software they have used has supported their business. People outside companies, such as people working as consultants, are able to share their knowledge about the effects of marketing automation more generally because they have accumulated experience in several projects with different companies.

Thus, they have gained knowledge through these projects which are sought to be utilized in this study. Very often, companies in the private sector operate based on growth or profit. Indeed, the interviewees offer the opportunity to look at the impact of marketing automation on business through multiple cases.

3.3 Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews have been used in this study. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewee to talk about the phenomenon through their own experiences. However, the interview has a predetermined structure along which the interview progresses, but the research style also allows new questions to be added between the structures. (Barriball & While 1994) A semi-structured interview requires that the interviewees have sufficient knowledge of the topic of the interview, but the interviewer's knowledge of the topic is not yet at a sufficient level. The interviewees can answer the questions in the way they feel best, and the interviewer can examine the issues raised in the answers. The questions are asked in the same order to all the interviewees, which means that the data is comparable between the interviewees. To some extent, this also allows the data to be converted to a numerical format if desired (McIntosh & Morse 2015), which, however, will not be done in this study.

When selecting the interviewees for this study, it was important to get different perspectives on the effects of marketing automation because the issue has not been extensively studied in the past. Studies related to marketing automation have been done in the past, but not whether it benefits the company's business and may it have some disadvantages. Five different people were chosen to be interviewed, who either work in a company that uses market automation or they work as experts with software that provides market automation. The table below provides more information about the interviewees, their role in marketing automation, the software they work on, the size class of the company, the type of customer of the company, and the length of the interview. For reasons of data protection of individuals and companies, the data of the persons participating in the study will not be published in this study. Table 2 includes the individuals interviewed for this study

Table 2 Interviewees in this study

Interviewees					
Interviewee	Role in MA	MA Platform	Company Type	Target customers	Length (minutes)
Person 1	Director of Sales Engineering	HubSpot	SME	B2B	35
Person 2	Marketing Manager	HubSpot	SME	B2B	45
Person 3	Marketing Consultant	HubSpot	Consulting	B2B	60
Person 4	Sales & Marketing Development Manager	Dynamics 365	SME	B2B	60
Person 5	Marketing Manager	HubSpot	SME	B2B	45
Person 6	Digital Marketing Specialist	Salesforce	SME	B2B	60

3.4   Data analysis methods

The content analysis in the research can be used when the researcher wants to categorize the research results, form concepts, or want to describe the phenomenon under study. Content analysis can be used when research is conducted, for example, through interviews, observation, or a combination of several qualitative data collection methods. When conducting qualitative research, it is possible to use two approaches to do content analysis. These styles are deductive analysis and inductive analysis. (Saunders et al. 2009) In deductive analysis, the existing theory is first introduced, after which some kinds of assumptions can be made about the topic under study. This is followed by the research itself, which can be done through interviews, observations, or some other method of qualitative research. Based on the data obtained with the research method, the existing theory can be confirmed and a new discoveries made (Bazeley 2013).

Inductive analysis, on the other hand, means that when research is initiated, the researcher has a research question that is sought to be answered by an interview or observation or some

other method of qualitative research. After that, based on the collected data, the researcher creates hypotheses, ie assumptions about the research topic. In the last step, the researcher becomes acquainted with an existing theory and can make a comparison between the hypothesis the researcher made earlier and the existing theory. However, inductive data analysis is not recommended for researchers who do not yet have significant experience in researching because it may be perceived as a difficult way to conduct research. (Saunders et al. 2009) Figure 5 below shows in practice the differences between the two methods of analysis.
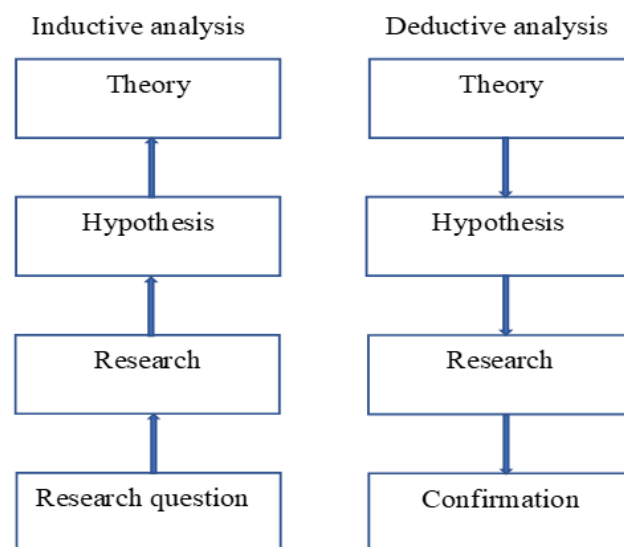
Figure 5 Inductive and deductive analysis compared

This study will use more deductive data analysis. The study first introduces an existing theory through which it has been possible to make some assumptions about the topic under study. This is followed by the study itself, which is conducted through semi-structured interviews. The interviews can be used to confirm and correct existing data on the subject under investigation, and in addition, the interviews have made it possible to find new information (McIntosh & Morse 2015). The semi-structured interviews conducted in the study have been conducted as online interviews and the interviews have been recorded so that they can be listened to afterward in the hope of better research results. After the interviews, these are transcribed into text format to make it easier to structure the issues

raised in the interviews. The aim is to find recurring elements in the interview materials, which in turn allow for the validation of research results.

4 Findings and empirical study

This section presents the results of the study. Semi-structured interviews have been used as a research method, so first it is natural to get to know the interviewees, and their history in the use of marketing automation and to review the companies they represent. It is therefore a natural transition to go through the experiences of the interviewees in the use of marketing automation. This includes the pros and cons of the product. It is important to find the answer to how companies benefit from the use of marketing automation so lastly, we go through the findings of the study.

4.1 Background of the interviewees

The experience of the participants in the study in the use of marketing automation is varied. In part, this is explained by the fact that some of the interviewees are end-users of the product, while others are consultants in market automation. this means that some users see and experience the use and benefits of marketing automation in a slightly different way than others. In summary, consultants working on the supplier side may know more about the system itself and the opportunities it brings than end-users. On the other hand, end-users know their customers and believe they know what kind of marketing works for their customers. All individuals who participated in the interview are experienced individuals to work with marking automation. Respondents' experience ranged from 2.5 years to more than 7 years of user experience. In this study, it is important to note that the interviewees work in B2B companies. The initial interview time was given to the interviewees for 30-60 minutes but if it started to feel like the interviewee wanted to talk more about marketing automation then it was a good way for the interviewer to get more insider information about the product and the interview time was expanded.

The most common marketing automation tools that interviewees have used has been HubSpot. This US cloud-based CRM software relies on being able to connect the company's sales and marketing teams. It is said to be especially good for companies that are introducing

marketing automation first time and if the company is rather small, among other things because it is free if the user only wants to perform basic marketing functions. (Mackenzie 2019). Other marketing automation systems used or previously used by interviewees include Microsoft Dynamics 365, Salesforce, Mailchimp, and Active Campaign.

The job roles of the interviewees are varied. Two people work as marketing managers for their company. One interviewee is a sales & marketing development manager, one is a director of sales engineering, one is a digital marketing specialist and two interviewees work as marketing consultants. It is therefore clear that the two people who work as consultants represent the consulting companies, while the companies of the other interviewees are in business-to-business (B2B) companies, including technology companies that provide software services to companies working for example in healthcare and infrastructure businesses. The interviewees work in marketing automation in the Finnish market, except for one person who works for a US company in Estonia. Therefore, their marketing activities are limited to Estonia.

Another important piece of information that came up about the interviewees is that they all have work experience in different areas, i.e. they have not always been involved in marketing. All individuals who participated in the interviews have a college degree at either the Bachelor's or Master's level. Of course, it must be taken into account that the degrees have been in line with their different work backgrounds, i.e. the interviewees include both engineers and people with a business degree. Only one interviewee studied marketing as a major at university at the same time while working.

In general, we can say that the people who participated in the interview have a very interesting background in marketing and sales. It could be said that some people see marketing automation through the results it produces, while others may be more enthusiastic about the technical capabilities it allows. In addition, it is excellent that both the end-users of the system and the persons consulting on behalf of the system were able to participate in the study.

4.2   Definition of marketing automation

The interviewees were able to define marketing automation very extensively but also through their own user experience. The overall purpose of the marketing automation system was that it meets the most common basic marketing needs. Two respondents highlighted how a marketing automation program facilitates lead collection in their business but at the same time facilitates lead nurturing. Similarly, the description of marketing automation includes the fact that when a lead is in the nurturing phase, it can be placed in the right place in the sales funnel, so the person working with the lead or prospect knows in which phase the lead is at the moment and aims to get lead warm that it can be converted into a sales.

Some of the interviewees wanted to point out the fact that the word marketing automation is a bit misleading. They argued that in order for automating the marketing, it requires a lot of pre-work for the automation of the marketing itself to benefit the company or individual operator. In addition to this, some interviewees argued that marketing automation requires maintenance almost all the time, for example in the form of building marketing paths. So that's why they saw from their own experience that the name can be a little misleading. However, Riserbato (2021) writes that marketing automation makes the entire organization more efficient by freeing up staff time from sending emails to other important tasks, but according to the interviewees, this happens only after successful implementation. In this case, the employer gets more value for the wages paid. The interviewees also thought the other way around. For example, if e-mail marketing were made without marketing automation tools, it would take significantly more time to produce targeted marketing to customers. The interviewees remind that marketing texts should also be written by an employee when using marketing automation. A good example is the comment of one interviewee. "marketing automation is not able to do marketing independently and does not know what is the right way to address a certain target group and say, for example, thank you for registering"

The other interviewee thinks it is important to be able to distinguish between email sending and marketing automation even if they go hand in hand. In his opinion, marketing

automation is the process by which en product is an e-mail which is sent to a customer. The process involves getting the customer to know so that they can be fed content that interests the customer, so to speak, to get the customer hooked. Sahni et al. al (2018) talk about the detailed reactions of consumers that can be exploited in email advertising. One interviewee's comment about marketing automation is that it is an intelligent way to distribute content to customers and prospects in a way to they feel personal and they feel to be selected, while some of the interviewees say that marketing automation can create a sense of interaction with the customer. In other words, when a customer does something that generates an activity, an email or text message is sent to the customer.

> *"Marketing automation is not able to do marketing independently and does not know what is the right way to address a certain target group and say, for example, thank you for registering." Person 4*

One of the most interesting answers when it comes to the definition of marketing automation is that it can level the playing field for sales and marketing teams. Bridging the gap between marketing and sales has been talked about before, as Redding (2015) writes that marketing automation works like a glue that connects sales and marketing. In addition to this, interviewees say that organizations have not previously been able to measure marketing results in the same way as sales results, and according to a couple of comments in the interviews, marketing and using marketing automation is hard sales work in itself. In general, with the help of the platform on which marketing automation is done, it acts as a unifying factor for the sales and marketing department. However, with the help of marketing automation, it is possible to renew sales processes, i.e. marketing has become more of a sales job. As a concrete example, the interviewee said that doing marketing is no longer just about standing in trade shows or shopping malls.

A marketer who nurtures a lead is already unobtrusively doing very valuable sales work before the lead is even handed over to the sales team. However, a digital lead can be seen by sales sometimes cold if they know nothing about the process of getting to know the lead that

is technically marketing through automation. On the other hand, the interviewee points out that platforms usually offer good opportunities to track the lead's journey from marketing to sales.

> *"The use of marketing automation makes it possible to measure the results of marketing better than before." Person 6*

There is a lot of talk about equality in the 2020s and one person strongly believes that the proliferation of marketing automation has brought more men to work in the marketing industry. According to the interviewee, marketing automation offers an opportunity for technical persons to work on marketing. By this, the interviewee meant that marketing could be handled more through statistics by modifying, for example, marketing paths on a marketing platform. In other words, one can make such marketing which impact can be measured.

> *"The platform of marketing automation serves as the basis for the data and this enhances the efficiency of the business and sales." Person 3*

The integration of marketing automation into the company's CRM system, which is one of the fastest-growing forms of business since the early 2000s (Foss et al. 2008) was highly praised in the interviews. This is one thing that makes it easier for a company to store data in one place and this helps to create more complex reports as well.

The result of this section is that before the system can be called automation, it requires more or less upfront work. Every system provider can likely offer so-called out-of-the-box solutions so that you can start using the system after installation. But when it comes to marketing, the time-consuming things are at least creating marketing materials in the system and making marketing paths. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings is that the system

further narrows the gap between marketing and sales and, for example, by nurturing a lead, it can be said to be the hard sales work that marketing does.

4.3   Marketing automation functionalities

Marketing automation includes many different functionalities. Perhaps the most important of these is email marketing, but in addition to this, the marketing automation platform can include lead management, analytics and reporting, lead segmentation, and campaign management.

Email marketing

All interviewees have used email marketing which is seen as part of the core of marketing automation, but a few interviewees underlined that ideally, it should be complementing the company's other marketing. According to Hartemo (2016), email marketing is brilliantly ahead of huge social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter when it comes to acquiring new customers. She claims that the power of email marketing is up to 40 times that compared to these platforms combined which, however, is likely to depend on the marketer's industry. The sending of e-mail has been used especially timed, so you don't have to do things yourself at the time of sending the e-mail, but the necessary things have been done as planned. One interviewer saw this as a particularly good step forward before they had marketing automation in place, as it could have been scheduled to send emails for Valentine's Day or some other time, for example.

Emails are important in that in the past their company had used so-called marketing annual clocks, which has required that something was sent to the customer every month or clients were taken to joint events, which has been seen as a very time-consuming thing. If this thing has been forgotten, then it has resulted in negative feedback from the customer. However, the interviewee thinks that the most important thing is just keeping in mind the customer,

and the interviewee thinks scheduled emails do the same thing as sending something to the customer, such as a chocolate bar previously. The interviewee continues that even if the email quality is bad it can still act as the first touching point with the client to open a conversation. In any case, even a bad message must be able to stand out from the mass in order to get the customer to open the email.

> *"Marketing automation should complement the company's other marketing."*
> *Person 2, 4, 6*

> *"Scheduled emails sent to customers work the same as previously sent gifts to*
> *customers. The company stays in the customer's mind." Person 4*

Although the sending of e-mails can be done automatically or in a timed manner, one interviewee thinks that many points of contact with the customer are required, especially on the B2B side. He clarified that sometimes many emails need to be sent to a customer or lead before any data can be extracted from them. This may be because, with the spread of email marketing, the sending of spam has also become more common. (Hartemo 2016) However, the interviewee admits that personalizing e-mails must be successful in order to get the recipient interested in advertising. In other words, they may not have been able to get the customer's attention because they have had a hard time getting the recipient to click on the first message. The interviewee continues that very often, after active communication, the leads remain in the system in the so-called lead cemetery and those leads can no longer be further processed.

One respondent's opinion was that the added value of marketing automation for newsletters is small because newsletters have been in use for a long time before automated marketing. To this, the respondent wanted to add that if automated email marketing is used, then the sales path must have been determined in advance together with the marketing and sales team so that the customer can be directed in the right direction. The respondent continued that it is easy to build paths for leads if there is a small amount of them, but with a bigger amount

of leads, it can be quite difficult to know which leads to concentrate on. However, modern technology makes it possible to send segmented messages even to large masses (Peter et al. 2018), but it requires great knowledge about your customers' segmentation and also system expertise. The consultant's view on this issue is that making a workable path requires that the client (lead or customer) is known and that the path must be modified when more information about clients and leads is obtained. Regarding a large number of leads, the consultant's opinion was that lead scoring helps the end-user of the system to evaluate which leads they should focus on.

"The sales path should be thought of in collaboration with marketing and sales so that the customer can be directed in the right direction." Person 6

Lead management and segmentation

Lead management, which includes lead scoring is seen as very useful when a marketer has had to make prioritization. In doing so, they have focused on leads that have received higher scores on a scale made by the company. This means that the company may have had to exclude worthless leads from marketing or may have focused on them later if there is time left. The interviewees have pointed out that the gap between sales and marketing has narrowed and so-called customer knowledge management has improved as marketing automation has been introduced from the beginning. Regarding lead management, this has led to the observation that it is really quick and easy for the sales team to return a lead to marketing for further nurturing if it is experienced that the lead is not yet ready to make a purchase decision.

One marketer raised an issue related to lead management. If marketing automation and the company's CRM systems are two different systems and integration is built between them, then depending on the functionality of the integration in lead management, problems can be identified. For example, systems make updates in the background so that the two systems are not up to date with each other and this may cause problems to use those systems.

Previously in this study, it is written that a customer's activities, such as when they click on a link or advertisement in an email or on a website, result in the sending of an email, which means that marketers can build paths to target their marketing. (Singh et al. 2014) This functionality has been used by the interviewees but some of the interviewees felt that it depends a lot on how these paths and targeted advertising can be provided. As an example, it was mentioned that a company operating in a very narrow market makes it difficult for its customers to be able to offer alternative products or services. Usually, customers already have clear information about what they need at that very moment.

One interviewee saw the good side of using marketing automation to get a customer off the marketing path if they are seeing that the customership is coming to an end. In general, the interviewees have built purchasing paths for their customers and it was seen as a very useful thing to be able to keep track of the stage they are on along the path. However, the interviewed consultant said that it takes time to build and understand these paths, meaning that not only is it enough to build a path but at the same time there must be an understanding of customers and the marketer must collect information about clients as possible while they are on that path. This information helps to customize the path so that the customer can then be guided in the direction of the purchase decision.

> *"A company that operates in a narrow market may have difficulty offering customers alternative products or services." Person 6*

The general perception among the interviewees is that the customer appreciates the fact that personalized messages are sent to them, and that marketer is able to target marketing. However, one of the interviewees said that with the system they have in place, the chances of personalizing the messages are poor. The consultant's opinion on this, on the other hand, was that marketing automation can be facilitated by customizing the platform, for example, adding new fields to the platform with the default values. Thus, with the values ready in the system, customers can be segmented and through them, suitable paths for the customer can be built.

Analytics and reporting

Interviewees who act as marketers believe that marketing automation systems provide at least satisfactory opportunities to track marketing and sales analytics and reports. At best, marketing automation systems are multidimensional systems that can be used to measure marketing performance at a general level or more narrowly, for example at a campaign level. (Hulland 2021; Todor 2016) However, one person said that at least in their company, no one doesn't know how to use reporting opportunities. Second, the interviewee found that the data in their company is always a bit old, which in the opinion of the consultant shows that they do not understand all the possibilities offered by the system. The consultant said that the system was probably incorrectly customized and argued that the system should be automatically updated at all times.

However, large companies like Microsoft offer two major upgrades a year to their systems, in addition to smaller upgrades. (Microsoft 2022) This means that users are constantly being offered new tools to work with. One interviewee raised the idea that the marketing automation for which reporting is done should always be handled by a dedicated team. He stressed that this may not be necessary for small companies, but it could also be useful for their company, even if the company is included in the SME category.

About analytics and reporting, an issue arose that purchasing customers can be used as references to leads. According to the interviewee, this is a very effective way to get more sales if it can be shown to the lead that, for example, a customer in the same industry has bought products or services from a company that does the marketing.

Campaign management.

Campaign management itself received less attention in the discussions, but some of the interviewees talked about it that it is an entity consisting of previously performed

functionalities. These are email sending, lead management, segmentation, and reporting. A general observation is that the systems used by the interviewees can create campaigns for certain customer groups, for example. The success of the campaign can be monitored by opening a campaign in the system, which shows the leads included in the campaign and data on how much traffic the campaign has generated, for example, to the website of the company that does marketing. The finding was that the campaigns could be used to create new campaigns for a new group of customers to whom alternative or complementary products and services could be advertised.

The system offers several functionalities, some of which are seen as more important than others. For others, marketing automation is equivalent to sending targeted email advertising to the masses more simply than before, but on the other hand, it is also seen as valuable in how leads and customers can be managed through the system. In addition, the ability to report and perform various analyzes was seen as something that helps a company focus on those customers that bring value to both the marketer and the customers.

4.4   Motivation to introduce marketing automation

People who participated in the interviews see the growth of companies as an important part of why companies adopt marketing automation. As the company grows, the number of customers increases, so more emails are sent, and by automating these processes, employees can focus on other tasks. Whatever motivates a company to acquire marketing automation, it should be seen as a long-term asset. (Berghofer et. al 2018) Two interviewees, which act as end-user, have been involved in the design and deployment phase of marketing automation, but they agreed that the company's growth and conspicuousness have certainly acted as a motivator to adopt the system. The growth has been reflected in, among other things, the increase in traffic on the company's website and the fact that active communication with customers has begun to take more and more time. Therefore, this has served as a basis for the decision to introduce the system. The consultant agreed but wanted to make it clear that sometimes it is a mystery why the customer wanted to implement

marketing automation. In other words, the customer has not made it clear enough to themselves why they need that product.

"The growth of the company and the growing number of customers is one of the main reasons for acquiring marketing automation." Person 4

The word scalability came up in the interviews, meaning that when the number of leads increases, without marketing automation, messages should be written manually, and sales and marketing paths could not be used. One person said that it has become very necessary for them to be able to segment large amounts of leads and thereby send targeted marketing material. He saw this as a very motivating thing to introduce marketing automation. They have also felt that leads should be able to track better what the program has allowed.

Rising marketing costs can act as a motivator for system adoption. One person said that compared to, Facebook advertising, email marketing is free. Of course, the implementation of the system will always cost and after the implementation, the costs will arise from further development and license fees. But the fact that it is possible to carry out marketing through a single system, which combines collecting leads, nurturing, and processing them, acts as a motivator for the interviewee to adopt the system.

One interviewee talked about how in the past, he felt that the results of marketing had not been measured correctly. In his view, this would act as a motivator for the introduction of the program, as marketing automation programs usually offer the opportunity to do so. They wanted to promote the transparency of marketing and sales operations in the company and for example, existing customers and contacts wanted to be used for sales and marketing teams. According to the interviewee, marketing automation can be described as a kind of megatrend that companies want to adopt, even if they have not become familiar with it in a necessary way. This is supported by Turkanik & Johnson (2020) that marketing automation systems are a multi-billion business nowadays and one of the best ways to handle marketing. The opinion of the interviewee is that the salespeople on the supplier side sell the marketing

automation skillfully and effectively as if it is a religion, which contributes to the popularity of the system.

> *"Marketing automation can be described as a kind of megatrend that companies want to adopt, even if they have not become familiar with it in a necessary way." Person 1*

As a summary of the motivators, it can be said that to some extent marketing automation can be described as a megatrend, but its real nature of it may not be understood yet. It can still be a reason to get a system when others have it. More rational reasons are potentially lower marketing costs as the company's customer base grows and it attempts to find easier ways to manage a growing customer base and gather new leads. Of course, perhaps the most amusing thing that came up in the interviews is that sometimes feels like the company itself may not know why they are getting the system. Perhaps then the reason is indeed a general hype around the system and as a result, the system is expected to improve the performance of the company somehow.

4.5   The benefits for business

The interviews showed several benefits of marketing automation for the company, but all those interviewed said that in order to achieve the benefits of the product, its design, implementation, and usage require time and money-consuming investments.

Marketing and sales cooperation

All interviewees said that the cooperation between the marketing and sales team has improved when they have introduced marketing automation or have become part of a company that uses the software. Marketing and sales are currently very close to each other

and the line between the two teams is subtle. (Todor 2016) Without a marketing automation platform, it would be difficult to transfer data from marketing to the sales team. Several interviewees agree that cooperation has been improved by the fact that marketing and sales use the same information through a common platform, so the so-called tacit information plays a smaller role. The platform has also made it possible to ensure that information is not lost with the person leaving the company if there are possible personnel changes. However, this requires that staff have been committed to using the software. The information can be, for example, the sales team can see through what kind of process the lead has come to them, what kind of advertising the lead has been interested in, what emails, and how many phone calls have been made to the lead, and lead scoring help sales team to see how warm the lead is. One of the interviewees thinks that transferring leads from marketing to sales would be much more difficult without a proper platform. If calls have been made, the system can show the contents of each call. In addition to this, it is possible to record some very small details about the lead, for example in connection with hobbies that can later be used to maintain customer relationships. For example, if a customer called John Doe likes to play golf, a salesman can make an appointment and go play golf with a lead-born customer. However, gathering data requires work to heat the lead.

> *"Transferring leads from marketing to sales would be much more difficult without a proper platform."* Person 5

Marketing and sales pipeline

Based on the interviews, more leads are generated through marketing automation. That does not necessarily mean that all the leads are good quality, but a large mass allows the creation of a larger number of potential leads with the right kind of content. Nurturing leads on the platform is seen as a clear advantage of using the system. One interviewee said that nurturing leads can take a long time and the length of a sales pipeline is 6-12 months. The long sales pipeline from lead generation means that email automation chains sometimes have to be modified to increase sales. There are a lot of failed attempts in generating leads, but as the

quality of the messages can be made more personal to the recipient, the chances of turning leads into a profitable business increase.

The effects of marketing automation on a company's business results can be seen over time, but according to one interviewee, the results are not immediately visible. Chen & Popovich (2003) writes that software can be used to achieve long-lasting and productive customer relationships. Another interviewee continues that there may be industry-specific differences, but the industries in which the interviewee has worked have been such that the direct impact on the company's result may not have been visible. However, he points out that once marketing automation has become more effective, it has freed up employees' time for other tasks, so that employees' work can be made more efficient. The biggest benefit he has experienced is that the customer has received targeted marketing that is interesting to the customer, the interaction with the customer has improved and perhaps they have had more satisfied customers as a result. With the system, instead of the word sales funnel, one interviewee thinks that it would be worth it to start calling as the interaction funnel. In addition to the interaction, the company's value propositions are presented to customers with the help of marketing automation. The interviewee believes still that in the best scenario, well-optimized marketing automation can potentially be a sales machine that has a direct impact on a company's earnings.

> *"The company's value propositions are made visible to customers through marketing automation." Person 6*

> *"Customer interaction has improved significantly and this affects customer satisfaction." Person 2*

> *Marketing automation system can potentially be a sales machine that has a direct impact on a company's earnings." Person 4*

Reporting

Reporting with marketing automation tools can be simple, but interviewees still think it's better than without the capabilities the platform offers. However, the consultant interviewed wanted to point out that even the reports can be created in more depth and in more detail, which is the thing that end-users may not be aware of. One interviewee wondered that even today, some companies maintain reporting with, for example, in excels stored in the company's systems. The biggest thing about reporting is that the reports are directly visible in the same place as the information about the company's customers.

Reporting also provides an opportunity to measure the success of an individual marketing campaign, so messages sent through the platform aren't just messages sent to individual customers. Measuring the results of marketing campaigns is found to be very useful in terms of profits. Todor (2016) suggests that when the results of marketing campaigns are measurable, they could be compared to the investments made. So the question is, does the time spent on a marketing campaign increase its productivity? The interviewee cites as an example of this that if newspaper advertising has been done in the past, then the effects of marketing have been very difficult to measure. At most, it has been possible to know how many people read the newspaper daily, but no concrete results have been available. By measuring the success of campaigns, it is possible to create new campaigns if the reports have shown that customers are interested in, for example, alternative or complementary products and services. Table 3 indicates the benefits of marketing automation for the business.

Table 3 Marketing automation benefits for business

Marketing automation benefits for business	
Marketing and sales cooperation	• Improved cooperation between marketing and sales • Same information through a common platform • No lost information
Marketing and sales pipeline	• More leads through marketing automation • Lead nurturing • The employee has time for other tasks • Better interaction with the customer → satisfied customers • Sales machine in the best scenario
Reporting	• Simple to do • Detailed information • Measure marketing campaigns • No more excels • Stored in the system → availability

In theory, marketing automation offers several benefits to a company, as the table above shows. It's hard to evaluate which of these benefits is most important to a company but one could imagine that big companies appreciate that marketing and sales processes can be combined and data is stored in one place. In smaller companies, data can be more easily shared without a system if there are only a handful of employees and the same people handle both sales and marketing. However, smaller companies can benefit more from that reporting is no longer required with Excel, and they have more satisfied customers, thanks to the system. On a practical level, the benefits are again a consequence of how well the system has been implemented and used, and more on this in the next section.

4.6   Pitfalls of marketing automation

According to the interviewees, marketing automation is not the answer to all the company's problems. On the contrary, it can even cause problems for the company. Problems can be caused already at the implementing stage when marketing automation is being introduced or after implementation. This section includes the observations of the interviewees about the pitfalls of marketing automation.

Before the implementation

According to the interviewees, it is important to think about what you want from a marketing automation system. It is important to ask as a company representative why we need this system and what we try to value? Berghofer et. al (2018) write that when considering the acquisition of a system, one should be analytical and study the real need of a platform. One of the interviewees suggests that the company should be able to identify the processes for which marketing automation can be utilized. Sending newsletters alone is not enough and the customer or lead rarely contacts after the first email and says he wants to do business, but the customer often requires persuasion and communication, especially in the B2B business.

> *"The company should be able to identify the processes for which marketing automation can be utilized." Person 2*

In other words, when purchasing a system, you do not have to change everything at once, but it would be good to take care of one thing at a time. The potential benefits of the system can be wiped out at the implementation stage if the company starts building the system wrongly. Another interviewee points out that the system can always be modified again, but it costs time and money for the company to make the changes and design processes again.

During the interviews, it was emphasized that planning requires time, resources, and a competent person to lead the project and a dedicated project team. The introduction of the new system can therefore be seen as a very stressful issue for staff, as the new system requires learning new things. For this reason, the interviewed consultant recommends that an external system specialist will be involved in the planning stage. This, of course, will cost the company money, but this will have a money-saving effect in the long run. The consultant continues that, of course, there is always the risk that a system specialist outside the company does not understand the client's needs or is not a competent enough person.

> *"Already at the design stage of the system, it would be good to use the help of external consultants." Person 3*

Other important points that emerged from the interviews are that the person in the company must be committed to using the new system, such as that sales begin to handle the leads generated by the system and marketing team. As a result, marketing automation must improve the company's operations and not complicate them.

After the implementation

Once the system is implemented, the system itself will not start doing the things the company needs. Too high expectations for the system can easily cause the system's utilization rate to decrease over time until it is realized that at some point in the company hardly anyone uses the implemented system. The users need to be trained to use the system which takes time, so it is important to understand and prioritize the employees' work tasks in the early stages of deployment.

To benefit from the system, the company using it must migrate the data they already have to the system and be able to collect more information about customers and leads. The information is obtained, for example, by asking directly from customers and leads or based

on their online behavior. Without further information, the nurturing of the leads cannot be done and thus they can remain so-called passive leads in the system. One interviewee faced a problem that the company focused more on developing the system, although the interviewee felt that the problem was more than they did not have enough information about customers and clients in the system. One of the interviewees stressed the importance of familiarizing themselves with the data. Only with that you can get to know your customers and steer them in the direction you want.

"It is important to get familiar with the data stored in the system." Person 1

The materials used in marketing must be interesting to get the customer interested in what is being marketed. For this reason, you should invest in marketing materials well in advance and think about how they are suitable for e-mail advertising, for example. According to one interviewee, the best material is where the expertise of a product or service can be seen, especially in b2b business. So just putting pressure on the buying decision in marketing materials is not a good idea. Table 4 address the pitfalls of marketing automation before and after implementation. Lack of data from the system and keeping leads passive emerged as new pitfalls after the interviews compared to Table 1.

Table 4 Pitfalls of marketing automation

Pitfalls of marketing automation	
Before the implementation	- Lack of planning in advance - You change all the processes at once - No time, resources, or competent people to plan - No committed people
After the implementation	- Too high expectations - No data in the system - Leads remain passive - Poor quality marketing material

The previous table shows which mistakes can be made with a marketing automation system as soon as the acquisition of the system is planned. In conclusion, the biggest problems are related to the fact that the expectations for the system are too high and the implementation is not planned at a sufficient level. Sure, the most common mistakes can be fixed during or after deployment, but to save time and money, it would be important to find out what you want from the system, what it takes to benefit from the system, and whether the system meets your business requirements.

4.7 Things to consider about marketing automation

All interviewees recommend the use of marketing automation and see it as benefiting the company's business. However, there are several things to consider. First, the system is only part of the company's marketing, so you can't put too high expectations on it. One interviewee said that in their company, marketing automation is the only way to gather leads and the interviewee couldn't imagine working without it. The system also makes it easier to transfer leads from marketing to sales allowing you to allocate employees' work tasks elsewhere.

However, using the system requires time and resources from the company, so there must be the right desire from employees to use it. The interviewed consultant raised the rule for the introduction of the system, where 80 percent of the system will be completed after 20 percent of the time allocated to the project has been spent. The last 20 percent, grinding the details, then takes a lot of time, which is very important to make the most of the system. It is important to understand the product and understand, for example, how marketing campaigns are conducted. However, industry-specific differences exist, and one interviewee felt that he did not believe that marketing automation could be used, for example, in companies that provide consulting services. The reason for this is that then it is difficult to make personalized messages to leads and customers.

One interviewee proposed that every company should have one or two superusers for the system who could be a touchpoint for other users. These superusers could help others when there are problems or questions regarding the system. They could also be used to help engage staff to use the system

5 Discussion and conclusions

This chapter includes the conclusions of the work. The aim is to find an answer to the main research question of the work which is "how does marketing automation benefits the company's business". In addition to this, the section clarifies the answers to three sub-questions. This section also includes managerial implications and limitations and suggestions for future research

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The main research question of the research is how does marketing automation benefit the company's business and this question is answered by three sub-questions

How marketing automation tools and features are useful?

The marketing automation tools and features discussed in this work are lead management, email marketing, analytics and reporting, campaign management, and segmentation. Lead management was perceived to be of particular benefit to the company's business. In particular, the collection of leads was perceived to facilitate the work of the company's staff and, depending on the industry, is perceived as a quick way to collect leads. Järvinen & Taiminen (2016) emphasize, that an up-to-date marketing information system or a complete CRM facilitates the collection, preservation, and maintenance of leads. However, in this study, after interviews, it emerged that there are always some industry-specific differences where the lead collection may not be as efficient. But if you want to collect and manage large amounts of leads, then with the help of marketing automation, the work can be done more effortlessly. A large number of leads does not necessarily mean that this would have a clear effect on the company's results. The literature reviewed in this study argued that the success of a business can be measured by the conversion rate of a company's leads (Turkanik & Johnson 2020) but we can claim that with a large number of leads has the potential to achieve

good results even if the conversion rate of the leads is a bit lower. In practice, Singh et al. (2014) highlighted how anyone who visited a company's website would end up in the system as a lead. Of course, it can then be said that it would take a very long time to process the leads. However, there will certainly be no sales without leads, so the recommendation is to use marketing automation at least if the company does not come up with another idea to collect leads. As a finding, it is recommended that lead collection and processes related to it are considered and tested to prevent potential leads from dropping out during lead management.

Email marketing is an essential part of using marketing automation. However, based on this study it is good to remember that this is just one form of marketing and part of bigger marketing machinery. However, as Jenkins (2008) writes that low-costs and easy targeting of email marketing could be enough for a smaller company to do marketing. If you want to do holistic marketing, then email marketing should be included as part of your business marketing. Email marketing offers an opportunity to be featured but a strong emphasis needs to be placed on the content of the messages and thus on standing out from the masses. Many of us can say that emails today contain a lot of spam, so the finding of this study is that a lot of attention needs to be paid to the content, especially that the emails are properly targeted and look professional, and highlight your business and what you offer.

Analytics and reporting in marketing automation programs are seen as useful and especially because the data is visible to the sales and marketing teams. The finding is that companies should pay more attention to this section, as the impression is that not all companies have the best possible awareness of reporting. Todor (2016); Turkanik & Johnson (2020) cites purchase history, online activities like opened emails, and other customer buying behavior as examples of these. Systems are usually large entities that are very much customizable and are constantly being developed by the companies that provide the system. So this requires a lot from the company using the system to understand the possibilities offered by the system. As a finding, the best thing a company can do is that the company has a person or team to handle the reporting. A person should preferably be someone who has technical knowledge but who also understands the laws of business.

Lead and customer segmentation allow a company to create different campaigns that target specific customer groups. Every company should remember that when the system is implemented, the system itself is very customizable, for example, to facilitate segmentation. At its simplest, this is done by creating a new field or fields in the system that allow segmentation. When doing segmentation, one can start with very simple things, such as geographic information. In B2B business it is a great way to segment customers by industry. (Singh et al. 2014) This information can be used to build marketing paths and campaigns. The biggest benefit of this is that marketing materials can be targeted to specific customer groups, and this improves the chances of improving the lead conversion rate. Of course, it must be remembered that segmentation is not possible in all business sectors if the sector is a niche. However, this must be taken into account as soon as the company starts planning for the introduction of the system, and it is recommended to ask ourselves what the system will be used for and whether it will be useful to its users.

As already stated, a company that uses marketing automation should have a responsible person or team that takes care of its functionality. With the help of marketing automation, campaign management can also be handled by a person who may not have been interested in so-called traditional marketing. In other words, technical know-how is useful in the use of a marketing automation system.

What motivates companies to use marketing automation?

Motivation is based on motives and motives are the needs that drive companies to acquire a marketing automation system. If a company has problems collecting and nurturing leads, then with the help of a marketing automation platform, collecting leads becomes faster and more meaningful. This is done so that people can run email marketing automatically through the system. This requires that a person or a representative of another company have made their email address available to the marketing company. As they interact with leads and involve them in telling them what they are interested in, this information can be used to automatically target marketing to them, and the result is hopefully a converted lead.

Acquisition of the new system is recommended for companies that want to get sales and marketing to work more closely together. In addition, the system is recommended for companies that want information about leads and customers to be stored in one place and that this information could easily be used in the company's marketing and sales activities and in both teams.

If a company wants to improve its existing marketing capabilities, then acquiring email marketing is a great way to do this. In this way, it is possible to reach a target audience that does not use social media, and therefore the advertising made on social media does not reach this target group. It's good to keep in mind that social media advertising can ultimately direct leads and customers in the same direction as email advertising, and through these links, a company can gather new leads or information about existing leads and customers. In other words, the e-mail advertising provided by marketing automation and social media advertising are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary, and in both ways, the information can be transferrable to the system. With a marketing automation platform, email advertising is faster, precise, and the effects are visible in companies so that when using marketing automation, the company has more time for other work tasks than advertising. Taylor (2021) notes this same argument about saving time and believes it is one of the motivators in favor of acquiring marketing automation.

Any business will appreciate that sales and marketing can be measured. If the company has encountered problems here, then the reporting tools provided by the system can be used to create really simple reports about customers and leads, but also more complex reports. For example, imagine a situation where a company has collected 1,000 leads, 100 of which have been converted into sales. Therefore, the company has the entire marketing and sales pipeline visible within the same system, and based on the completed sales, reports can be made in which the conversion rate of the leads is 10 percent. On the other hand, Riserbato (2021) points out that perhaps the motivator is not only to measure success but also where a company can improve its operations. The reports make it possible to measure, for example, the time of the sales pipeline and how long it has taken for the lead to convert into opportunity and purchase decision. Also, other information in the system can be added to

the report, taking an example from B2B business where the leads industry can be used as a filter in reports. This gives the marketer information on which industry of their customers makes the fastest purchasing decision or in which industry customers spend the most money while they are purchasing goods. It is a good way to use these signals to indicate which industry the marketing company should focus on in the future to maximize sales and as described by Bucklin et al. (1998), measuring results can be used to make further marketing decisions that might not otherwise be dared to be made.

Among the motivators in favor of the acquisition of marketing automation, this study did not reveal any significant issues that had not already been addressed in the previous literature. Of course, it must be added that in the past, there has not been a lot of talk about motivators, but more about the capabilities of marketing automation, and these capabilities aim to address the shortcomings that are generally identifiable in the marketing-related operations of companies.

What are the pitfalls in marketing automation?

Several mistakes can be made with marketing automation, but many of these mistakes can be prevented. The first thing to do when starting to implement marketing automation for the company is to ask why they need the system and what processes it should use to improve. Murphy (2018) argues that one needs to know the current processes (if any exist) and thereby start thinking about how these can be improved.

It is recommended to be very critical in this thinking because in the worst case, the system will be implemented in a way that is not a useful tool to the company. Second, company staff needs to commit to the use of marketing automation and this is emphasized by Brinker et al. (2018) as well and they underline the involvement of management in the acquisition and implementation phase. Imagine an employee who has been used to doing things the same way for 20 years and keeping their data in an excel spreadsheet or, in the worst case, in post-it notes. Such a person needs to be thoroughly told why the new system is useful and

necessary for the future of the company. In this situation, the company's management must show its commitment to the introduction of the new system. The company should have a plan in place for change management and how the transition to the new technology will be as painless as possible. The importance of planning cannot be stressed enough and this is supported by Foss et. al (2008) argument that unclear goals, poor deployment plans, and misunderstanding of business goals lead to a failed implementation project. Additionally, rewarding staff with monetary compensation is not necessarily a good way to get through the change but for instance, a salesperson should be told how much more he or she can do sales with the new system, and therefore salesperson can earn more bonuses. This already increases the motivation in advance among the staff to carry out the project.

When the construction of the system is started, the project team should include management who is already familiar with the product. This designated person should be given time to familiarize themselves with the product and plan the necessary processes and functions. The time spent on it may be temporarily off from the project manager's other work tasks, but in the long run, a successful system will bring more benefits to the company than the initial investment. During the implementation phase of the system, it is recommended to use external consultants and preferably those who have the latest information on the features of the system.

After the introduction of the system, it is really important to train the people working on the system who have been committed to using the system earlier. Insufficient knowledge of the system emerged in both the interviews and the previous literature as one of the biggest reasons for failure. (Erffmeyer & Johnson 2001; Foss et al. 2008) The training must take into account the fact that it is not about what the system can do, but it is about training staff to use things that are important to the marketing company. Even at this stage, possible resistance to change must be taken into account, but employees' confidence in the system must be achieved one thing at a time, and employees must be given time to familiarize themselves with the system. A previously appointed project manager who has already gained an understanding of the system should be easily approachable in order to allay the doubts of

new users. Sometimes employees may feel safer talking to an employee of their own company than to an outside.

When implementing the system, it should be emphasized that the system requires time and data to function properly and according to Jena & Panda (2017) it requires continuous development. It takes time for a company to learn the system, such as making marketing materials and, in addition, making the change itself. The company should be prepared for the fact that in the worst case it may be a very difficult period for the company's employees, but with good planning and management, it is possible to make this as easy as possible to operate.

How does marketing automation benefit the company's business?

The three sub-questions make it possible to answer the main question of the study how does marketing automation benefit the company's business in the following way. Based on the research results, it improves sales and marketing team collaboration and transparency but it makes it easier to share information about customers within the organization. This same issue has been referred to by Gibbert et al. (2002) in writing on customer knowledge management which is an important part of genuine customer orientation. With marketing automation, the company can bring business closer to its customers and enables the company to serve its clients as well as make the company's offerings available to the customer. The company has a better chance of doing targeted email marketing to customers and leads, but this requires the company to have enough information about them.

Marketing automation offers opportunities for new types of employees in marketing which is a piece of new information. An example of this is technically savvy people who are familiar with the system and generally in IT. The system allows many companies to maximize the number of their leads. However, industry-specific constraints need to be taken into account here. It is more convenient to handle and nurture large volumes of leads with

the system and target them with marketing. Table 5 below contains the highlights related to the main question of the study.

Table 5 Answers to the main research question

Answers to the main research question

• Improves sales and marketing team collaboration
   ➔ Transparent cooperation and equal pay
• Bring your business closer to your customers
   ➔ Let them know who you are and what you offer
• Targeted marketing to customers
   ➔ Know your clients' needs
• New types of employees in marketing
   ➔ Technical people welcome
• More leads for the company
   ➔ The opportunity to grow your customer base
• Better opportunity to nurture leads
   ➔ Develop client relationship

5.2 Managerial implications

As such, the marketing automation system is suitable for companies whose customer base has different needs and the scalability of the marketing company's products is wide. However, it is good to keep in mind that using the system is also suitable for companies that operate in a market area where the products or services are unique, i.e., in the so-called niche market. The potential customer base of such a company is small, but with the help of marketing automation, email advertising is easier than ever. The system can be used to easily carry out, for example, mass marketing on a timed basis for a specific target group. According to this research, in some cases, marketing automation is not necessarily a system that gathers leads for the company, but it can greatly facilitate the maintenance of customer relationships. This is influenced by people's desire to be taken into account, and very often it is enough to send the right kind of e-mail to these people that they feel to be noticed.

Hence, it is advantageous to use the system even if the company does not seek better sales revenue but only focuses on providing better customer service.

Although maintaining customer relationships alone is easier with the help of marketing automation, for many people the first impression of it is that it also helps the company to gather leads. So depending on the need of the company, marketing automation is suitable for companies that have problems collecting leads or for companies that have difficulty turning leads into completed deals. With the help of marketing automation, it is possible to transfer leads from marketing to sales in an easier way than before, because the same system is used for marketing and sales. Therefore, this research will also benefit companies that have a desire to bring their marketing and sales teams closer together and narrow the gap between them so a marketing automation platform is a great tool for a traditional company that wants to streamline its sales and marketing processes. By bringing these two teams together, it is possible to combine the company's marketing and sales processes so that they support each other, but also share common knowledge of their potential leads and customers. However, this means that the marketing automation system is integrated into the company's CRM, (Krush et al. 2013) while sales usually handle customers through CRM. In practice, this means that marketing handles the collection, marketing, and nurturing of leads. The task of the sales team is to close the opportunity created by the lead and make the sales. The result is that a company can improve its entire sales process, from lead collection to sales, and use the system to improve conversion rate, for example by nurturing leads. For these reasons, the use of marketing automation is highly recommended if a company wants to bring its sales and marketing teams closer together.

As said, the marketing automation system facilitates the internal work of the organization so that the data is stored in one system. When a lead becomes a potential customer, the record can be transferred from the marketer's ownership to the seller's ownership. The information remains in the same system, so there is no fear that the information will be lost, but the information on the record, meaning the lead or a customer, or any related activities to them, will still be visible as it is entered into the system. This is a clear advantage for the company in the sense that very often, for example, during sick leave or if the employee changes jobs,

the employee does not take with him or her tacit information about the customer. In the worst case, this means that gathering information about the customer should start over with a new employee

In this work, it has become clear that marketing activities have not previously been able to be measured in the same way as sales results. At its simplest, this means creating leads and sales created through leads. (Nabi-Abdolyousefi 2015) In practice, this means that, for example, marketing activities can be targeted and improved if it is statistically established that the lead conversion through marketing is not in line with the goals set in the company. This also means that companies may have been able to pay bonuses to employees, especially in sales, when the results are measurable, but the marketing team may have been left without bonuses because their marketing performance has not been necessarily measurable. The marketing automation platform, therefore, marketing automation gives a company a better chance to renew its reward program. This can have an impact on the company's public employer image and, more generally, on equal pay for employees. This work also revealed that a marketing automation system also brings a more technical workforce to marketing, and this may well be a competitive advantage for the company compared to other companies in the industry.

Perhaps one of the biggest questions about marketing automation is whether it is useful to improve a company's financial performance. In this work, it has been found that at best, a system can be a sales machine, but perhaps it is more natural to think of it as part of a company's marketing machinery. This is, of course, affected by the size, industry, and resources of the company, and how much the company can invest in its marketing. For a small business, a mere marketing automation system combined with social media advertising can be a great way to improve a company's sales performance. On the other hand, for a large company, it might make sense to include the system as part of marketing, without forgetting other marketing channels.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Qualitative research methods are effective research methods that allow researchers to go in several different directions but also when the phenomenon has not yet been studied in-depth. (Jamshed 2014) The effects of marketing automation on a company's business have not yet been studied in-depth and this has been one of the reasons why this study has been carried out using qualitative research methods. As said, quite a few studies like this have been done in the past so it is difficult to say what effects a different test method or sample would have had on this study. However, it should be noted that the research made it possible to highlight the aspects that marketing automation has to the company's business. Of course, it must be taken into account that the persons interviewed in this work, according to the circumstances, were both from the supplier side of the marketing automation and also the end-users of the system. Thus, the outcome of the study could be slightly different if the work focused completely on end-users or system suppliers. However, it must be kept in mind that these two different groups may have different views on the capabilities of marketing automation, so on the other hand it is interesting to get opinions from different perspectives.

This study could certainly be carried out in part by quantitative research methods, but then the subject is likely to be delineated much more closely. It is known, that quantitative research enables the collection and generalization of numerical data between different groups or focuses more on a specific phenomenon. (Goertzen 2017) Now the work generally focuses on the impact of marketing automation on business, but if the research method had been quantitative, then the people in the research would have had to be limited according to the company's industry, size, and type of business.

This is also a thing of how similar work could be done in the future, to limit the target group of the research and to bring quantitative research methods into the work. If research is carried out where the effects of marketing automation on the company's business are studied, for example in industries a, b and c, then this would make it possible to study in which industry the marketing automation is most beneficial. In addition, combining qualitative and quantitative research in the same work brings the best of both of these methods. On the other

hand, combining qualitative and quantitative research brings its own challenges to the work, for example how to combine findings obtained with different research methods. (Kidd et al. 2011)

I believe that it would be possible to get even more detailed results at work if the research were done full-time and generally it would be possible to put more time into it. The global pandemic has also contributed to the fact that it is not always possible to meet the interviewees face-to-face, which may have had an impact on research. However, I think this work is a good start to the practical implications of marketing automation for a company's business and the pitfalls of using marketing automation. As this study shows, marketing automation can have several improving effects on a company's operations, but it also shows that marketing automation is not always a silver bullet but can also have adverse effects on a company's business.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview questions

Background

- From which marketing automation platform do you have experience?
- How long have you been using marketing automation?
- What is your role in using marketing automation?
- Other relevant information about you?

Definition

- How would you define marketing automation?

Functionalities

- What is your opinion about the functionalities related to marketing automation?
  - What functions have you used?
  - How have you used them?
  - What kind of experiences do they have?
  - What kind of challenges have you noticed in these functionalities?
  - Are these functions to be developed in the future?

Motivation

- What do you think are the motivating things for a company to implement marketing automation?
  - What motivates or could motivate the company to start using marketing automation?

Benefits

- How do you think the use of marketing automation will benefit businesses?

Pitfalls

- Are there pitfalls in marketing automation?
  - Before the implementation?
  - After the implementation?

Recommendation

Would you recommend the use of marketing automation to other companies? Please specify in both cases why?