



# **CUSTOMER VALUE CREATION VIA DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION: CASE OF BUSINESS PROMOTION COMPANY**

Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT

Master's Thesis in International Marketing Management

2023

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Examiners: Postdoctoral Researcher Heini Vanninen

Assistant Professor Jarkko Niemi

## **ABSTRACT**

Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT  
LUT School of Business and Management  
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### **Customer value creation via digital marketing strategy implementation: case of business promotion company**

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Digital marketing activities adoption have been revolutionizing the way companies sell their products and services as well as the way they communicate with customers. Several studies have explored the implementation of digital marketing activities by B2B companies, however the degree to which digital marketing practices adoption may generate customer value has not been addressed enough by the academia. The objective of the study is to figure out how digital marketing activities adoption impact customer value creation in B2B context. The paper addresses current research on digital marketing utilization, its importance and main components as well as on customer value creation in B2B sector. The study is conducted in a collaboration with a digital service provider company specializing in business promotion via online presence enhancement. A single case study and qualitative research method were chosen and addressed and the primary data for the analysis was collected via semi-structured interviews conducted with case company specialists.

Results of the study identified that digital marketing strategy adoption contributes to customer value creation in B2B sector via positively affecting the company online presence consolidation, enhancing company business performance and accelerating brand equity and brand awareness formation. The study found that successful implementation of a set of digital marketing activities in B2B companies made with the help of a service provider firm creates customer value via increasing the online presence of firms, fostering business development and promotion and influencing firms' performance enhancement. It was also found that the prioritization of digital marketing tools utilized positively affects the business promotion and fosters customer value creation. Several valuable observations and conclusions were also made regarding the role of each digital marketing tool during the strategy implementation as well as regarding the company principles and practices that are maintained for efficient customer value creation. Insights received during the study accomplishment advance further topic exploration and pave the way to investigation of several related themes.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

B2B – Business-to-Business company

B2C – Business-to-Consumer company

CVP – Customer Value Proposition

SEO – Search Engine Optimization

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

SMM – Social Media Marketing

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Composition of study conducted is outlined in this chapter. Research background is outlined first, followed by a literature review revealing the base of knowledge regarding the theme and context of the study. Then, research objectives and main questions are stated, concept definitions and theoretical framework are reviewed. Moreover, the research method and delimitations are introduced, followed by showing the study's structure.

## 1.1 Research background

Nowadays online presence contributes to successful business promotion and arriving at a superior digital marketing strategy is crucial for company prosperity and development (Sokolova & Titova 2019, 509). Online presence now is an integral part of business operations of every company and addressed by firms due to multiple reasons to be considered (Webb 2017).

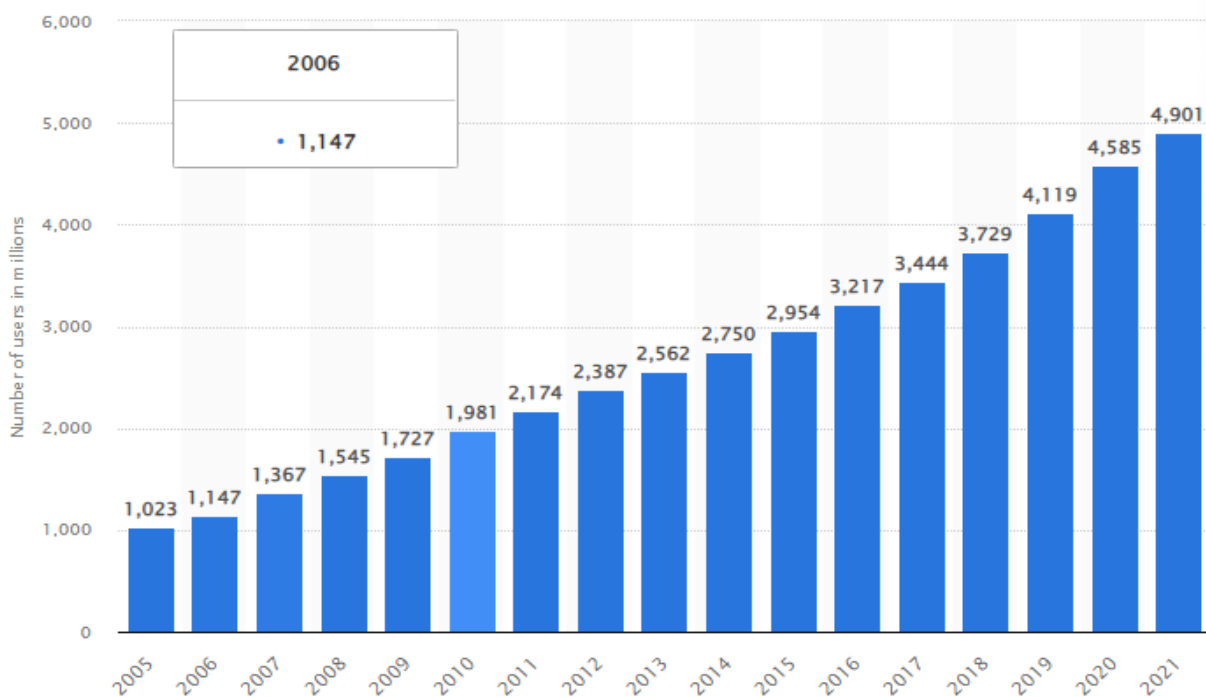


Figure 1. Worldwide Internet usage growth (Statista 2022).

Figure 1 indicates that the number of people (in millions) utilizing Internet has been increasing drastically throughout more than a decade, which justifies the importance and rise of digital marketing activities implementation.



Increasing Internet usage has led to a drastic explosion in the sphere of business technologies (Marulanda 2021). The advancement of online business and the constantly increasing number of e-commerce possibilities are witnessed and embraced by enhanced number of firms around the world. It is undeniable that the development of e-business and e-commerce presents multiple opportunities for companies striving to attract and retain customers and explore rises in productivity and profitability. (Hagiu & Wright 2021,115)

Online presence allows firms to attain more consumers in a bigger number of markets since enterprises now sell products or deliver services to customers and firms located all over the world via websites (Kim & Moon 2021,3). Moreover, firms can also utilize e-business to lower some business expenditures since the acquisition of needed economic resources for production or delivery of services is much easier done with the help of technological advancements. In addition, enterprises are able to communicate directly with the customers, and that enables real time products advertisement. (Vitez 2019)

Digital marketing has recently become an indispensable tool supporting e-business promotion and development. Due to digitalisation, customers can choose what and where to buy from multiple options, and it is crucial therefore to communicate with customers online in order to figure out and meet their needs (Webb 2017). Strong digital presence of the company is therefore indispensable for successful brand positioning and competitive advantage creation. Digital platforms lure customers regardless of the geographical location since they are capable of finding a needed product in a large online base. (Hagiu & Wright 2021,110-113)

Rapid digitalization has contributed to the change in customer expectations and therefore a customer value creation process has been revolutionizing as well. To generate value, companies need to reconsider their practices of interactions with customers, who are becoming more digitally conscious. The personalization efforts of firms need to be streamlined and the whole customer journey needs to be reshaped in accordance with new requirements. (Lund 2023) The technological advancements adoption and meeting the digital customers' needs has created an increasing significance of an efficient online activities strategy implementation (Marulanda 2021).

Figure 2 below depicts core potential benefits of digital marketing activities adoption that should be recognised by companies.

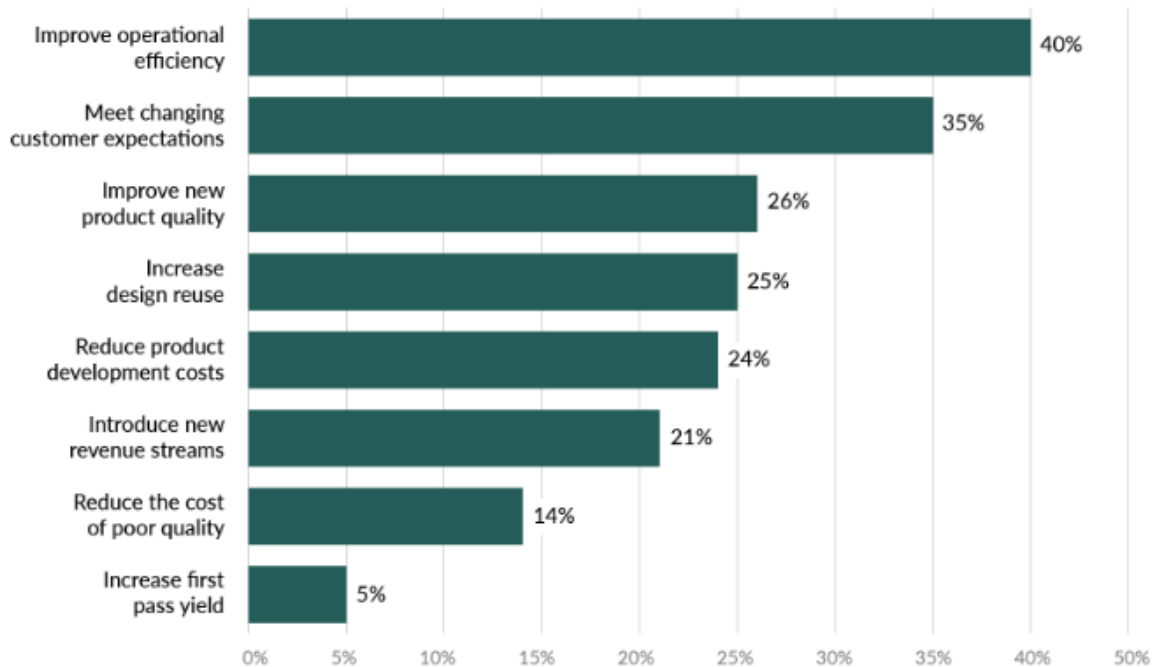


Figure 2. Benefits of digital model adoption (Fund 2023).

Figure 2 illustrates that, according to recent research, more than 30 percent of interviewed CEO claim that digitalization enables to more efficiently meet customer expectations and in turn facilitates operational efficiency improvements (Fund 2023).

The enhancing significance of a digital marketing strategy planning and adoption has in turn facilitated the rise in the number of digital service providers. The increase in the number of companies offering digital marketing services poses a need to explore and observe the way digital service providers harness the technological advancements to assist customers in business promotion (Grönroos 2017, 126). In particular, the study aims to figure out how digital marketing strategy implementation fosters customer value creation and business promotion.

The empirical research is conducted in collaboration with a case company specializing in definite digital marketing services provision and online business promotion in B2B sector, and the company was chosen due to the decent number of projects accomplished in the domain and due to practical observations made during collaboration with the company. A number of observations were also made by the author during the work time spent in a case company, which amounts to roughly seven months.

## 1.2 Literature review

Core literature review's aim is to comprehend previous and existing literature on digital marketing and customer value creation in B2B context. The academic articles and books connected with the topic were gathered and reviewed to figure out existing state of research and to delve into the possible research gaps. The review is limited to the selection of literature sources that align with the study context.

Digital marketing is a rapidly evolving concept that includes a set of relevant marketing tools and strategies (Sokolova & Titova 2019,511). Digital marketing can be perceived as a set of techniques assisting companies in communication with customers and in the pursuit of various goals of the firm (Chaffey & Chadwick 2022,32). Nowadays there is a growing tendency among people, especially youngsters, to search for items or services online rather than visiting a physical store and choose items there and therefore digital marketing channels are becoming more widely used than traditional ones (Ginting et al. 2021,142).

Digital marketing as a phenomenon and a powerful marketing management tool has been receiving growing research interest since the beginning of the 2000s, when the increasing number of mobile devices' users as well as social media users, such as Twitter, Facebook or YouTube had facilitated rapid e-commerce development. The way customers perceive and search for services and products as well as the consumer behavior have changed and a new perspective has appeared regarding the communication and interaction between consumers and firms. (Ghorbani et al. 2021,170; Li et al. 2020, 51)

As interest towards digital marketing has appeared and consolidated, main digital marketing components, involving Marketing Analytics, Content Marketing or Social Media Marketing and their importance were also observed by researchers. For example, Baltes (2015, 113) states that the high quality of the website and social media content is a one of the leading business success facilitators as the well-planned content creation stimulates customer interest appearance, inform and educate customers and in turn contributes to strong and long-lasting relationships foundation. Social Media Marketing is perceived as an indispensable tool for efficient communication between companies, subcontractors and customers. Moreover, digital marketing tools are acknowledged as core facilitators of brand awareness and brand loyalty building and consolidation. (Sarah 2019,7; Li et al.2020,80; Appel et al.2020,851)

Zhang et al. (2017, 865) considers Email marketing as a highly profitable digital marketing tool and the study conducted revealed that the efficiency of the email marketing depends on the careful determination of the right amount of emails sent to customers. To measure and track the effectiveness of digital marketing tools implementation, Web Analytics techniques, such as Google Analytics, have appeared and became a viable component of any digital marketing strategy. It is acknowledged by researchers that Web Analytics utilization fosters the effective assessment and timely monitoring of customer interactions and lead generation, thereby enhancing the efficiency of marketing actions, increasing sales revenue and improving performance measurement. (Järvinen & Karjaluoto 2015,118)

Digitalization has an influence on one of the core objectives of any company, which is customer value creation. Companies are striving to develop and ameliorate the value proposition, that plays a leading role in determination of the way customer value is communicated and delivered to customers. Multiple researches have addressed the customer value communication as well as value proposition, which is regarded as a tool that facilitates capturing and communicating crucial marketing decisions and thereby influences the implementation of a marketing strategy. Moreover, a strong value proposition underlines the way a company interacts with customers and consider their needs and problems, which implies effective customer perceptions' management. (Payne et al. 2017, 467,484; Ginting et al. 2021,133)

The research on customer value creation and proposition has also addressed the importance of customer data management and marketing analytics adoption. Value-based management (VBM) has been enhancing its relevance as a tool that aligns strategic actions of a company and performance management with value creation, utilizing control systems and managerial mindsets to implement value-creating actions (Firk et al. 2021,42-45). The data yielded by Hossein et al. (2017, 287-289) provides convincing evidence that marketing analytics contributes to customer value creation in the way that according to the analyzed data managers and marketers can offer valuable products and services based on individual preferences as well as newest trends. Customization via the help of tracking the analytics is made more effective, whereas value-based selling is prioritized (Keränen et al.,64).

It is undeniable that customer value creation is core objective of marketing efforts of companies and an indispensable component of sustainable competitive advantage attainment (Gummerus 2013,19). With the technological advancements in marketing, firms have started digital marketing adoption in pursuit of superior customer value creation, communication and delivery (Herhausen et al. 2020, 276). Keränen & Jalkala (2013, 1317-1318) based on the study findings mention that

digital marketing is an effective facilitator of customer value evaluation since it fosters the identification of potential value, the assessment of company performance and well-planned customer data management system utilization.

It is widely accepted by the researches that digitalization fosters the changes in value creation and delivery, and therefore firms need to address the increasing influence of digital technologies implementation on business performance. For example, due to the decreasing amount of personal contact and in order to benefit from technology developments inclusion, innovation and leadership skills need to be addressed and mastered by managers. Moreover, several studies suggest that marketing activities and plans need to be reevaluated and modernized to arrive at a more digital approach in marketing strategies realization to achieve greater customer satisfaction and superior customer value creation. (Herhausen et al. 2020, 276; Alwan & Alshurideh 2022,1560-1564)

Current research has emphasized that customer value creation is facilitated by efficient business model formation that focuses on firms' offerings. Marketers need to develop and implement strategies that are incorporated in almost every process of the company in order to pursue customer loyalty and satisfaction as well as long-lasting customer relationships maintenance (Grönroos 2017,137-139).

To achieve customers' trust and create customer value, firms strive to prioritize best offer provision and adopt changes. Digital marketing technologies and tools are appearing as a main driving force for those changes, facilitating company processes' amendment and customer attainment. Digital platforms utilization becomes embedded in everyday company practices since digital marketing enables firms to intensively interact with customers and utilize customer feedback and analytics to facilitate personalization and enhance customer satisfaction. (Ginting et al. 2021,134-138)

B2B companies are putting effort to develop efficient digital marketing strategies to generate more value for customers. Kim & Moon (2021,2) in their study found that the focus on technological innovations implementation and customer centricity assisted in customer performance determination and increases loyalty of a business customer. Authors highlight also the significance of digital marketing, especially SMM for networks as well as partner firms' relationship management in order to create value for groups of customers. (Kim & Moon 2021,3)

It can be reviewed that digital marketing tools appearance and advancement were drastically addressed by most of companies, starting to implement them in their business practices. Several research papers had been addressing the role and digital marketing tools implementation importance for firms' performance and long-term prosperity.

However, a considerable amount of research concentrates on the investigation of digital marketing effectiveness in B2C context, whereas more research is needed regarding the adoption of digital marketing practices by B2B markets (Kim & Moon 2021,3-4).

Article/book, year	Topics covered		
	Digital Marketing	Customer Value	Business-to-Business
Sokolova & Titova, (2019).	√		
Chaffey & Chadwick (2022)	√		
Li et al. (2020)	√		
Keränen et al. (2021)	√	√	√
Gumerrus (2013)	√	√	
Alwan & Alshurideh (2022)	√	√	
Baltes (2015)	√		
Firk et al. (2016)		√	
Kim & Moon (2021)	√		√
Grönroos (2017)		√	√
Appel et al. (2020)	√		
Zhang et al. (2017)	√		√
Järvinen & Karjaluoto (2015)	√		√
Sarah (2019)	√		√
Keränen & Jalkala (2013)		√	√
Payne et al. (2017)	√	√	√
Ginting et al. (2022)	√	√	
Ghorbani et al. (2021)	√		
Herhausen et al. (2020)	√		√
Hossain et al. (2021)	√	√	√

Table 1. Selected literature regarding customer value, digital marketing and B2B contexts.

Table 1 illustrates the overview of selected and observed literature sources, covering the core three aspects which are focus areas of the research – Digital Marketing, customer value creation and Business-to-Business context.

Overall, a sufficient attention had been given by researchers to the components of digital marketing. However, a closer look at the data indicates that the adoption and importance of digital marketing is less observed in context of B2B markets. The digital marketing influence on customer value creation has been also addressed by researches, however less is known how B2B companies may leverage digital marketing to generate value for customers.

As can be seen, there are only few articles found that incorporate digital marketing, B2B and the customer value contexts to the study. Building more in-depth knowledge on how Business-to-Business enterprises may utilize digital marketing for value creation is needed and for that aim exploring digital marketing as a service provision can be addressed. Figure 3 below incorporates the three core constitutes of the research paper and of the literature review.

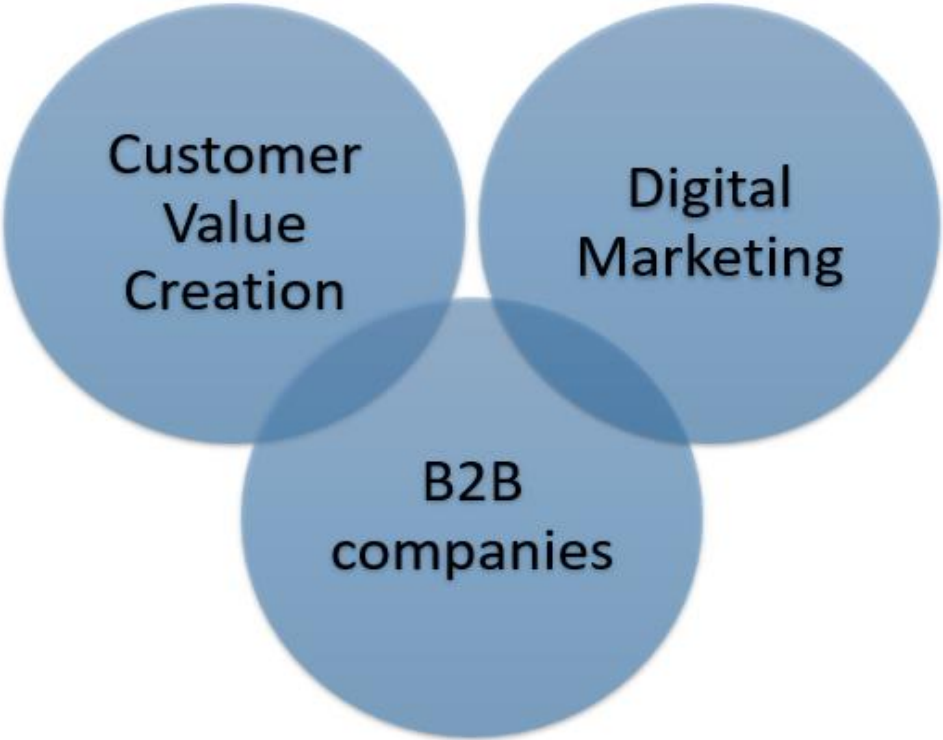


Figure 3. Research outline.

### **1.3 Research gap**

Although the importance of online presence in modern business domains is already acknowledged, the effects and the impact of digital technologies implementation and utilization are still not completely understood in the fields of business management and entrepreneurship in B2B sector (Nambisan 2017, Vadana, Torkkeli et al. 2019). The insufficient amount of information is still witnessed regarding the approaches and activities that B2B firms utilize to implement customer-focused digital marketing strategy, and therefore research and further studies are needed regarding the topic.

Drastic changes in consumer behavior posed by the digitalization of businesses require firms to reconsider marketing activities and adopt digital models to adjust to the modern requirements. Nowadays, a considerable number of digital marketing related studies consider the impact of digital practices implementation on customers' behavior mainly in B2C sector, whereas B2B firms' capabilities connected with customer benefits obtainment via digital marketing activities adoption is still not investigated enough. (Diago & Venissimo 2014,703) Digitalization is changing the way B2B companies operate and provide value to customers and therefore the way digital marketing technologies may be leveraged to create and deliver customer value is a fundamental question for academic research.

### **1.4 Objectives and research questions**

Careful determination of right objectives supports problem formation and define a framework for development of study. Moreover, a clearly stated research purpose incorporates theoretical background consideration with empirical data obtainment and discloses structure of research and the way research questions will be answered. (McCombes 2021)

Crucial aim of study is analysis regarding the way how customer value is created via digital marketing activities implementation addressed by B2B enterprises. The aim is to explore how different digital marketing tools utilization may foster business promotion and generate value for customers. The purpose is also to figure out what digital marketing practices are regarded as the most efficient and therefore could be prioritized by B2B firms. Moreover, it is indispensable to investigate how a service provider company assists B2B firms in successful online presence establishment and in creating and delivering customer value via digital marketing tools utilization.



The research questions of the study are the following:

Main question: “How digital marketing strategy implementation contributes to customer value creation in B2B context?”

Sub-questions were developed to direct the research:

1) What digital marketing activities should be addressed by B2B companies for successful business promotion and customer value creation?

2)How customer value is created and measured in B2B company offering digital services?

3)How digital marketing strategy implementation in B2B marketplace is conducted by the service provider for its customers?

### 1.5 Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework outlines core theoretical perspectives aligned with the research context and research topic. Its purpose is to provide an overview of the key concepts and variables utilized in the paper and to outline the research problem and research phenomenon. A theoretical framework presents the core concepts and topics covered in the literature review.

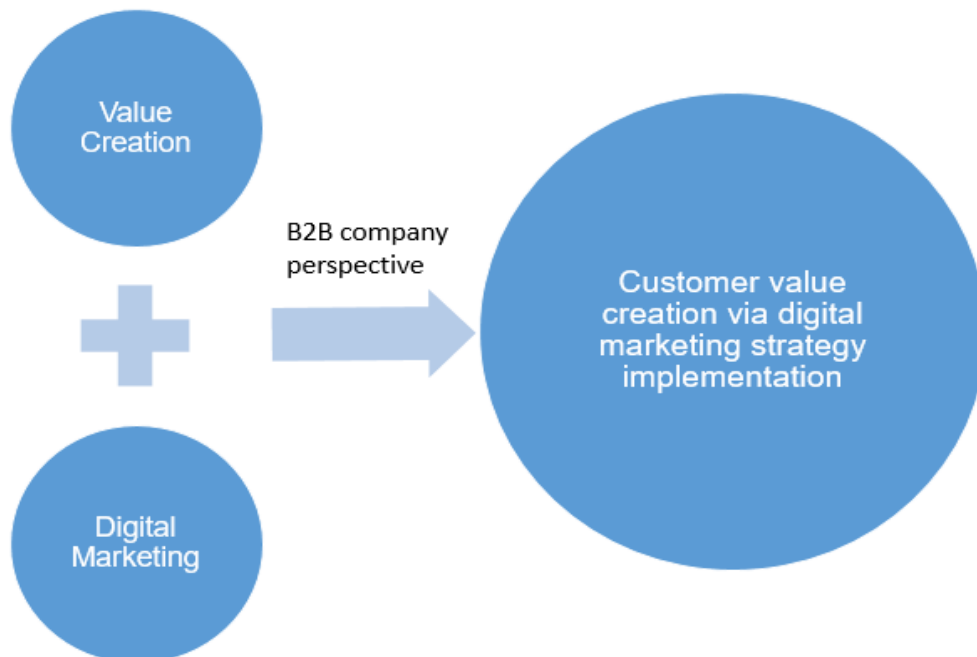


Figure 4. Theoretical framework.

Figure 4 above illustrates the crucial components of the theory utilized during the research, which investigates the connection between customer value creation and digital marketing strategy implementation in B2B context.

Research therefore relies mainly on two theories: digital marketing and customer value creation. The research problem primarily concerns digital marketing phenomenon and its components as well as Marketing Analytics phenomenon, which is considered as a main digital marketing activities constitute and facilitator.

Digital marketing phenomenon is investigated via observation of buyer behavior and digital marketing fundamentals observation. Research also addresses main goals and benefits of digital marketing strategy adoption. Moreover, main digital marketing components are outlined as well as strategy development and implementation processes are analyzed.

Regarding B2B digital marketing environment, the study explores several selected channels and tools, which are regarded as the most used in B2B digital marketing campaigns, and they are SEO, SMM, Content marketing and E-mail marketing. These components are also relevant to the case company's mission and operations, as they are regarded to be efficient for a firm's awareness increase (Chaffey & Leszynski 2018, 37). During these components' implementation, a company website is put at the center of all activities and acts as their main facilitator in digital marketing strategy adoption (Herhausen et al. 2020, 278).

Customer value creation is observed via the outlining of a Customer Value Proposition (CVP) concept and addressing the value of customer experience. Moreover, the theoretical grounding includes the investigation of customer value dimensions and value creation process. Finally, the observation of the practical implication of customer value measurement in a digital business is conducted, where main measurement metrics are outlined.

## **1.6 Delimitations**

Delimitations are crucial components of qualitative study since they outline the borders of the study, and reveal what the study focuses on and what is not included in the scope of the research. Delimitations are accompanied by justification of reasons for data exclusion or inclusion and are needed to highlight goals of study. (Editage Insights 2020.)

Research includes empirical and theoretic delimitations. Theoretical ones reveal the concepts that are utilized in the research, and empirical one pinpoint the topics that are mentioned or not included in the paper in accordance with case company collaboration.

Theoretical concepts included are Digital Marketing and Customer Value. The Digital Marketing concept is investigated via consideration of its main constituents, relevance and core activities implemented by a firm to foster value creation and business promotion. Customer value concept investigation is performed via addressing its creation, measurement and delivery in terms of digital business. Theoretical part focuses mainly on SEO, Content marketing and Marketing Analytics concepts exploration as these activities have been successfully implemented in a case company.

Empirical delimitations put a focus on implemented by a case company digital marketing activities, considering that the firm specializes primarily in website optimisation and business promotion. Regarding the B2B context, one definite sector is observed and generalizations are difficult to be made regarding the digital marketing practices implementation in other sectors. The interviews number can be regarded as not sufficient to results' theorization as well as main findings are connected with practices maintained in a definite firm. Generalizations concerning digital marketing services offering are challenging to make regarding other industries or organizations.

## **1.7 Concepts definition**

### **1.7.1 Digital transformation**

Digital transformation implies utilization of digital advancements to develop new and ameliorate business practices and customer service to meet altering business and market needs. Digital transformation implies a customer-focused, digital-first approach to all business processes and operations. (IBM 2022)

### **1.7.2 Business digitalization**

The concept refers to the process of technology integration to business operations of companies operating in different industries and offering various services and products. It enables the consolidation of customer and stakeholders' communication channels and requires engagement of the entire firm to assess business processes to serve business needs. (Marulanda 2021)

### **1.7.3 Digital marketing**

The notion implies usage of various digital services and platforms for efficient company services and products promotion via the internet. Such kind of marketing comprises the utilization of mobile applications, social media, search engine optimization services, websites and other channels. Digital marketing now is viewed as a drastically new way for firms to reach and engage customers as well as to explore their behavioral patterns. (Barone 2022)

#### **1.7.4 Customer value**

Customer value is viewed as a degree to which a definite service or product is worth to a definite customer. It comprises the benefits and costs that are connected with a service or product, such as quality, price or other characteristics. Customer value is usually subjective since it can be different for every person and its creation implies the solution that a service or product may provide. (Maza 2022)

#### **1.8 Research methodology**

Research should be chosen in accordance with study aim, the scope, research questions and delimitations. Deductive approach is utilized in the study, supported by a qualitative research method utilization. Deductive reasoning implies hypothesis creation according to existing theoretical background, and research plan is developed for verification of the hypothesis. The cause-effect connections are investigated between concepts there is a chance of making conclusions regarding the core findings. (Dudovskiy 2020) Deductive logic concerns reasoning from the general information, (theory), to detailed data, which is core observations and findings (Bradford 2017). Deductive logic assists in main aim pursuit, which concerns the exploration of the digitalization theory and further testing it using the example of definite activities utilization in a case company.

Qualitative research method provides a profound phenomenon view and tests the theory in a definite context. Method focuses on the combination of the theoretical and empirical data and findings and interprets the findings according to peoples' experience and view (McLeod 2019). Theoretical framework in the study combines the information retrieved from existing literature and from lecture materials. The data utilized for the theoretical part outlining as well as partly supporting the empirical part findings justification was retrieved from lecture notes, online articles, books and from different internet sources.

Case study represents empirical part of research. Business processes of website promotion firm with which the author was collaborating are investigated and data was received and analysed via interviews with specialists of the company and with Chief Executive Officer. Interview assists in effective obtainment of own viewpoints of interviewed people which they have regarding the topic under investigation. Interviews could be structured, semi-structured and unstructured in accordance with aims of the study. (Jamshed 2014)

## **1.9 Thesis structure**

The study comprises theoretical background presentation, which outlines core concepts and empirical research that outlines the practical observation results in terms of studied theory implementation. The study starts with introduction, followed by theoretical framework and empirical research that reveals the way theoretical background correspond with case firm operations. Conclusion part presents analysis of the empirical findings.

In introduction chapter, there are study background, theoretical framework, literature review, main concepts definitions and research gap that justifies the study's viability. In addition, objectives and delimitations, research questions and research methodology are presented to highlight the study direction. The second part outlines theoretical grounding of the study and discovers topics connected with research phenomenon. Finally, the empirical part introduces the research design, findings, discussion and conclusions in alignment with the case company collaboration. Moreover, the limitations and future research directions are outlined.

## **2 B2B DIGITAL MARKETING**

### **2.1 Consumer behavior and B2B digital marketing**

Marketing field activities have recently experienced drastic changes during the recent several years and these changes are mostly posed by digital marketing techniques' appearance and altering consumer behavior. Various digital tools' advancement has had a tremendous influence on activities connected with marketing since they paved the way to the new opportunities for gathering consumer insights, customer relationship management, customer value creation and capture. Digitalization is now changing the way customers and companies interact and therefore a formation of a marketing mix in B2B organization is drastically influenced. Digital technologies implementation and active utilization is now regarded as a core driver for adaptation to rapidly changing customer behavior and for successful B2B marketing campaigns realization. (Morakanyane et al. 2017, 423-425)

Digital technologies development has been changing the way customers make purchases and interact with the companies. Firstly, customers in the digital environment now can obtain all the information regarding companies and their offerings and compare firms before purchasing (Sarah 2019,8). The decision of customers regarding a purchase is significantly affected by the kind and amount of data they search for and find online, which justifies the importance of online presence for organizations. Online presence acts as a channel for communication with customers and

therefore should be well planned and managed to transmit the values and mission of the company to potential clients. Nowadays a customer can and should get to know as much as possible about the target company via reaching to its social media pages or scrolling down the thoroughly designed and maintained website page. (Stafford Global 2022)

Secondly, customers nowadays actively use online stores and prefer purchasing items or services online, which makes online business management a crucial point in customer attainment. While meeting the increased demand for searching for items and online shopping among customers, every firm needs to figure out transparent and clear customer policies regarding purchase or making a return. It is essential also to provide tailored shopping experience via digital content design and constant improvement. (Rjoub 2021)

Moreover, digital transformation has generated a significant boost in customer engagement. Customers have begun to engage with the companies in social media, customer forums and other widely accessible webpages. Companies have therefore started to receive increasing amount of feedback posted online and the speed of reacting to customers' opinion has become a driver of effectiveness of a firms' digital marketing, sales growth and customer relationship management. (Chain Reactions 2020; Sarah 2019, 6-7)

Artificial Intelligence is now also impacting the consumer behavior during a product or service searching. B2B Marketers are actively use Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithms to adhere to customer preferences and enable customers to make better choices of products or services. The viability and efficiency that AI creates provide convenience for customers and create a competitive advantage for companies that utilizes AI for better positioning of products or services. For example, AI plays a significant role in Search Engine Optimization since when a customer search for some item, his or her intent is considered for efficient search results adaptation and therefore makes a purchase faster and more convenient. (Chain Reactions 2020; Rjoub 2021)

Nevertheless, digital marketing has contributed to a considerable decrease in the loyalty among customers. Before the digital transformation era, consumers tend to prefer familiar and recognizable brands since there was a considerably less choice of products or services. When new brands began to appear and to lure the customers via discounts, advertising and other features available on brands' websites and in search engines, customers became less hesitant to changing a brand and buying from a completely new one. The instability of a customer loyalty has urged B2B marketers to fiercer competition, whereas customers benefit from getting better service at lower prices. (Chain Reactions 2020)

## **2.2 Goals and benefits of B2B digital marketing**

Digitalization and the influence it has created on the customer behavior has set some definite aims and benefits of digital marketing adoption. Regarding digital marketing goals, they usually differ depending on the industry in which a company operates and on the firm's objectives. From the general perspective, the main digital marketing goals that should be highlighted are customer attainment, enhancement of leads generation and brand awareness increase (Brenner 2023). Moreover, one of the aims of digital marketing adoption is to become closer to the target customers and to communicate with them in digital channels, which in turn fosters better understanding of customer needs and facilitates value creation (Chaffey 2020).

Other significant goals of digital marketing that are worth mentioning are differentiation and financial benefits obtainment. When a company embraces new digital marketing techniques implementation, it enables dig data analysis and foster market research, which in turn contributed to streamlining of personalized marketing campaigns. In addition, online sales form a new income source for the company as well as cost optimization via digital marketing is targeted since big data analytics enables efficient supply chain and inventory management of an organization. (Sokolova & Titova 2019, 512)

One notable benefit of digital marketing environment lies in the ease of communicating with and sharing information among customers since the content that company provides can be shared not only with the closest people and shareholders but with multiple new people engaged in a single social network. With the help of digitalization, customers may attach their reviews on firms' services or products as well as on partners' offerings on the websites, which generates a large pool of potential customers. (Kanan & Li 2017, 38-40)

Customer loyalty can be stated as a main goal as well as crucial benefit of digital marketing strategy adoption. Customer loyalty is extremely difficult to reach and measure and comparing with traditional marketing, digital marketing tools enable to effectively track and analyze customer loyalty extent as well as to examine the differences in loyalty establishment. For example, such Marketing Analytics metrics as Net Promoter Score and customer lifetime value are among key measurement metrics. (Brenner 2023)

Other significant benefits of digital marketing strategy implementation that are worth mentioning and addressing by firms are efficient targeting and positioning facilitation as well as better and faster leads generation. Digital marketing tools and activities which are properly utilized and managed contribute to more efficient targeted audience identification, segmentation, reach and

analysis. When new leads are attracted and finally acquired by the company, the provided information about them is more easily collected and managed with the help of various digital marketing techniques adoption and analysis, such as Google Analytics and different data analysis applications. (Hossain et al.2021, 190)

## **2.3 Digital marketing components**

### **2.3.1 Social Media Marketing**

Social media is utilized by enormous number of people on a daily basis. To be more specific, number of people using social media is estimated to reach roughly 3.5 billion users in 2025, which will be more than one fourth of the population of the world (Appel et al. 2020,83). To leverage Internet advantages efficiently, companies need to perceive social media as a tool for providing information to clients and for communicating with stakeholders; as well as for sales generation (Diago & Venissimo 2014,703).

Social media can be seen as several software-grounded digital techniques, such as applications and websites based on digital platforms where users can exchange different data in some kind of online network. It is widely used by companies as it has become a strategic tool for creating customer value and competitive advantage generation. (Vinerean 2017,28)

Social media enables companies to communicate better, share content and information to the stakeholders and interact with them. Therefore, companies can assess and understand their target customers better and create valuable, long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship with them. (Appel et al. 2020,84; Vinerean 2017,29)

Social media has changed the mode of communication between firms and customers and it is crucial for every company to be able to align social media activity with the marketing strategy. Social media engagement is vital for foundation of mutually beneficial, long-lasting and strong relationships with customers since the information about customers derived from social media channels can contribute to thorough customer portfolio creation, market research, and generation as well as implementation of new ideas. (Li et al. 2020,52)

It is assumed that more than a half of customer's decision processes (that are future purchases) is facilitated by social media usage, therefore marketing strategy should address social media communications and firms need to put efforts in resources online brand communications' management (Vinerean 2017,31). Companies need to understand that nowadays every step of a decision-making process of customer is prone to social media influence. Therefore, for example,



the usage of micro-influencers has been proven to be extremely efficient for customer reach as they are seen as credible experts who can encourage their followers to interact with companies. Moreover, influencers allow firms to benefit from narration from first person utilization, which is considered more pleasant and personal. It generates trust among customers and appear more effective in terms of customer engagement. (Appel et al. 2020,86)

Social media presence gives companies a possibility to track the customers' actions, which in turn assists marketers to gain insights concerning the interests of the target audience and facilitates the creation of a suitable digital marketing strategy for customer acquisition enhancement (Henderson 2020). The analysis of customers' actions on social media assists in creating relevant content. For example, a firm may see and analyse customers' demographics when it tracks who visited the company's social media page, what content was the most appealing and further adjust the digital marketing strategy according to the analysis (Henderson 2020).

### **2.3.2 Search Engine Optimization**

Kannan & Li (2017, 34) in their study stress the importance of search engines by highlighting that they enable customers to obtain free information on services and products and find firms that fit the needed search range. Search engines generate organic sets of websites along with listings of paid search in accordance with the typed keyword.

Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to a complex of content and technical practices designed to align a ranking algorithm of a search engine with website page for the site to be quickly found according to specific queries. It implies the process of ameliorating the site to enhance its visibility for people searching for products or services connected with a definite business in search engines, such as Google. (WordStream 2022)

Businesses that use semantic SEO practices succeed more in building an authority in a definite industry and can more easily outperform rivals in terms of relevant keywords in a specific niche. The semantic core of the site is a list of keywords and phrases that bring targeted visitors to the site and are used to promote the site in search engines. Queries in the gathered semantic core are divided by frequency, competition and commercial component. Semantics allows a company to evaluate and understand the distribution of search demand and in turn form the correct site structure for promotion. (Bhan 2022)

SEO is one of the crucial parts of digital marketing since people conduct multiple searches every day to retrieve information about various products and services. The core source of digital traffic

coming to firms is search and SEO is targeted primarily at search experience formation and improvement. Main SEO activities are aligned with other digital marketing efforts, therefore greater visibility and a high ranking in terms of search results can have a substantial impact on business performance. (Panel 2023)

Figure 5 below illustrates the reason for SEO activities implementation by visualizing the amount of website traffic that comes from different kinds of sources.

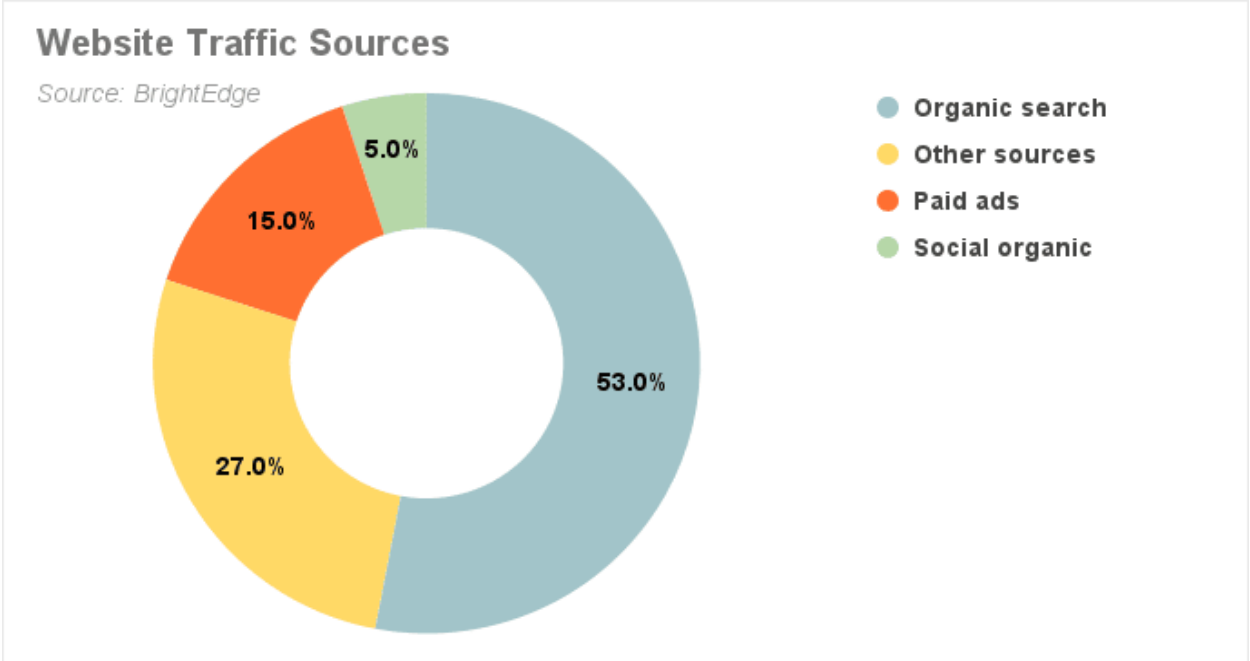


Figure 5. Website traffic sources (Skow 2023).

Figure 5 outlines the importance of SEO for businesses. It has been revealed during an examination of multiple companies' websites that more than a half of website's traffic comes from organic search, followed by the complex of other traffic sources. SEO activities and strategy formation are therefore regarded as a core priority during most digital marketing campaigns implementation (Skow 2023).

There are several crucial goals that are targeted by SEO and that are reviewed before every new project accomplishment. The first one is elaboration of website structure - the core allows a business to determine the hierarchy of pages and form the structure that is necessary to simplify the work with the site for users and search robots. (WordStream 2022).

The second aim that should be highlighted is promotion of pages to the top of the search - the semantic core allows a company to optimize each website page for a specific search query, which is required for the correct ranking of the site in the search network and affects SEO campaign performance. (Bhan 2022)

Thirdly, SEO allows the compilation of a content plan as the collected keys are used to create a content matrix. Content matrix is a marketing technique that enables to visually represent the strategy for content creation and publication. It allows a firm to determine the focus, theme and objectives presented to the content on the site. The tool is used by digital marketers to evaluate the target audience that needs to be addressed, generate new ideas and figure out best tactical decisions regarding upcoming content marketing campaigns realization. Content matrix audit assists marketers in understanding how to create a longer content, which in turn generates stronger ranking performance and fosters efficient SEO. (WordStream 2022).

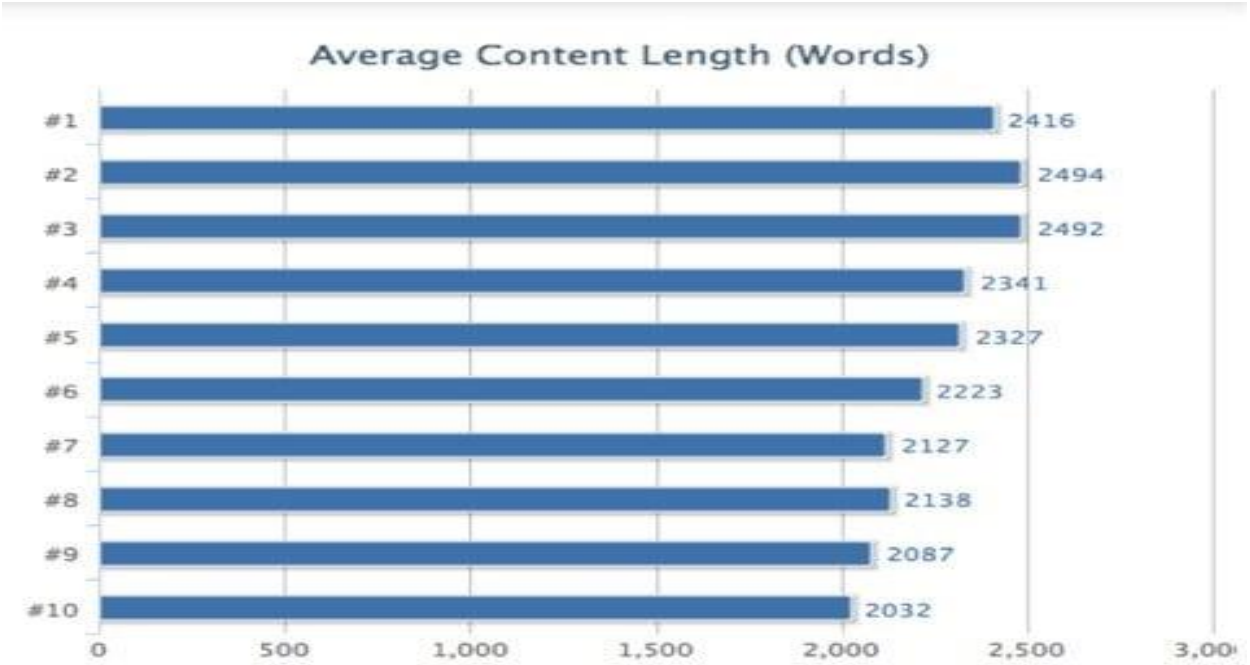


Figure 6. Average content length of top-10 results. (Panel 2023)

Figure 6 demonstrates the positive correlation between the content length and the ranking position of the website and reveals that it is essential to put effort on longer content creation to optimize and foster both SEO and Content Marketing activities. One of the best options to increase the content length is to make it more informative, topic-focused and specific. Timely and efficient collaboration between SEO and Content Marketing specialists is indispensable part of the whole successful digital marketing strategy implementation. (Bhan 2022; Panel 2023)

Moreover, SEO enables creating linking on the site - the semantic base after clustering simplifies setting up page linking, which is necessary to distribute link weight and create convenient navigation. Semantic SEO implies putting a focus on topic instead of individual sets of keywords and it is targeted at answering all possible queries and questions that a potential customer might have regarding a definite topic. It enables to generate more valuable and comprehensive content for users and increases the chances that potential customers will stay on the site for a longer time. Moreover, semantic base formation creates internal linking opportunities since when one topic is thoroughly investigated it may reveal the connections with other relevant topics that should be emphasized via internal linking. (Bhan 2022)

Finally, SEO is used to set up contextual advertising as in the future, the optimized semantic core of the website can be used to launch PPC advertising on social media, which allows a company to get additional coverage and traffic. The advertising is strongly targeted as appear when a potential customer searches for what a firm offers, and therefore generates a traffic of leads that could be easily converted to customers. It is essential in SEO and PPC advertising combination to first clearly define the target audience since when a company attracts people that are not interested in services or products provided, they will leave the site. Moreover, to benefit from PPC advertising utilization the website should be responsive and easy to navigate to provide decent user experience. (WordStream 2022)

### **2.3.3 Content Marketing**

It is undeniable that today's marketplace is increasingly rival, where smart companies understand that they need to pay attention to the details and think outside the box when introducing a brand. Nowadays people have the power to choose which content they will consume, therefore neither product nor price can help a business to stand out as a powerful content. When a firm provides audience with relevant and appealing content, customers will be more interested in sharing it with friends or followers as well as in interacting with the content by leaving comments and reactions. (Ginting et al. 2022, 140)

Content Marketing involves creation and distribution of consistent, valuable and relevant content for current customers' retention as well as for luring potential customers. The primary goal of content marketing campaign is to drive sales and it implies that a business process should be efficiently managed regarding creating and delivering valuable content that the target audience is searching for. (Vishnu 2020)

Content Marketing is aimed at brand awareness increase and customer acquisition and facilitates long-term relationships establishment. Efficiently targeted content marketing should be addressed by marketers, since according to recent studies, more than 60 % of all interviewed consumers will choose companies that provide appealing and personalized content, whereas more than 65% of B2B enterprises report addressing content advertising more than in a previous several years. (Baltes 2015,112-114)

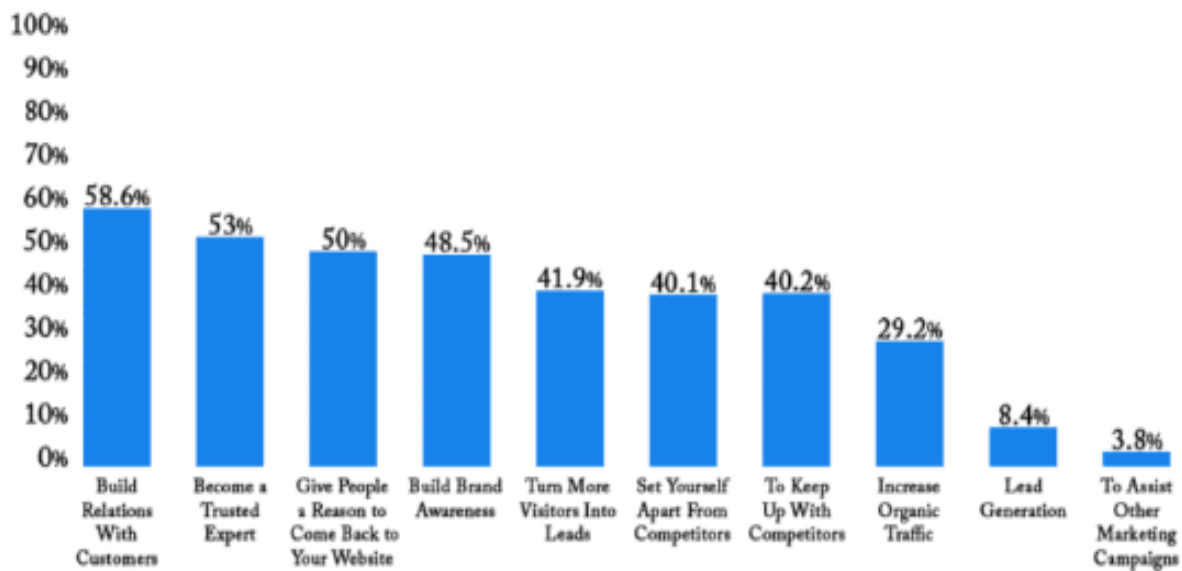


Figure 7. Importance of Content Marketing (Vishnu 2020)

Figure 7 depicts the significance of addressing Content marketing for customer engagement. According to a recent survey, more than half of respondents claim that content marketing is extremely efficient for customer relationships foundation and trust creation. Other important Content marketing benefits that should be also considered are brand awareness increase, leads generation facilitation, organic traffic increase and others. (Vishnu 2020)

Content Marketing is an indispensable part of any digital marketing strategy since relevant content is a crucial part of almost all website promotion connected activities. It is a powerful tool for audience engagement that helps to increase the number of clients by creating relevant and appealing content. The method forms a positive perception of the brand as well as attracts and retains more customers. Moreover, relevant content attracts attention in SMM or email marketing campaigns, enabling more people access the site. (Peçanha 2022)

Content Marketing helps people to find a firm among a vast flow of information available since a decent content makes a company stand out, especially for search engines like Google (Baltes 2015,109). To reach that purpose, Search Engine Optimization and content marketing activities should be interlinked. The company can benefit from high-quality leads generation by focusing on those keywords that correspond with customers' search intentions and therefore by attracting leads that look for solutions the company offers. Various keywords should attract customers on diverse stages, such as awareness stage, problem definition and consideration as well as making a final decision. On all the stages consistent content is a powerful tool to appear at the top of search engines' ranking and to drive more traffic to a company's website. (Peçanha 2022)

Another crucial reason to focus on content marketing concerns financial and operational effectiveness. Traditional marketing focuses mainly on advertising, which is costlier than content marketing since the firm does not need to constantly pay for a piece of content produced. Moreover, several studies have highlighted the considerable difference between ROI generated from traditional advertising and content marketing campaigns. For instance, it was reported that companies that create and constantly update blogs generate roughly 70% more leads than those that do not have blogs. (McCoy 2022)

To develop an efficient content marketing strategy, a company should undergo several indispensable steps, which should be aligned in all departments and addressed by all B2B enterprises, but may vary depending on the industry or a sector in which a firm operates. Firstly, it is essential to determine and follow the definite goals that content created pursues, whether it is lead generation, customer experience improvement or other business objectives. Clear goal definition should be a primary step to which other steps should continuously refer and align with. (Hrach 2023; Baltes 2015, 115-117)

Secondly, the company needs to define core unique points for value proposition, align them with the organizational practices and culture, and keep a focus on them during the strategy design and implementation. On this step, it is useful to conduct a thorough competitor analysis to compare the brand message with those that rivals possess and finally arrive on an own appropriate brand message company transfers to customers via content publication. (Baltes 2015, 117-118)

Thirdly, it is important to figure out relevant performance metrics that the firm is going to track, for example consumption or leads generation metrics. Those metrics should be predetermined and need to be tracked temporarily by a specialist and then the figures obtained should be analysed during the business performance evaluation activities implemented in an enterprise. Finally, an

indispensable step that should not be neglected is thorough target audience identification and further segmentation process, which facilitates consumer research accomplishment and enables the firm to focus better on customers' needs and preferences analysis for customer service provision improvement. (Hrach 2023; Baltes 2015, 115-117)

### 2.3.4 E-mail marketing

This digital marketing tool implies sending emails directly to a definite number of customers and prospects. Email marketing campaigns are utilized to send special offers, releases of a new product and other types of content. Email marketing is an essential part of every digital marketing strategy since it is effective in terms of driving conversions and brand loyalty establishment. Moreover, there is less expenditure involved in comparison with other channels and it provides a company with direct and individual access to the inboxes of customers. (Harper 2022)

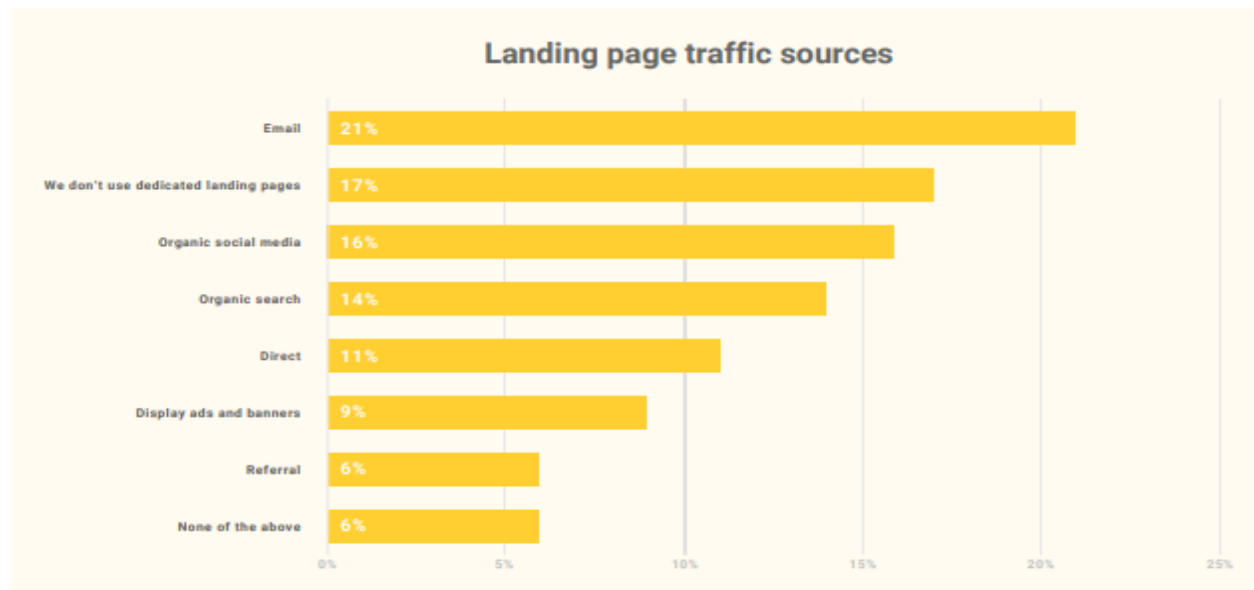


Figure 8. Landing page traffic sources (Chaffey et al. 2018, 34).

Figure 8 illustrates the importance of email marketing for landing pages' traffic generation. According to the survey statistics, email marketing has appeared as the leading traffic source for most landing pages (Chaffey et al. 2018, 34).

E-mail marketing is a common digital marketing technique that is used practically by every company and daily utilized by most B2B companies. However, digital marketers need to identify and utilize the definite emails' number and frequency of emails sending to run profitable and successful e-mail marketing campaigns, since most customers tend to complain about the increased amount of received letters (Zhang et al. 2017,851). The company needs to figure out

the needed number of emails sent in order not to miss lead generation opportunities on one hand and not to be considered as a spam sender, which will contribute to significant customer loyalty decrease, on the other hand (Chaffey et al. 2018, 20).

To benefit from email marketing campaigns, personalization should be addressed by companies as email marketing campaigns are personalized more effectively compared with those placed on social media (Harper 2022). The recent research on email marketing and marketing automation has revealed that lack of targeting is one of the crucial reasons for a weak email marketing efficiency. According to the survey, more than half of marketers send the same kind of letter to all of the predefined recipients. Firms need to combine targeting actions with email automation, which includes for example welcoming sequences, when diverse letters are sent to different audience (Chaffey et al. 2018, 18).

It has been acknowledged by researchers that for effective email marketing campaigns implementation, marketers should combine product or service-related content with the one that relates to advertisement's target audience, thereby providing some "noninformative" content. Such content is valuable for customers' interest obtainment and it increases the probability of reading and responding to the advertisement. For example, it has been found out that name of each recipient's inclusion in email subject statement increases the chance that a person opens the email by roughly by 20%. (Navdeep et al. 2018,238)

### **2.3.5 Marketing Analytics**

Marketing Analytics is a business analytics domain implying obtainment, management and analysis of data to derive insights useful for supporting decision-making in marketing campaigns. Organizations utilize various digital marketing analytics techniques to make business decisions concerning marketing, product development, sales, inventory management and other company departments' operations. (Cao et al. 2019,73).

Marketing Analytics components addressing is regarded as an efficient marketing department tool, especially for efficient and timely customer data collection and analysis. Technique utilization supports complex decision-making that concerns for example observation of a whole digital customer journey, which in turn contributes to creation of personalized marketing campaigns. (Dilmegani 2023; Cao et al. 2019,75) Moreover, concerning different social media channels, marketing analytics tools enable to track social media performance of the company regularly to get all the relevant customer insights for further analysis, which will foster segmentation and digital marketing campaigns preparation. Regular evaluations maintained as a practice in an



enterprise helps to analyze the actual performance regarding the way social media pages' visitors are interacting with the organization and assist in staying on track with business goals, as well as in comprehending where changes are needed to further identify weak points to be eliminated. (Järvinen & Karjaluoto 2015,127)

Figure 9 below illustrates the importance of marketing analytics usage for company operations. According to a survey results, customer and market analysis is the first function for which marketing analytics is utilized, followed by the contribution of marketing analytics tools implementation to online operations accomplishment. (Dilmegani 2023)

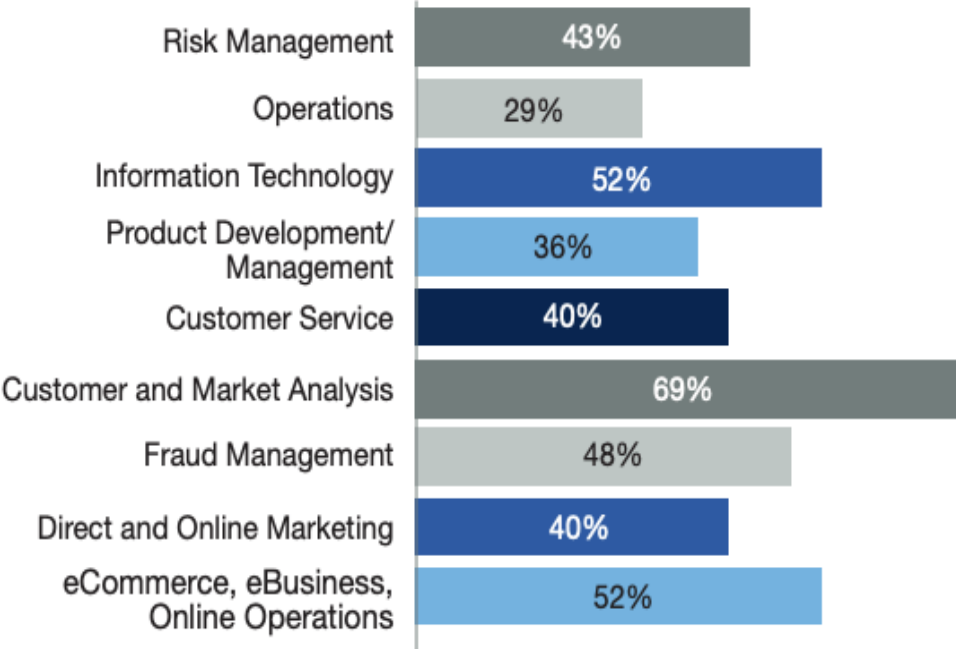


Figure 9. Marketing Analytics and business functions (Dilmegani 2023)

Efficient data management is one of the crucial challenges that marketing professionals face. Marketing Analytics fosters the data examination and analysis conducted with the aim of the evaluation of marketing activities performance. Analytics' techniques and tools enable the company to understand consumer behavior and facilitate the amendment of marketing campaigns. By keeping track of key metrics, a company can figure out the areas where improvement or changes are needed. (Saas Insights 2023)

Successful marketing analytics strategy comprises accurate and timely data collection, data sorting, analysis of the data for trends and patterns identification and consideration of future actions according to the results of the analysis. To benefit from marketing analytics' techniques utilization, digital marketers need to develop a clear plan connected with the data usage prior to data collection itself, where definite steps are undergone to arrive at profound understanding of information retrieved and analyzed. (Domo 2023; Cao et al. 2019,74)

### **2.3.6 Web Analytics**

In this study, Marketing Analytics is considered from the perspective of Web Analytics, which implies a technique that gathers clickstream information regarding source of website traffic, such as search engines, social links or e-mails. Web analytics relies heavily on data and helps to make accurate decisions regarding the website's performance. It gives valuable insights that assists marketers in website conversions analysis, website user experience improvement, search engine ranking increase and website visitors' analysis.

The examples of metrics that are tracked with web analytics include bounce rate, monthly unique visitors, page visits, total website conversion rate, source of traffic, and some others. (Gandhi 2022) Web analytics is used by more than a half million of the most visited websites around the world, and partly the popularity of the tool is justified by the fact that some Web Analytics systems can be utilized free of charge. However, since the data obtainment is significantly improved with the help of Web Analytics, the core challenge in the measurement of Web Analytics effectiveness is to interpret the data gathered in a way that benefits marketing decision-making.

Before the adoption of diverse Web Analytics metrics, it is indispensable for the enterprise to design an appropriate metrics organization that is connected with the primary marketing goals of the company. An important part of the metrics system identification is the determination of core KPIs related to the main marketing goals and prioritization of them over the metrics that appear secondary. The importance of metrics that appeared secondary needs to be assessed according to the data they may provide in accordance with the predefined target KPIs. (Järvinen & Karjaluoto 2015,124-126)

One of the main Web Analytics systems is Google Analytics, which presents several important metrics that should be tracked by a company. For example, it is important to observe how many times visitors are returning to firm's site with the help of Sessions metric. Moreover, an important Google Analytics metric that should be rigorously tracked is Acquisition. It is relevant since it shows how customers get to the website of the organization. In addition, if a company aims at

effective digital marketing strategy implementation and attainment of increased awareness via social media, the metric seems viable in order to understand which channels appear the best for the promotion of the organization. Another metric, which is Social media engagement, measures the number of clicks, likes, shares, and mentions that social updates receive and consequently facilitates the decision-making regarding targeting and segmentation strategies. (Tiago & Verissimo 2014, 704)

### **2.3.7 Digital Marketing strategy development and implementation**

Digitalization has recently become an indispensable process in many B2B markets, including transportation, logistics, manufacturing, telecommunication, purchasing, textile industry and many others. Rapid digitalization of businesses has stimulated the changes in customers' behavior and has led to an appearance of new B2B customers' trends, and therefore marketers need to respond to those trends by effective digital marketing strategies implementation addressed to generate and deliver customer value. (Kim & Moon 2021,3)

The crucial factor of an effective digital marketing strategy is alignment of traditional marketing campaigns with newest digital channels utilization. The strategy should correspond with the broad business mission and goals and annual plans of every company and support brand management and development. It should be also consistent with the core types and portfolios of customers who are engaged with the company via several digital channels. Therefore, it should support the whole digital customer journey starting from the initial contact of the customer with the company, followed by turning leads to customers and nurturing customer loyalty that fosters customer retention. (Chaffey 2022, 35)

The core component of a multichannel customer journey that is facilitated by digital marketing strategy implementation is complete integration with the help of the Internet. There are two leading perspectives that should be considered while evaluating the role of the internet in communication with customers. The first one is communication from the company side with the customer, where the firm needs to track, assess and analyze the way traditional marketing channels are complemented by internet technologies during the whole process of attracting and retaining customers. (Kim & Moon 2021,2)

The second one is established and maintained communication from the customer side with the organization, when the firm needs to evaluate how and what level of customer service is delivered via the Internet and other marketing channels and how customer experience is created and integrated using all the channels. These two perspectives are addressed for instance when social

media or email marketing campaigns generate leads since people enquire about products or services via web forms, email or social media depending on the convenience that each method presents to each customer. (Chaffey 2022, 46)

The core digital channels that are needed for digital marketing strategy integration, which are e-mail, phone, web channels and personal communication, are presented in Figure 10. Figure demonstrates that those channels should be utilized by customer, company and intermediary on a mutual basis to benefit from the integration.

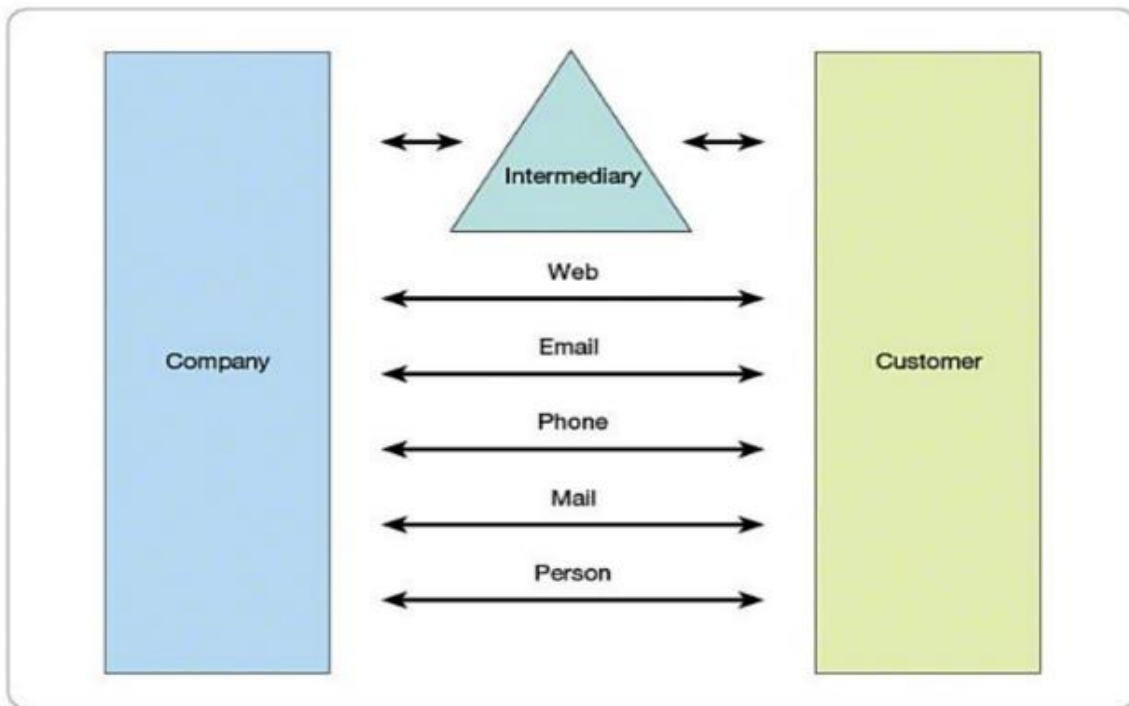


Figure 10. Core channels enabling digital marketing strategy integration (Chaffey 2022, 47)

Definite steps need to be addressed by a B2B company to benefit from successful digital marketing strategy adoption. The first step is to clearly define the goals that should be achieved in a definite timeframe, whether it is a week, month or a year. These goals can be determined by the key metrics that should be determined and tracked, for example click rate or number of website visitors. (Alvarez 2020)

The second step involves customer segmentation, defining buyer personas and consideration of a buyer behavior and preferences of each customer type to enable effective personalization in strategy implementation. The third step concerns analysis and identification of core activities,

tactics and tools to utilize and design of a schedule for the tasks' accomplishment with clear and realistic deadlines statement. On this step a marketer should start with current marketing activities' analysis that firm embraces and then to figure out what activities should be added or replaced. (Alvarez 2020)

The next step is performance measurement, which implies reviewing the results of digital marketing campaigns and analysis of the effectiveness. For example, one of the important points to consider is the definite number of leads generated from a contact form placed on the website. For performance tracking and further improvements consideration, it is also essential to figure out how the lead reached the company. The final step is a progress review, when the company needs to check the effectiveness and relevancy of a strategy and the recommended schedule is a review made once in three months. (Ghorbani et al. 2021,163-165; Alvarez 2020)

### **3 CUSTOMER VALUE CREATION**

#### **3.1 Value proposition**

Customer value proposition (CVP) is a company statement that outlines why the customers should choose a company's services or products over competitors' offerings. It is a strategic principle utilized by firms in order to communicate with and deliver to customers the way a firm provides value to them. (Payne et al. 2017, 468)

Value proposition in business domain can be regarded as a promise to customers of a value that is delivered to them via products or services provision. It aims to give a customer a compelling reason to make a purchase or order a service by outlining the benefits of the service or product and explaining the way it may solve the problems of customers better than competitors. It is a persuasive statement that should induce a customer to try a service a product by indicating its relevancy and usefulness. (Laja 2023)

An efficient value proposition should be visible when a customer encounters the company for the first time, for example company's motto or vision should be highlighted on a company website across all the webpages. Moreover, value proposition should be written using the language of the customer and to understand what language is appropriate, it is efficient to conduct regular interviews with customers and receive relevant feedback. Successful value proposition of an enterprise should be clear and persuasive enough to communicate the definite outcome the customer receives with the service or product usage and to explain why the company's offering is worth accepting. (Payne et al. 2017, 469)

### **3.2 Value dimensions and creation process**

Customer value generation process requires the identification of core services or products that customers demand (Baran & Galka 2016). Creating customer value means provision of perceived benefits of a service and product which outweigh the price paid as well as the maximization of those benefits. Understanding the customer value assists a company in more effectively attracting potential customers and better servicing current ones. Customer value is measured according to the customers' time, money and energy and the value creation process for customers includes provision of time value, non-financial and financial value. (Haksever et al. 2004,295)

Financial component is regarded as a sum of company expenses connected with a definite customer, what the customer yields regarding the revenue and how long a customer stays with the company. (Zwart 2019). The value for money customers receive when a firm offers products or services that has high quality and affordable prices and then excellent customer service is provided when the product or service meets and exceeds customers' needs. Efficient customer value creation involves collection of data about customers' needs as well and analysis of the feedback customers provide for further improvements concerning the products' quality or services' quality. (Haksever et al. 2004, 295-296)

Non-financial value is generated when a company provides such products or services benefits that perfectly match predefined ones. It also appears after a decent and credible service at affordable price is offered. (Haksever et al. 2004,296) To generate nonfinancial value, Superior customer service need to be prioritized since it assists companies in customer acquisition and retention enhancement, in turn contributing to the company's success. Continuous engagement with customers also fosters the achievement of a high level of customer service since it enables to track and adjust to customers' preferences. (Nasir 2017,1181)

Time value appears when a service of product save client's time and therefore companies try to provide time value through upgrading the existing features or creation of a new ones. Besides, time value is also created when the services or products provide benefits for a long time. Even more value is created when the company advances the duration of benefits' duration as customers prefer durable services and products with extended lifecycle. Moreover, this value is generated when the services or products are provided when clients need, especially in terms of services provision, where the opportunity to have a service in needed time significantly affects time value creation. (Haksever et al. 2004,298)

Customer value creation process involves identification of customer needs, value dimensions and the ways of customer feedback obtainment. It is essential to understand that customer value changes and evolves throughout the whole customer journey and therefore to be able to track the changes and adjust the activities accordingly. Moreover, in B2B marketplace value creation process comprises the profound justification of price charged for the service or product as B2B customers are interested in reasonable buying and consider financial components with increased accuracy and attention. Payment methods should consequently be made convenient for the customer for long-lasting relationships establishment. In addition, fast and convenient communication with the company is a crucial value creation contributor along with the availability of communication modes provided. (Mahajan 2020, 120)

### **3.3 The value of customer experience**

Customer Experience Management (CEM) is a profound strategic management process that includes a consideration of all customer touchpoints that are connected with the service or product offered. (Mashingaidze 2014,54). It implies the formation of a strategic plan that is targeted at memorable customer journey creation and consolidation of a positive attitude shaped towards the company (Ceesay 2020,171).

Experience of the customer is worth addressing by companies striving to beat fierce competition and to facilitate the ease of making purchases. Competitive advantage is achieved by a company that addresses the activities connected with excellent customer experience provision management for customer loyalty increase. (Menezes 2019) Moreover, value of customer experience is regarded by companies as a determinant of customer satisfaction and a core driver of digital transformation tools implementation as well as innovation management (Alwan & Alshurideh 2022, 1558).

To provide superior customer experience, the company needs to track every touchpoint when the customer interacts with the company, starting from initial contact to post-purchase activities provision (Homburg et al. 2017,388). CEM focuses on the comprehension and analysis of the customer attitudes towards the firm that appear when a client encounters the company or make a first purchase (Mashingaidze 2014,56).

To follow the interactions of the customers with the company, the customer journey map need to be analysed, which includes several stages. First comes the discovery, implying that a client gets to know about the firm via word-of-mouth, social media channels, or by other ways. Second stage means comparison, when customers search for firms' competitors and analyse their offering

comparing with the company's ones. Third stage is purchasing, which is the beginning of customer loyalty and retention formation. Support is last stage, implying that the company efforts are put on excellent customer service creation. (Zeynab et al. 2018, 241-243)

There are several ways to improve the customer experience in B2B marketplace. First, a company needs to nurture and maintain customer centricity to ensure that a positive interaction happens during all the stages of a customer journey and to show every customer that he or she is valued (Alwan & Alshurideh 2022, 1560). Secondly, personalization is highly demanded especially in B2B markets, where customers appreciate when a company offers something specific and of value to the customer. Customization should be maintained in every customer touchpoint, from the initial interactions to the best service or product offering. Thirdly, customer education should be prioritised, when a company gets to know customers' preferences and needs and provides an advice that would reduce the fear or uncertainty regarding a purchase and foster long-term customer relationships foundation. Finally, post-purchase support should be offered to every customer, which implies the practical advice given regarding the best usage of a product or service as well as staying in touch with customers not to overlook the changes in their needs overtime. (Morgan 2022)

### **3.4 Customer value measurement in digital business**

To measure the value that a company delivers in a digital business, a multichannel synthesis is required. It implies a set of definite activities targeted at superior customer experience achievement through coordination of channels used by a customer for reaching a company. These channels include, for example, direct promotion, social media platforms, or personal e-mails sending (Baran & Galka 2016).

Marketing Analytics tools enable to leverage customer profiles via the obtainment of information from various channels and by that means to assist a firm in communication with the customers in a way that suits them most (Cao et al. 2019, 75). Synthesis of multiple channels enables to comprehend customers' behaviours better and facilitates increase in marketing actions' efficiency of alignment with clients' expectations, that in turn contributes to valuable and long-lasting connections establishment (Kannan & Li 2017, 23).

From the perspective of service provision, all company resources and capabilities are leveraged in order to deliver a service to the customer. For service provider, customer value is generated when the company supports everyday activities of their customers with offerings that assist the



client in definite business or life goals accomplishment. (Grönroos 2017,126) Digital marketing service provision has increased in relevance in B2B segment and many companies nowadays utilize digital marketing agencies' services for promoting business online. There are different types of digital marketing agencies that have appeared on the market, such as SEO agencies, social media agencies, web design companies and other (Simon 2021).

There are several notable benefits of addressing service provider offering when endeavoring to adopt digital marketing activities. Firstly, when a company offers digital marketing services, it usually adopts multichannel marketing, which implies reaching customers and interaction with them via multiple diverse channels, such as email, blogs, and others. Core purpose is to generate an organic traffic to customers' website via inbound marketing, search engine ranking optimization and facilitation of digital customer journey throughout the channels. Secondly, an agency assists a client in generating more qualified leads that have a high probability of purchasing customers' products or services. It makes a consumer and market research, identifies the target audience and creates digital marketing campaigns according to clients' marketing objectives and sales funnel. Moreover, the service provider activities contribute to customer's brand establishment and online visibility enhancement, which in turn promotes the clients' business. Finally, a digital marketing agency performs activities and possess skills that a marketing team of a client may lack, therefore by allowing an agency to adopt digital marketing agency, a client company may focus on other core business operations. (Simon 2021)

### **3.5 Main measurement metrics**

There are several performance measurement metrics that digital marketers need to track to ensure that superior digital marketing services are delivered. For example, the Conversion Rate and Customer Lifetime Value are one of the most significant digital marketing metrics to be addressed. The Conversion Rate poses significance since it reveals what percentage of the traffic is performing what the company expects and therefore the firm can make efforts to find the best way to target the audience. (Firk et al. 2016, 44)

High conversion rate implies that the target audience enjoys the content created and therefore aims to stay longer in the webpage and explore the company more. It also implies that a post was relevant to the offer and it helps the organization to analyze the figures retrieved and ameliorate content creation accordingly. The success of the current results received via the metric tracking should be analyzed using Conversion Reports, which allow an enterprise to track website goals based on business objectives. (Alwan & Alshurideh 2022, 1563)

The Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) is a relevant metric that assists in marketing campaigns planning, which can be done with more confidence. CLV enables to segment customers according to the value a firm may deliver to each customer since the metric assists in better understanding of diverse customer types makes customization faster and more efficient. Concept also allows to plan in advance the expenditure connected with advertising and personalization activities. In addition, CLV analysis enables to address all customer journey stages since the metric answers the questions about the place, time, and frequency of purchases made by clients and answering those questions can efficiently reveal the issues or problems that may have been overlooked before. (Firk et al. 2016, 45-46)

Other important metrics that should be addressed are Customer Retention Rate and Churn Rate, which should be tracked simultaneously. Customer Retention Rate implies the number of clients staying with the company after a definite time period and it reveals the customer experience received. Customer retention rate assists companies in better understanding what customers value and what makes customers stay with the company, therefore the metric contributes to further service improvement decisions and activities. High retention rate means that the company develops a solid and trusted brand. Customer churn rate shows the number of customers who have left the company and stopped using its services or products. It is a total number of customers measured within a definite timeframe and it reflects the overall business development. Customer churn rate and customer retention rate metrics are interconnected since for example a 15 percent churn rate means that customer retention rate is 75 percent. Tracking these two metrics enables a company to more accurately predict future profit gains and make corresponding decisions. (Lafontaine 2022)

## **4 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **4.1 Case study research**

One of the primary aims of the case study method is to analyze definite behavioral patterns and collect valuable information that may be further generalized. A crucial benefit of a case study is provision of an opportunity to collect a considerable amount of information and investigate a hypothesis in an experimental setting, which facilitates new insights gathering and further research ideas appearance. (Cherry 2022; Quintão et al. 2020, 272)

The case study method comprises several core activities such as information obtainment, data consideration planning and data analysis. The results of a case study are reviewed and then utilized to further create generic theoretical investigations regarding the observed topic and facilitate further studies accomplishment process. The case study method logic relies on practical evidence and real relevant domain-specific data collected for thorough specific social phenomenon investigation, analysis and interpretation. (Quintão et al. 2020, 272)

As a case study research method is based on an exploration of the phenomenon in real-life context, it can be regarded eligible for the research as the aim is to figure out how a company exploits digital marketing tools to create customer value. In the research the case study is accomplished via collaboration with a company and implies a descriptive case study, since information obtained from some company representatives is analyzed via the comparison with the existing theory (Cherry 2022). Studying a real-life case is an appropriate and efficient strategy that is chosen to collect and analyze the needed information and observations and align with the existing theoretical background.

## **4.2 Case company**

RS Digital was founded in 2015 and is headquartered in Ukraine. The team consists of designers, web programmers, content managers and SEO specialists. RS Digital has started its operations with SEO services provision and every year it has been introducing new competencies for clients in order to receive comprehensive solutions for promoting goods and services on the Internet. Now the company specializes in the profound promotion of businesses coming from different industries via provision of a set of digital marketing services: SEO, Web Analytics, SMM, E-mail and Content marketing. (RS Digital 2023)

RS Digital can be regarded as a born digital company. Born-digital companies are perceived as organizations whose resources and operations are based on leveraging digital technologies as a crucial competency and competitive advantage. Such companies concentrate on user experience and on making that experience unique and excellent perfect for a definite person. Born-digital firms rely on data and tend to decide according to specific metrics. (Panetta 2016)

During their work, company professionals have collaborated with companies from various industries, including art objects, manufacturing, premium online boutiques and events (RS Digital 2023). The company is currently growing and aims at new customers' acquisition. The competitive advantage of RS Digital lies in effective customization, resources utilization and cost leadership strategy. The company managers communicate directly with customers and create individual

digital promotion plans with every customer, enabling timely and effective communication. It provides a well-planned set of digital marketing services at a price that is lower than the average in the niche. Figure 11 below depicts the logo of the company.



Figure 11. Logo of the company.

There are several crucial reasons for choosing the company for collaboration. Firstly, the company employees' activities, working process and arrangement as well as communication with current and potential clients are observed during the working time as a Marketing manager. The way company reaches and engages with its customers' fosters customer value creation and therefore the company appeared as a suitable partner for the study accomplishment.

Secondly, the company has developed and maintained a clear set of advantages that it possesses over competitors and that form a unique value proposition. These definite advantages are based on an industry and customer analysis of the niche in which a company operates and positively affect customer value creation. Therefore, for the research objectives accomplishment company operations provide a significant practical contribution and relevant insights.

Finally, the team of the company consists of specialists located in different cities and even countries, which makes it interesting to figure out the way the company delivers customer value to various kinds of customers located in diverse parts of the world, meanwhile investigating the way digital business activities are conducted.

### **4.3 Data collection**

Semi-structured interview is utilized for data acquisition as it is a significant kind of evidence of a case study evidence (Saunders et al., 2016, 724). Crucial aim of the interviews held was to discover practical implications regarding the way digital marketing service provider company generates customer value creation via set of digital marketing activities adoption and strategy creation and implementation.

This kind of interview is suitable for data obtainment as it enables to open-ended questions asking according to interviewees' answers, enabling the flexibility during the conversation. The semi-structured interview stimulates an interactive discussion between the researcher and interviewees and enables respondents to provide detailed answers and reveal their own comments and viewpoints (Saunders et al., 2016,723).

Semi-structured interview mode is regarded as detailed regarding the planning and creation of predetermined themes to cover, however the wording of questions as well as their order may be different and can be adjusted to each person interviewed (Stolle 2022). Themes and corresponding questions were formulated in alignment with the theoretical background and research questions. Nevertheless, despite following the structure of the interviews, each interview flow was different depending on additional questions that have arisen.

Interviews were conducted with the Content specialist, SEO specialist, CEO, and a customer of the company via zoom application or a phone. Interview themes involved interviewee's background information, role and activities performed with customer benefits stated and familiarity with the project management tasks. All the interview questions were formed in alignment with the study's research questions, theoretical framework, and the study context. Appendix 1 outlines questions asked during the interviews.

Problems connected with internet or mobile connection were avoided as much as possible to enable the comfortable communication process. Open-ended questions were asked and they were composed in a way to achieve a profound understanding of digital marketing activities implemented in the firm. All interviews were recorded in one month and in predetermined time convenient for interviewees to obtain the relevant interview data efficiently. Table 2 outlines the summary of interviews conducted.

<b>Interviewee and job title</b>	<b>Interview type</b>	<b>Interview length (in minutes)</b>
CEO (Interviewee 1)	phone	33
SEO specialist (Interviewee 2)	zoom	45
Content manager (Interviewee 3)	zoom	26
Customer A (Interviewee 4)	phone	32

Table 2. Summary of interviews

Information obtained was sufficient for analysis and enabled an interviewer to understand better digital marketing focus maintained by the enterprise. The responses were detailed enough, and few additional questions have assisted in comprehending the whole picture of activities addressed by firm. Table 3 illustrates the information of each person interviewed.

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Specialization/Role</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Work experience</b>
Interviewee 1	CEO	Male	5 years
Interviewee 2	SEO, Marketing Analytics	Male	7 years
Interviewee 3	Content marketing and SMM	Female	6 years
Interviewee 4	Customer	Male	Not relevant

Table 3. Information on interviewees

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

Study addresses thematic analysis, which implies coding for the data to identify the themes for further analysis and data set reading and identification of patterns usually with research participants. Moreover, thematic analysis can be utilized regardless of the research approach chosen, implying a deductive or inductive one. This kind of analysis is frequently used for qualitative data analysis since it enables flexibility for the researcher to comprehend and interpret the qualitative data. (Saunders et al. 2016, 578-579)

Four interviews conducted were recorded depending on the method of the interview, to ensure that the information obtained could be further processed and analyzed. Processing of the information retrieved was accomplished via listening to the recorded interviews, transcription of spoken material to the text and consideration of notes taken during the interview process. The time taken to transcribe the whole amount of data was predetermined and considered in the scheduling process of study accomplishment.

For streamlining data obtainment and analysis, recorded interviews conducted via Zoom were reviewed and information was transcribed to text via Microsoft Word software. The interview conducted via phone was recorded in Zadarma service for further transcription in Word application. When interviews' information was available in text format, it was reviewed, analyzed and replenished with the notes taken by the author during the interview process to analyze the whole set of data and to make viable observations and conclusions.

#### **4.5 Reliability and validity**

Validity and reliability are main research measures that are utilized to consider and analyze the accuracy, quality and consistency of a research study. Both reliability and validity should be addressed by the researcher to ensure the study quality and to assess the practical relevance of the study for future research.

Reliability of research implies necessity of the accomplished study to provide reliable and coherent findings according to the chosen research method, considering that other researchers may arrive at similar conclusions and similar observations (Saunders et al. 2016, 725). For ensuring reliability of the research, all measurement methods in the research are applied consistently. The interview as a data collection method was carefully planned to ensure that the same interview scheme was followed for all the interviewees.

Validity of research implies the extent to which the defined data collection methods are capable of measuring what it was meant to measure, and the extent to which the study results present the issues that they claimed to be about (Saunders et al. 2016, 731). External type refers to the ability to generalize results with regard to different environments. Since single case study method is utilized, external validity is more difficult to measure and justify compared with a multiple case study method. However, to ensure external validity, the study presents the reasons for case company selection, outlines the context of a study and identifies patterns for generalization for further research. (Quintão et al. 2020, 268-270)

To ensure that the validity and reliability measures are followed, interview topics and questions were not announced to interviewees. It is important for the research quality to obtain data that comprises genuine viewpoints of interview participants and that is not subjected to reveal any predefined opinions. The interviewee was objective during all the interviews held and tried to follow the predetermined structure and subjects to be discussed to avoid bias and follow the research purpose carefully.

As previously stated, when the research findings are generalizable, external validity can be justified. Research gap of the study refers to the insufficient knowledge regarding impact that digital marketing activities adoption process has on customer value creation in B2B since the literature on the topic is still scarce. Therefore, for precise generalization of results, further research needs to be addressed regarding this particular issue and various case companies in different industries should be observed. Main study objective is to replenish existing knowledge base concerning topic studied and to give a contribution to future studies appearance rather than to generalize the results. Future research directions are identified and set in Chapter 6.

## **5 FINDINGS**

The empirical part results and observations are outlined in chapter. Thematic analysis was held after processing of the data from the interviews and the core topics of the chapter are presented according to information received and analyzed during and after the interviews. During the interviews held, the general questions about the interviewees' relation to the company were asked, followed by the questions connected with the interconnection of digital marketing strategy implementation and value creation with consideration of customer and employees' viewpoints.

### **5.1 E-business project management**

The project management connected with e-business is a complex process that involves several specific as well as common business projects' accomplishment steps and activities. To reach an efficient customer value delivery, project management practices should be prioritized and maintained constantly by all company representatives. Project management should start with a detailed plan creation, since there are multiple objectives, processes and skills that are required to efficiently leverage e-business opportunities. The core step in the planning process should be the understanding of actions that should be performed as well as the clear definition of the scope and the objectives of promoting business online.



One of the main principles of case company that foster customer value provision is clear project goals formation and their following throughout the whole process of project accomplishment. Interviews conducted have revealed that for customer value creation the key business objectives are outlined and discussed via the arrangement of a first meeting with the client, which is preferably held face-to-face. The more trustworthy and mutually beneficial relationships are nurtured between a company representative and customer during that meeting, the more information a firm may receive for successful project realization and the more value company may continuously provide to a client. During the meeting, the customer gives detailed information regarding the goals that need to be achieved via digital marketing efforts:

*“These goals are usually connected with lead generation, and they may include website traffic increase, website management, content creation and others. Before the meeting, a company specialist conducts a website audit and develops a plan for the customer, which outlines what activities need to be performed. The plan is focused on SEO and content marketing activities consideration, whereas SMM, E-mail marketing services are offered to customer as additional and included in the final project plan when the customer needs them.”* (Interviewee 1)

*“When we were creating a plan for business promotion, the main goal that I emphasized and that was clear to me is increase of website visibility on the Internet. My company is young and for the moment of starting the usage of RS Digital’ services the challenge was that the website had been just created and did not bring many customers. It was a problem since my company specializes in selling protective clothes and it is essential to attract customers to visit the website, where the assortment of products is presented with pictures, sizes, availability status, delivery terms and other important information. When I discussed the situation with the specialist, and except SEO activities and website support he had suggested to increase brand visibility and enhance brand awareness also with the help of SMM and explained briefly the way it works and how it can benefit my firm. Finally, project plan for my organization included those SMM promotion activities with a separate plan for them and standard SEO and website optimization services.”* (Interviewee 4)

Another significant stage of a project plan should be the consideration of financial resources connected with the implementation according to the amount of website work needed or costs of customization of e-business software, for example. Financial management and proper budget

allocation is essential for customer value creation since it enables to honestly justify and communicate the prices of services offered to every client as well as honestly report on the amount of investment done for every activity performed. Along with other significant stages in the project planning, which are time management, schedule creation, budget allocation or consideration of processes involved, the monitoring stage is also a crucial one. (Interviewee 1)

When the project is in implementation stage, it requires constant monitoring held by responsible specialists since there is a risk of the project failing to adhere to the created and agreed project plan due to issues such as unexpected technical requirements, significant changes in target user preferences or scarcity of resources that may appear unexpectedly due to definite circumstances. *“Monitoring stage as well affects customer value creation as it shows the customer that even if some deviations from the plan happen, specialists are ready to adjust practices accordingly and continue flawless project accomplishment”.* (Interviewees 1 and 2)

Efficient customer service and customer retention practices in RS Digital are embedded during the whole project accomplishment process. For example, every month a specialist responsible for the project calls a client and asks a predetermined set of questions regarding business performance and customer satisfaction. The call is usually aimed at ensuring that the customer is aware of the results of works accomplished and at figuring out the degree towards which customer expectations are met. Moreover, during the call specialist asks a customer whether he or she has encountered some difficulties with website utilization or leads processing and whether questions or suggestions regarding further work have appeared. (Interviewees 2 and 4). By that means both the specialist and the customer ensures the mutually beneficial, trustworthy and long-lasting relationships establishment, which in turn increases customer retention and enhances customer service.

Efficient customer service is reflected via constant proposition of new ideas and ways of business performance improvement, which is regarded by case company customers as one of the main value creating factors. For instance, during the website optimization and SEO works accomplished, a specialist responsible for the project constantly offers new options or improvements that could be done with the website, which generate additional expenses, but contribute to overall website performance improvement. (Interviewee 4). When a specialist sees that the website is not ranking well on some queries, it is suggested to customer to consider SMM campaign adoption, which will stimulate website traffic and supplement SEO efforts. When a Content Manager sees that visual type of content appears as the most appealing for customers of a client company, it would be suggested and offered to customer to invest more in different

types of visual content publication, presented by a project manager, with justification of types and the expected outcomes. According to customers' feedback, when specialists offer something new that could be done for streamlining business promotion, it shows to client that a company cares about successful website promotion and strives to generate true value for the customer.

## **5.2 Organizational culture and value creation**

It has been acknowledged that for an efficient value creation process, customers' needs and preferences should be the primary focus, which should be embedded in the corporate culture of a company. All the employees need to share common value creation principles and the firm strategy, mission and vision, as well as main business operations should be aligned with value creation principles. Those principles should be in turn embedded in every activity that a company representative performs to pursue the broad company mission. (Firk et al. 2016, 43-45)

Organizational culture maintained in RS Digital is supported by the leadership style of the CEO, which was pointed out by interviewees and can be described as a combination of autocratic and democratic styles. The combination enables CEO to control all company practices as well as to efficiently communicate the general and administrative issues to customers, which impacts customer satisfaction and generates value. From an autocratic perspective, the CEO expects subordinates to adhere to definite organizational structure rules and accomplish all the projects in time. As an authoritarian manager, he asserts strong authority and has total decision-making power regarding every project (Interviewee 2).

From democratic management style perspective, CEO of case company always listens to various opinions and suggestions of subordinates and takes advantage of collaborative discussion held on current issues on weekly basis. He tries to encourage and stimulate the participants of the team to share their thoughts, ideas, suggestions, and potential solutions for every problem that arises during a project work. The goal of CEO management is the achievement of such an organization of work when there are no conflicts in a team at all or when they all can be resolved quickly and conclusions are made together. (Interviewee 1)

One of the core components of customer value creation is quick response to clients' problems appearance and their fast resolution. For that aim in the company all the employees benefit from created and established communication and collaboration rules that foster timely customers' concerns addressing. The crucial component of organizational culture that affects customer satisfaction is efficient communication practices maintained among all employees who are responsible for a definite project connected with a particular client:

*“Every customer journey is treated as a separate project, within which all the responsible employees, for example SEO specialist, Content manager and other specialists have equal roles in making decisions regarding every project. For example, in the company there is a special scheme established, which implies problem statement, then collection of all available data that can be used for problem solving and the proposition of a possible solution. When all the components of the scheme are outlined, the solutions are considered and discussed among all the employees responsible for the project.” (Interviewee 1)*

*“All involved in the project workers have a chance to utilize their knowledge and skills to try to find the best solution for a problem together with a Sales manager and the client ultimately benefits from the best offered solution that was created and agreed by all responsible employees.” (Interviewee 2)*

The client-oriented vision of the firm is usually emphasized and discussed during monthly company meetings, where all the employees have a chance to discuss problems that have arisen during the month and analyze which solutions appeared the most beneficial for the customer. Except monthly meetings, a SEO specialist has two or three meetings with junior SEO specialists, where they discuss projects' accomplishment process and a SEO specialist ensures that subordinates communicate efficiently with clients and are always ready to fix the possible problems as fast as possible to foster customer value creation. Moreover, company development process is addressed during the main meeting held once in a month, and during that meeting especially the number of new clients and projects acquired as well as company promotion and development measures are discussed.

In addition, organizational culture of RS Digital can be characterized by supportive and encouraging atmosphere and team spirit. One of company practices involves step-by-step support and guidance temporarily provided to junior specialists during new projects accomplishment, which is done to ensure that all the projects' connected activities are kept under control. The practice will be also maintained when RS Digital will hire new specialists as the team is going to be enlarged in pursuit of company business goals:

*“Currently we are aiming at hiring few junior SEO specialists, who will take the projects of Senior SEO specialist as well as work on new projects' accomplishment and collaboration with new clients. During first two or three months' or sometimes even half a year depending on the level of junior specialist' expertise, new workers*

*will receive practical guidance from a supervisor and become acquainted with the work system maintained in company. Then, when problems or customers' concerns arise, Junior specialists may ask a Senior specialist for help and together they will find a solution and communicate it to the client. Later, when a Senior SEO specialist sees that a Junior specialist becomes more competent and independent, he or she is encouraged to make decisions and communicate with clients without assistance.” (Interviewee 1)*

Strong following of company regulations is a core component of company culture. RS Digital employees follow the rules of the meeting that enables to structure the information discussed. The rules are the policy of the company, it cannot be canceled and the actions described in it become "sacred" for all employees. It allows team members to rationally plan their time and creates a sense of stability. The regulations indicate date and day, time and place where each meeting will be held. The purpose of the rules of the meeting is not training, instruction, encouragement or punishment, but development of a common action plan. The main mistake in the meeting is that the participants come unprepared, therefore it is advised to communicate topics in advance and prepare for them. Rules of the meeting is an efficient tool not to deviate from the established regulations and not miss important actions is the protocol. The meeting minutes are filled out by hand by the moderator, who before the next meeting checks the fulfillment of all previously set tasks. (Interviewee 1)

Although company regulations and organizational practices are not directly affecting customer value creation, but they are designed to assist employees to pursue the core mission of the company, which is to be truly valuable for customers and bring benefits to their businesses. Strict rules following helps all the company representatives to structure and revise information regarding every client and to correspond the project realization process with company values and key practices maintained. When a worker prepares for the meeting, he or she addresses the problems, analyzes current situation regarding each project accomplishment and figures out suggestions for further activities and possible solutions.

During the meeting, when every worker has a chance to explain and discuss the situation regarding own projects, customer problems or concerns, all the challenges and difficulties are discussed then together in a team in accordance with company practices maintained and therefore solutions could be found quickly by all team members. Moreover, one of the sections of the meeting rules is devoted to discussion regarding newest market and industry trends as well as discussion of new customer relationship management tools and practices, that are regarded

the most efficient for case company domain. That section is placed and discussed in the beginning of the meeting, therefore it enables every worker to analyze how new industry practices or innovations could be implemented by a firm for every client, that in turn would foster customer value creation and delivery as well as case company development.

### **5.3 SEO and Marketing Analytics activities**

Marketing Analytics techniques and activities have been acknowledged by multiple researchers as a core tool that enables the performance measurement of digital marketing activities. Web Analytics is in turn an indispensable tool that justifies the way digital marketing activities implementation benefit organizations by analysis and processing campaigns' data with metrics system utilization. Web Analytics components are regarded as core initiators of most digital marketing strategy formation steps. (Järvinen & Karjaluo 2015, 117)

SEO activities play a crucial role in digital marketing strategy implementation provided by the company to its clients. To provide relevant and decent service, SEO specialists strictly follow the timetable of tasks accomplishment for every client to provide valuable service and generate customer value. For example, in each month definite dates are assigned for reports preparation, control of project worktables, preparation of new tasks that need to be accomplished, for control of additional services design and offering as well as for communication with clients via phone or zoom. This set of activities enables workers to foster efficient, structured and timely project accomplishment, which is found especially valuable for company customers (Interviewee 2).

The timely implementation of the SEO specialist's tasks from the predefined plan positively affects the ranking of the customer's website, leading to an increase in website positions and, as a result, in website traffic. Case company customers, as highlighted by interviewees, see the value for them in increased amount of requests that they receive via a website. The average increase in website visitors among case company customers has been roughly 20 % after one or two months since the start of website promotion. The figure can be even higher especially for those customers, who are running an e-commerce business, for example having an online store:

“My online store was visited mainly due to traditional advertising modes, for example for a definite amount of time I was using billboards. When I started to collaborate with RS Digital, after two months of website promotion I have started to receive about 32% of all customers from the issuance of leading search engine, in my case it is Google as it was primarily chosen for SEO activities and website optimization. Definitely not all the visitors became

leads and then my customers, but the traffic increase was inspiring and truly valuable for the development of my business. My profit increased not drastically at the beginning, but the increase in customers' number has stimulated different company operations improvement and sales department activities' optimization, which in turn gradually affected the positive changes in sales figures" (Interviewee 4)

SEO activities' importance, as highlighted by Interviewee 2, will increase even more in the near future as they are regarded as main facilitators of superior user experience provision. Moreover, SEO is regarded as a rapidly developing field and therefore specialists in this niche need to constantly educate themselves and keep track of the most successful practices. The more practices are tried and implemented and the more trends are recognized, the more value customers receive in terms of website traffic increase and business promotion.

There are several skills and characteristics that SEO specialists should possess to coordinate tasks and activities and adopt the most efficient practices. There is a definite interdependence between the amount of needed skills and customer value creation, since the more skills a specialist has, the more he or she can utilize them to create and implement a campaign that would best suit client's business and generate satisfying results regarding website promotion.

First, the most important and valuable skills highlighted by a specialist are technical and analytical skills. SEO specialists need to always have a profound understanding of search engine algorithms, ranking and other relevant domain-specific issues. The specialist needs also to acquire, process and analyze the acquired information to further work with the website maintenance, optimization and ranking increase. Secondly, adaptability is highly essential for the job as digital marketing landscape changes rapidly and therefore it is indispensable to track and quickly adapt to industry changes and trends and be able to alter SEO and website optimization activities accordingly. (Interviewee 2)

Moreover, constant communications maintained with the customer are a crucial point in terms of adaptability since the main business goals and KPIs of the customer need to be considered when strategy changes are needed. Thirdly, critical thinking is essential for a specialist since every website is different and requires understanding and analysis in terms of website activities that would best suit and need to be performed in every case. Finally, a good SEO specialist should possess project management skills and should be able to prioritize the strategy implementation steps. SEO tasks are usually divided into less and more time consuming, and therefore it is vital

to allocate the time and efforts accordingly as well as properly manage the resources to provide decent customer service. Digital resources are different from traditional one, but they also require careful allocation and in-depth planning to be able to present the actual results to customers openly and honestly. (Interviewee 2)

Successful SEO strategy implementation approach comprises a thorough analysis of a target audience, identification and exploration of core competitors of the client company. Moreover, the process involves division of a main SEO and website optimization objective into long-term and short-term goals to be accomplished:

*“SEO strategy involves several internal and external optimization stages, which are equally relevant for customer value creation. At the beginning of working with the site, it is necessary to assemble the semantic core and perform internal optimization. It implies conducting an in-depth technical audit, which involves fixing all website errors, site map and internal linking creation, micro markup setting and other interrelated actions. Then comes an audit of key industry competitors, usability evaluation and website design development. Further meta tags are optimized based on the semantic core and search results and content relevant to queries is created and published on site pages. The external optimization involves building up the link mass, which implies placement of site links on free and paid resources and creating cards in Google-maps and similar services to work with reputation.” (Interviewee 2)*

Each strategy step requires different SEO tools utilization, and the most important ones to note are “KeyCollector”, “Screaming Frog” and Google Analytics. Main success factors of SEO activities highlighted by SEO specialist are constantly increasing conversions and traffic to a website or landing page, the growth of inbound links number and a growth of traffic for a definite keyword phrase. Moreover, a specialist tracks on a permanent basis the referral traffic figures, time spent on page and number of visits, and it is crucial for a SEO specialist to measure results from these factors to understand whether the tactics chosen should be changed. Other relevant KPI that are continuously tracked are Click-Through Rate, increase in leads and the number of site positions in top-10. When all the measures are carefully tracked and analyzed, they can be successfully shown to the customer, who will see the amount of work accomplished and results that were reached, which undeniably contributes to customer satisfaction and in turn to client value creation. (Interviewee 2)



Customer value connected with SEO and website optimization activities accomplishment is generated when a customer sees on a permanent basis the definite results appeared from corresponding company actions and when the client understands the reasons of and solutions for possible problems. For that aim case company openly displays the website performance figures, which can be reviewed in any time by a client and which in turn positively affects customer satisfaction and generates genuine value for a client:

*“For efficient customer engagement, I am working together with Content Manager in an online file which is shared with the customer, which enables the client to see what activities are carried out and analyze the actual performance. Moreover, a monthly report is written by a specialist, where all the activities and results are reflected. The report contains current analytics with pictures (site traffic and positions), explanation and solutions for problems for further realization, accomplished tasks and the plan for the next month, which includes new content publication goals, positions tracking with problems identification and analysis, copywriting and other objectives.”* (Interviewee 2)

Web Analytics is a core facilitator of a successful SEO campaign. The main platform that is used is in the company Google Analytics, which enables a firm to analyze the most principal factors that determine the business success of the company. It is leveraged by the company to improve productivity and increase profitability of the customer company. As SEO specialist stated, *“the system is especially beneficial for digital marketing purposes since it allows to figure out the most efficient customer acquisition channels and based on that information the marketing campaigns can be altered and adjusted to reach new and existing customers via those channels.”* The same way the most attractive products can be figured out and product development or promotion efforts can be adjusted accordingly.

Overall, regarding the main case company service provided, it should be noted that customer value is created when website optimization and SEO activities are performed by a specialist, possessing a definite set of required skills and acting according to a predetermined plan. The plan is addressed on a daily basis, and it is accompanied with consideration of competitors' actions, industry trends and the most important - client's business goals and needs. Then those activities generate measurable results and impact the advancement and promotion of clients' businesses, leading to genuine customer value appearance and consolidation.

#### **5.4 Content Marketing campaigns**

Persuasive content creation is essential component of digital marketing strategy implementation success for B2B enterprises. Several studies indicate the growing importance of effective and appealing content creation for customer attainment and streamlined leads generation. B2B companies admit that efficient content marketing campaign realization enhances brand awareness and makes customers more willing to buy from firms. The reason is that during content marketing campaigns' realization companies are displaying personalized and therefore more appealing website content. Efficient content creation and publication in B2B sector generates customer value by providing a possibility to educate and inform customers about core industry trends and changes and thereby to influence the decision-making process. Brand loyalty and trust establishment among customers are essential results of effective content marketing. (Baltes 2015, 116-117)

To create relevant content that generates value for the customer, except the expertise in content creation, a successful content manager should have a profound understanding of a sales funnel, which comprises all the stages of a customer journey. To turn website visitors into leads, the content created should align with the requirements and target audience needs in every stage. For that aim RS Digital devotes a sufficient amount of time during the meeting with the client to obtainment of all the needed information. The data that should be obtained and asked is core company principles regarding the business vision, target audience, desired website traffic performance and other important issues. (Interviewee 1)

Research and planning skills are also equally important for successful content marketing campaign realization. Customer research as well as the investigation of topics that should be covered and published are followed by conducting a plan that ensures the consistency of content publication. Moreover, when the research stage is completed, data representation and data analysis skills are essential to be utilized since the obtained data should be processed according to the key performance indicators defined as well as according to the business objectives of the customer. When a specialist possesses all the required skills and strive to constantly enhance the level of expertise, it contributes to successful projects accomplishment and in turn positively affects the value creation process. (Interviewee 3)

There are different types of content marketing activities that the company utilizes, both for website development and optimization as well as for e-mail marketing campaigns and social media pages. There is a definite plan created and followed every month by a content manager, where all

website, e-mail marketing and social media marketing activities are defined and listed, enabling the customer to see the actions performed and track how the plan is followed by a content specialist. Transparency and honesty maintained between two parties is a crucial point in terms of results presentation as it correlates with the level of customer satisfaction and customer service quality provided by a firm.

Each content marketing campaign includes several steps and activities and pursues different goals depending on a customer's industry and business domain. However, it should be highlighted that primary aims of content creation are to prolong the reading time on customers' websites, stimulate lively discussions and foster customer engagement:

*“There is a predetermined set of content publication activities, which are more less the same for every client with some implications connected with the customer's industry or individual preferences. These activities typically include, for example, publication of case studies for company portfolio creation and consolidation, publication of videos depicting the product or service offered as well as provision of statistics and figures concerning the topic. Moreover, we usually display the new information about customers' products or services and create blog posts where we also disclose the news, upcoming events, firm announcements or other interesting information. We strive also to discover and implement new types of appealing and engaging content, especially visual as it is the most comprehensible and valuable type of content among current and potential customers. On the website we also add links to social media pages, where we constantly post something new according to SMM campaigns realization” (Interviewee 3)*

Customer value creation is stimulated especially when content tasks to be performed are directly connected with the SEO activities that are accomplished during website optimization and promotion. For complex and efficient Internet promotion, company specialists need to establish and maintain strong and timely communication. To provide decent customer service, quickly make decisions and be able to communicate them to customers, SEO and Content specialists work in constant collaboration and usually give tasks to each other:

*“For example, when an SEO specialist conducts an analysis of current website traffic and behavioral patterns of visitors, the information obtained should be visible for the Content Manager. The data about traffic and customers' activity on the website is relevant for the Content Manager to effectively tailor SMM and e-mail*

*marketing campaigns, according to customers' preferences and buyer behavior. Even if SMM or emails sending is not included in customer's own service package, the information obtained is significant for making all the necessary content creation and publication decisions"* (Interviewee 3)

Collaboration of SEO and Content marketing specialists is especially significant for the B2B sector, where customers search for a long-lasting and reliable partner, value trust establishment in relationships, and pay attention to the way the company presents itself online. Efficient content management therefore creates a competitive advantage that may lead to outperforming competitors in the lead generation process.

For competitive advantage obtainment, decent website content should be consistent with the topic of the site and the relevant query. To avoid bad website content creation, a specialist should strive to generate unique and difficult to copy content that perfectly matches the idea of the company that needs to be reflected via the content published. To achieve the compliance with the theme of the site, the text should be relevant to search queries and to do this, keywords are added to the text for better ranking. Moreover, to generate memorable content, a specialist should remember the mission and vision of the company and the needs of a target audience to achieve customer engagement and form a unique brand voice. (Interviewee 3)

As effective Content Marketing requires comprehension of target audience' needs, it is essential for content manager to keep track of newest trends in the domain. For example, the new technique that a company has recently started to utilize is infographics, which implies the presentation of complex data via figures and graphics that enable to visualize the information. After addressing several studies conducted on the influence of visually presented data and customers' comprehension of visual information, which had been acknowledged as more successful than of textual information, it has been decided to implement infographic technique to clients' websites. It is still difficult to analyze the definite results of infographics adoption, but it is evident that the tool transforms boring numerical data into an engaging format and therefore makes website content more appealing and data more eye-catching and easily comprehensible. Moreover, infographics is useful for SEO works as it creates backlinks that search engine can rank in alignment with needed keywords assigned. Infographics usage is usually shown to a customer, whose opinion is asked and who is then consulted regarding the correspondence of the infographics utilized with target audience addressed as well as business goals pursued. When the infographics is accepted and admired by a client, customer satisfaction enhances and customer value creation is facilitated. (Interviewee 3)

## **5.5 E-mail marketing and Social Media Marketing services**

According to literature review, Social Media Marketing has recently appeared as a powerful tool for timely and efficient engagement and communication with customers, which in turn contributes to marketing campaigns' performance increase and leads generation. However, it has been acknowledged that companies still lack the knowledge and skills regarding the interpretation and measurement of SMM campaigns' performance. (Li et al. 2020, 68) Studies investigating E-mail marketing performance also indicate the significance of tracking the schedule of emails' sending as well as highlight the importance of careful planning of content included and of the number of sent letters (Zhang et al. 2017, 851; Chaffey & Leszczynski 2018).

Except website content creation, Content Manager of RS Digital combines SMM strategy and e-mails sending. E-mail and SMM activities are presented in a company as additional services, and they are agreed on with a client according to his or her desire. The company works with different industries as well as online marketplaces and most of them vary significantly from each other, for example two current projects of the company relate to the textile industry and transportation sector. Therefore, as Interviewee 3 highlights, every SMM and e-mail marketing campaign is unique since it requires in-depth customer research and target audience identification and analysis. Moreover, in every sector a client's customer may be reached via different channels and consequently the analysis of digital marketing campaigns' performance is also specific for every project. Customization is undeniably a key to successful customer satisfaction obtainment and in turn to true customer value generation and consolidation.

Social media and e-mail marketing tasks are usually combined by the specialist, which enables convenient reports provision to customers, who can see the results of both campaigns (if they both are offered to a client) in one place. Social media campaigns are targeted at attracting more people to visit a website, sharing new information about the company and at brand awareness increase in general. E-mail marketing is utilized further to strengthen the relationships with attained customers and stimulate brand loyalty. Emails sent usually include links to social media profiles, which enable subscribers to engage with the brand and observe the content created on social media channels. Moreover, emails are usually designed in a way to induce customers to check a new product on the website, see the new blog post or try a new feature added to a certain product. By that means, successful realization of both campaigns result in company awareness increase, which in turn provides value for the client in terms of new customers' attainment and customer base enlargement.

Although SMM campaigns are not set as a priority in RS Digital, the firm understands the growing popularity of Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook and other social media channels. Sometimes the firm customers ask for a SMM campaign launch that is directly targeted on users of a particular app, especially is concerns Instagram. To create engaging content on social media, it is essential to observe the audience' actions and behavior showed on platforms as well as track how does the target audience react to company publications. For example, recently Instagram app has launched a possibility to schedule publication of posts, which enables a specialist to create a timetable for posts creation, publication and review of target audience reactions that is planned to happen in several hours after publication, for example. Facebook and LinkedIn are also in demand among B2B enterprises and consequently main company clients. Content sharing on those platforms is not only a chance to increase brand awareness, but also a possibility to establish new relationships and communicate directly with top level managers, whose contacts are usually displayed first. (Interviewee 3)

Main SMM metrics that are tracked by Content specialist are Social Media Engagement and Audience Growth Rate, which are regarded the most valuable according to practical experience and observations made during the years of company operations. However, there is a set of other relevant metrics that should be tracked and those metrics are usually determined according to each project requirements and sometimes even according to customer' preferences, which are discussed in the meeting with the client. For example, sometimes a customer wishes to stick to one definite social media channel that he or she finds especially important to work with and wishes to see the definite figures connected with that channel' performance.

Social media engagement metric is considered by company representative as one of the most essential to track to be able to assess the effectiveness of social media marketing campaign. The metric analyses the activity of customers and measures the number of clicks, likes, shares, and mentions that social updates receive:

*“By that means a company can compare incoming visitors from Twitter versus Instagram or to see how well email campaigns are running. To provide efficient digital marketing and increase awareness of the brand via social media campaigns' utilization, the metric should be tracked as it allows to understand what channels are most suitable for business promotion. The metric should be tracked also to assess the success of company performance on social media and to use the information further in planning. For instance, if Instagram page has low engagement but huge reach, it reveals that the audience did not find the content*

*appealing and therefore more targeting and segmentation efforts are required to be considered by firm. All the figures from metrics tracked are shown to customer to ensure that SMM campaign resonates will business objectives and contribute to beneficial results provision, which in turn definitely affect customer satisfaction and generates true value for a client” (Interviewee 3)*

Audience Growth Rate should be rigorously tracked by a specialist since it tracks a pace at which an organization’s obtain new followers in social media channels and it shows the speed of a customer’s website followers’ enhancement. The metric allows a company to determine how fast a customer company gained new ones during last month and to understand how to proceed. It is important to benchmark each network’ audience and assess the followers’ number increase every predetermined period of time according to a timetable to figure out the pace with which organization is attracting new followers.

Furthermore, a specialist tracks “Social Traffic” and “Conversion” metrics. The second SMM metric aligns preferred conversion rate with current performance figures in social media across various platforms. As Interviewee 3 highlights, “high” conversion rate reveals that the content is valuable and compelling to the target audience. It reveals that a definite post was valuable and matched the offer, therefore helps the organization to analyze and ameliorate content creation. The success of “Social Traffic” and “Conversion” should be analyzed using Conversion Reports, which will allow a company specialist to track customer website goals based on business peculiarities and objectives.

To evaluate e-mail marketing performance, the crucial metrics tracked are “click through rate”, “conversion rate” and e-mail “sharing rate”. “Click through” and “conversion” rates enable to see the number of customers who had clicked a link added in an email or completed an action that was offered via a definite link. “Sharing rate” is essential to track since it enables to attract new leads when a customer shares the information from email on social media as well as enables to analyze what kind of content resonates with the audience the best. (Interviewee 3)

The main customer value received from SMM and e-mail marketing campaigns is providing a possibility for customer to focus of core business practices and partly delegate the communication and engagement with customers via social media channels to RS Digital. For instance, as a part of SMM campaign a company representative communicates with client company account’ followers and track customer reviews constantly. Customers value that a company generates a definite amount of social media activities that correspond with the business goals and target

audience and handle them by that means attracting more attention to a client company and influencing brand awareness increase. Moreover, according to customers' feedback, it is convenient for them to see the actual results of SMM and E-mail marketing campaigns when, for example, the specialist's work is visible when a new enquiry via mail is received or when there is a lively discussion in company's blog or in Facebook account.

## **5.6 Value creation through service provision**

A whole service provision process in the company aimed at delivery of superior customer value and can be observed via consideration of core customer journey stages. When the customer reaches the company, a SEO specialist offers a client to receive a website audit, which is made by a SEO specialist and followed by a detailed service offering according to the audit results. The basic offering includes SEO optimization, Website Analytics, website maintenance and content marketing. Additional services, which are E-mail Marketing and SMM are discussed and agreed on according to every client's preference. Value creation purpose of that stage is to create persuasive and customized offering according to audit results to ensure that company specialists can offer decent services and achieve predicted results and that the company has had successful cases and experience in the domain.

After the consideration of a service package comes a meeting with the client, which is preferred to be held one same week with the service package discussion. The primary aim of the meeting is to get acquainted with the customer, present the firm and build trust and express the willingness of the company to form long-term relationships generating customer value. The participants of the meeting are usually the customer, the Head of Site Promotion department and commercial director, who is CEO of the firm and the meeting can be in person or via zoom or phone. During the meeting, the company representatives introduce the firm, exchange the signed contracts with the client and outline the work system. Firm specialists and the client agree on the planning and reporting system, monthly reports preparation and reception, type of connection with the SEO specialist and payment terms.

Moreover, customer expectations are usually expressed and considered as well as problem solving activities are discussed during the meeting. Value at that stage is generated when a customer understands that trustworthy and mutually beneficial relationships are established and all expectations are accepted and discussed. Open and timely communications with the customer are an essential part of customer service and value creation process:



“For ensuring the smoothness and transparency of company actions and relationships with the customer, with the start of work on search engine optimization, as well as other Internet marketing services, we provide the customer with access to an online table. In that table a customer may see planned and completed work, meeting deadlines, project dynamics, working documentation and individual data. When new tasks appear, the customer simply enters them into the table and monitors the progress. The same way SEO specialist adds tasks that may appear during the monthly plan accomplishment, for example those that are coming as customer suggestions or requests” (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee 1 highlights that performance measurement should not be neglected in the process of customer-focused strategy adoption. Performance assessment for a successful project manager is one of the main activities. Efficiency tracking and evaluation involves income calculation, expenses calculation, comparative calculation of operational and technical indicators, and consideration of service cost itself. Efficiency results and financial components are then reported to the customer, achieving his or her satisfaction in terms of project accomplishment, going in the right direction.

In addition, considering current tough market competition and rapidly changing economic conditions, for customer value creation and successful project accomplishment it is essential to monitor continuously evolving or even changing market conditions to track appearance of competitors and be aware of their activities. It also vital to evaluate client firm's competitiveness and performance in accordance with industry trends, pricing tactics and innovations' implementation. It is always valued by the customer when project specialist' suggestions regarding the reaction to competitors' actions and corresponding website and content creation activities are reflected to the customer and adjustment plan or changes are accepted together by a customer and a specialist. (Interviewee 1)

Along with performance measurement and continuous market research, efficient sales management of additional services for the company is the right way to increase e-commerce profits of the customer and therefore to deliver customer value. One of the main activities of effective sales management is directing customers to the things they may need based on the analyzed target audience data and website audit. Effective sales management is especially important for e-commerce sites of customers, where additional website works help to increase exposure to customers as well as to manage inventories. (Interviewee 1)

As CEO of the firm stated, digital marketing services provision is directly connected more with the financial value provision, since the core aim of any digital marketing campaign is to generate traffic to a customer's website and by that means to generate leads and foster profit enhancement. Customers can track and evaluate the achieved financial benefits themselves when, for example, they analyze the amount of inquiries received via website:

*“Efficient website promotion and digital marketing strategy realization guided by a specialist allows a client company to reach multiple people cost efficiently and to especially benefit from reaching out to a targeted audience. Moreover, the monthly report that is provided to the customer enables to review the website's performance without having a profound knowledge about the SEO processes and to analyze the return on investment, as each aspect of specialist's work is reflected in definite figures with infographics utilization and the dynamics can be observed.”*

(Interviewee 1)

However, CEO of RS Digital highlights that the nonfinancial value is also considered when the website optimization and consequent leads generation contributes to a brand equity formation, business development and promotion. Website optimization and digital marketing activities, as Interviewee 2 states, enable the customer to see how the products or services are positioned and promoted as well as to evaluate how the company is performing against competitors. Moreover, customers collaborating with the company admit that the long-term outcomes of the website activities are customer retention and loyalty, increased market share, innovations implementation and other relevant non-financial measures.

There are several core constituents of customer value creation process addressed from the viewpoint of the customer. For example, customer satisfaction is the core priority in any business strategy implementation aiming for efficient customer value creation since the level of satisfaction enables to analyze how the company succeeds in meeting and exceeding customer expectations and providing customer service (Sunantha & Chandran 2022, 9944). Customer value creation is also stimulated when the offering of the company provides superb business performance improvements and shows opportunities to generate revenue for the customer as well as to gain financial and performance benefits (Keränen et al.2021,67). In addition, customer value is generated when a firm focus on the profound identification of customer's industry position, needs and problems and utilize the information retrieved to further figure out the way company can deliver superior value to customer firm. (Keränen & Jalkala 2013,1311-1312).

The interview held with customer has revealed that the value was created via company performance enhancement. Website optimization and digital marketing activities implementation have positively affected the business performance of the company. The implementation of the SEO specialist's tasks from the predefined plan has led to an increase in website positions and, as a result, in website traffic. Moreover, constant communication with a specialist and transparency of the company's actions has contributed to customer value creation:

*“The main issue that as a client I consider as valuable in the way RS Digital operates and communicates with the customer is provision of results in real time and being always in touch. There is a file which I can open anytime and see what positions my site currently has and what activities are going to be implemented. In a monthly report sent by the company I see the amount of work that was accomplished and what results have been achieved. SEO specialist usually honestly shows and tells about current situation, without inventing non-existent errors and without focusing on minor flaws. Sometimes I notice that the rankings of the site go down, and the specialist that is responsible for the project is always ready to explain why some misfortunes happen and how he is going to improve the situation in the next month”* (Interviewee 4)

Interviewee 4 also points out that initially he was not aware of ways of firm's promotion via internet, as he was utilizing primarily traditional advertising modes and encountered a company via searching for alternative ways of promotion online. The reasons to adopt a digital marketing strategy and optimize website were explained by a CEO of the company, who had actually communicated first with the client.

Except clear need explanation and discussion regarding potential benefits that digital marketing strategy adoption brings, another core component of value creation that Interviewee 4 admits is initiative and high personalization. To deliver superb customer service, case company strives to receive as much information regarding the current situation as possible to facilitate data analysis and suitable strategic plan formation:

*“On the first meeting I was asked multiple questions regarding my business and the aim was to understand the target audience, the business specifics and to align the information with the strategy creation. After a first month of collaboration with the company, I have noticed that the content published on my website perfectly suits the idea of my business and transmits it to the target audience.”*

Customer service received was highlighted by an Interviewee 4 as decent and even superior and it was mentioned that it sometimes exceeds the expectations in terms of some definite strategies adoption and activities implementation. The crucial component of customer service provision that was mentioned is detailed but easy to comprehend report provided every month to the customer, which contains all the relevant issues and answers to the questions concerning website performance. In the report, customer especially admitted that exact figures concerning website queries' ranking are mentioned and there are clear explanations regarding current and forecasted website performance and company activities' implementation, which reflects the strategic vision regarding the project accomplishment.

Moreover, it was admitted as a valuable factor in terms of cooperation and work process that the company does not insist on new features adoption or unnecessary campaigns launch, but provide advice regarding what else could be done to improve website performance and influence business development. By that means a customer can consider the online presence improvement' suggestions and decide on accepting them and therefore making changes or novel approaches utilization under specialist's supervision, or on declining the offer at all (Interviewee 4).

It is usually difficult to accurately predict and measure the success that every new approach may result in, however most of company suggestions are easily agreed on with customers and contribute to more efficient qualified leads generation, which in turn undeniably affects customer satisfaction. Sometimes a client may be unsure in or unaware of the possibilities that each new implemented option may create, and then the specialist' task is to explain what results could be achieved via new approaches addressing. By that means a customer one more time verifies the expertise of the company and uniqueness of the service provided, which stimulates customer value appearance. Being agile, always ready to implement something new to the strategic plan and striving to be as much productive as possible is therefore admitted as one of the key factors generating value for the customers. (Interviewees 2 and 3)

Moreover, brand vision transmission and brand awareness increase via reaching high website visibility were also highlighted as results of an excellent customer service provided. For B2B customers it is especially critical to maintain original content publication and transmit the right message and brand image to the target audience to foster leads generation. The company constantly adds new relevant information on the client' website and tracks the usability and convenience, which contributes to business operations' advancement, increase in sale as well as fosters customer engagement:

“I can observe how does the company work on the reputation of me firm and constant website update and maintenance. For example, if SEO optimization works I am not always competent to assess objectively, I can see how my site develops and new people get to know about my business when RS Digital prepares and adds reviews on business platforms for entrepreneurs as well as places review articles in the media. Project specialist maintains the relevance of information placed on the site and continuously post news, company cases and reviews. I can also see how a specialist develops the blog by disclosing topics related to my product and observe the reactions of my current and potential customers. That I find valuable for engagement with my customers, and constant website works enables to support that connection and analyze customers’ feedback.” (Interviewee 4)

Most of company customers admit that it is more difficult for them to handle online communications with customers and manage online purchases’ inquiries than to manage traditional marketing techniques that they were used to. Business digitalization is still a more challenging phenomenon that should be addressed by B2B companies and company clients value the undeniable assistance that is provided to them via profound digital marketing strategy implementation. However, some of RS Digital clients are born-digital companies and then they value collaboration with the company due to possibility to enlarge the pool of activities aimed at leads generation and brand awareness increase.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Theoretical contributions**

The research gap identified for the study reflects the lack of existing knowledge regarding the way digital marketing activities implementation may contribute to customer value creation and business development in B2B sector. A theoretical contribution in the study is made by outlining digital marketing tools and activities as well as digital marketing strategy components by which B2B companies foster customer value creation and delivery as well as business development. By addressing the influence that digital marketing practices have on customer value creation, it expands studies that are based on digital marketing strategy adoption importance to understand the connection between customer value generation and digital marketing practices in B2B sector.

The study supports previous research findings regarding the significance of digitalization addressing by enterprises and adds several contributions that could be considered for further exploration of the topic. First, it outlines and concludes which digital marketing activities and how

affect customer value creation as well as reveals what components of digital marketing strategy should be addressed for successful and continuous customer value delivery. Secondly, the study contributes to existing research by revealing how digital marketing activities are implemented as a service provision as a case company is acting as a team of specialists offering a package of digital marketing services for their B2B clients coming from various industries. Moreover, the study emphasizes efficient service provision practices maintained and nurtured by a case company and therefore paves the way to a further research on digital marketing services provision and customer value creation.

This study supports existing theoretical background and provides some reflections regarding the topic under investigation. Moreover, the research fosters further exploration of digital marketing service provision as it thoughtfully focused on the interrelation of customer value creation and digital marketing strategy implementation.

Research results justify the claim that efficient digital marketing strategy adoption fosters customer value creation. Despite the lack of studies investigating the extent to which digital marketing activities implementation contributes to customer value generation, multiple researches address and admit the business performance improvement connected with digitalization and digital marketing campaigns utilization. The study provides the analysis and identification of digital marketing activities as well as company practices leveraged for successful customer value creation. It outlines the main success factors, components and practical implementation of various digital marketing services and align those with the benefits they bring to customers.

Study findings align with the existing theoretical base which highlights the general findings and conclusions regarding digital marketing strategy implementation and customer value creation phenomena with no regards to a particular industry or type of organization. Study provides a new perception regarding the way digital marketing services provision generates customer value and affects firms' development and performance. It reflects that effective digital marketing services offering should be aligned with established company operations and effective practices to generate genuine value for customers.

## **6.2 Managerial implications**

Managerial implications are practical observations aimed at comparison of the empirical part's results with the decisions and actions made in practice. The implications need to be defined and addressed according to the objectives and findings of the study and need to indicate what managerial conclusions could be made. (Moura 2017)

The study comprises several valuable practical and managerial implications. First, it reveals that KPIs and success factors are similar across different projects, whereas core services, activities and techniques used may differ according to every client preferences and needs. Moreover, case company has initially chosen the priority in service provision, which is put on SEO, website optimization and Content Marketing activities, which enables to generate results in accordance with customer expectations. Social Media Marketing and E-mail marketing services are positioned as additional services and may be included in a package when the client demands, which provides flexibility and enables financial benefits generation, which in turn fosters customer value creation and trust establishment.

The research also gives managerial implications by provision of an understanding of which digital marketing services adoption contribute to value creation. The set of activities offered to every customer is created according to the practical observation of their positive impact on business promotion and customer value creation. The degree of success of different digital marketing services implementation has led to the prioritization of services, established in case company, as it offers SEO and Content Marketing services in a basic package, and other digital marketing services provision is discussed with every client individually.

### **6.3 Suggestions for further research**

Digital Marketing and Customer value are two broad concepts that are worth addressing according to their undeniable impact on supporting business development and prosperity. The way digital marketing fosters customer value creation concept needs to be studied further and other various industries, digital marketing tools and activities and their adoption practices should be addressed. For instance, every digital marketing tool can be observed with regard to its implementation that fosters customer value creation in the most efficient way. Consideration of multiple digital marketing concepts separately may contribute to figuring out limitations, advantages and disadvantages of every technique implementation for value creation and help to figure those digital marketing tools that would be the most effective for particular industry or field of business.

In addition, further studies should address crucial components, strategical steps and significance of e-commerce customer value creation. Every firm' online presence provides multiple opportunities to consolidate and enhance customer loyalty and satisfaction through leveraging various service provision, communication and customer engagement possibilities that online presence provides. Purchasing online is regarded as more impulsive, it has been growing in

demand among customers and therefore it is crucial to understand consumer drivers of purchase and tailor digital marketing campaigns to customer behavior patterns accordingly. The more customers' choices are affected by digitalization, the more attention should be given to digital marketing campaigns and tools.

Moreover, the way customer value is created via B2C digital marketing needs to be researched further as well since B2C companies have both similarities and differences with B2B enterprises and therefore digital marketing campaigns may have something in common as well as may vary. In every industry customer value can consist of various components which should be addressed in line with the suitable digital marketing activities to be implemented.

Finally, as internet marketing as a phenomenon is rapidly developing nowadays, novel approaches and technologies need to be researched in both B2C and B2B enterprises in different industries and domains. The impact of new digital marketing technologies' adoption in B2B and B2C sectors should therefore be investigated from the perspective of generating customer value, efficient practices connected with the generation and delivery, as well as from the perspective of fostering business performance increase.

#### **6.4 Summary**

Digitalization is stimulating B2B companies to search for ways of leveraging a digital landscape for online presence enhancement. It is undeniable that now creating and managing online business presents multiple opportunities as well as challenges for enterprises. Online presence needs to be addressed by firms striving to attract new and retain existing customers, gain financial benefits as well as willing to compete on the market. Digital marketing service providers create customer value by assisting clients' in online presence management and in enhancement of visibility among digital consumers.

Case firm can be named as a client-oriented organization, in which digital marketing activities are leveraged for customer satisfaction achievement and customer loyalty nurturing. Every customer receives a personalized approach during company campaigns' development. Focus of company operations is put primarily on superior customer service and formation of an excellent customer journey. Case company fosters customer retention through the combination of unique practices based on customization, performance assessment, efficient communication and analytical approaches that make case company stand out from competitors.



To answer the main research question, which was *“How digital marketing strategy implementation contributes to customer value creation in B2B context?”*, it should be noted that efficient digital marketing strategy adoption provides multiple benefits for B2B companies, including brand awareness, leads generation, and financial performance improvement. These benefits acquisition enhances online visibility of an enterprise and fosters business promotion and development, which in turn generates customer value. The set of digital marketing activities addressed simultaneously by service provider company improves and optimizes the website and enables its constant advancement and optimization, that contributes to website traffic increase, new customers’ obtainment and efficient communication with current ones, as well as revenue enhancement and operational excellence.

Answering the first sub-question, which was *“What digital marketing activities should be addressed by B2B companies for successful customer value creation?”* it should be noted that it is essential to determine and utilize a set of activities that are proved to appear the most successful for company performance enhancement and business promotion. Several studies have emphasized that e-commerce possibilities enhancement and online presence importance have stimulated companies to adopt digital marketing tools. The most efficient tools that are recognised by researches are Marketing Analytics, Search Engine Optimization, E-mail marketing, Content Marketing and Social Media Marketing.

Based on company’s experience and real customer cases, RS Digital has developed a comprehensive package of activities connected with website promotion and support. These activities are identified by a case company and presented in the table below, numbered according to the significance assigned by the company representatives.

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Standard package inclusion</b>
1	SEO and website optimization	Included
2	Content marketing	Included
3	SMM	Not included, additional service
4	E-mail marketing	Not included, additional service

Table 4. Case company services according to prioritization.

As it can be seen, core activities that the company embraces are included and offered to a client in a basic package, whereas two additional strategy components can be added according to each customer preferences. The focus is initially put and now maintained on SEO, website optimization and content marketing services provision as according to firm's experience, they appear as the most beneficial for company promotion and online presence enhancement.

However, SMM and E-mail marketing services are also found by the company as extremely important for business performance excellence. They are offered to every customer after discussion regarding the basic package, and these services are also in demand among company's customers due to efficiency and convenience that they provide in customer engagement and communication maintenance.

Referring to the second sub-question, which was *"How customer value is created and measured in B2B company offering digital services?"* it is worth mentioning that RS Digital has developed a system of efficient customer value creation and measurement, which can be divided into five core components, presented in Figure 12 below.

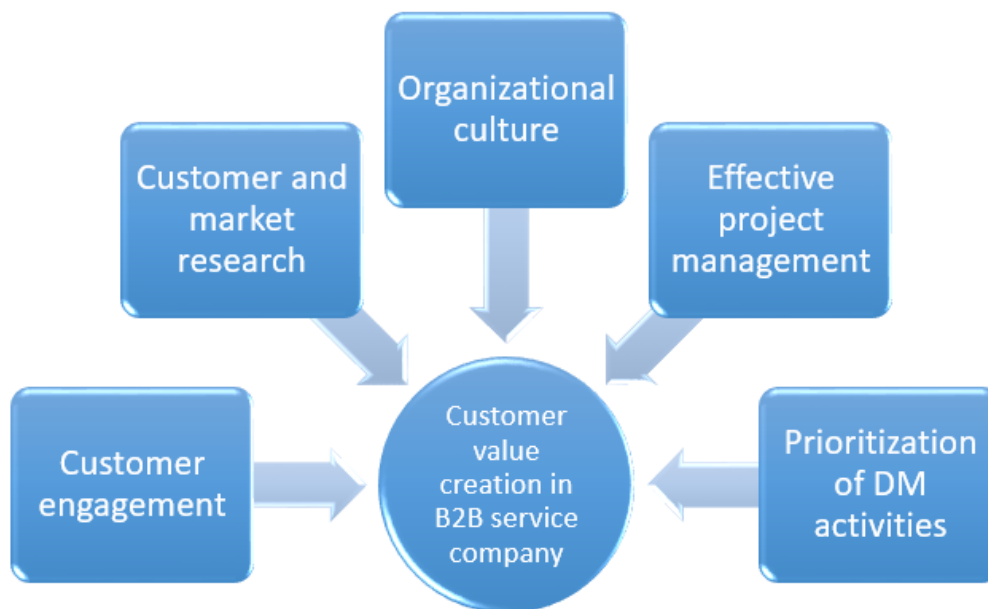


Figure 12. Components of successful customer value creation.

The components depicted on a figure reflect five core activities and company practices that are nurtured to efficiently generate customer value, which are: continuous customer engagement, thorough market and customer research, organizational culture that supports customer centricity, efficient project management and sticking to priority during digital marketing services provision.

These five components together are proved to be interconnected and indispensable components of successful customer value creation. Moreover, while sticking to these practices employees benefit from constant collaboration, which positively affects the project advancement and consequently customer value creation. Efficient customer engagement and maintenance of constant communication with clients together with effective project management can be named as a core results of activities' prioritization and thorough project accomplishment preparation, reflected via customer and market research conducted by specialists.

Answering the last sub-question, which was *"How digital marketing strategy implementation in B2B marketplace is conducted by the service provider for its customers?"* it should be highlighted that service provider should maintain a constant customer communication and organizational structure to conduct efficient digital marketing strategy implementation. As a service provider, a company needs to ensure transparency and ability to track the results of work in real time to establish trustworthy customer relationships. Constant communication with customers' fosters customer value creation via fast responding to customers' concerns and suggestions, their analysis and timely realization of goals set and analysis of problems solved.

Moreover, it is essential to create and follow a definite plan concerning digital marketing activities implementation, which should be agreed on with the customer. During activities accomplishment, employees responsible for the project should work cooperatively to provide seamless customer experience and to solve problems together for best decision obtainment. For example, it should be highlighted that SEO specialist and Content creator often work together on a project since they have interconnected activities to perform. Those activities adoption enhances the productivity during the project realization and therefore their successful combination directly affects the extent of customer satisfaction and influences value generation.

As a service provider, a company chooses and offers the most efficient digital marketing activities and tools in the process of digital marketing strategy realization to deliver true value for clients. The focus of activities is put on implementation of those practices that have been proved the most successful according to both research findings as well as company experience. Main activities implementation requires collaborative efforts made by specialists as the analysis conducted or information retrieved by one employee may affect further or simultaneous actions undergone concerning website development and business promotion. The organizational culture maintained in the company puts customers' needs and communication as a highest priority, whereas customer centricity principles are shared and valued among all employees.

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## **APPENDICES**

### Appendix 1. Interview questions

#### **Interview with the CEO**

1. How do you perceive the main company objective as a leader of the company?
2. Every company leader measures success in different ways. Can you tell, what are you most proud of regarding the company?
3. It is important for the leader to convince the employees to succeed in order to run the business successfully. What do you expect from the workers and how do you motivate them?
4. What activities does the company embrace to retain customers?
5. How does the company manage the whole service provision process to achieve superior customer experience? How the customers' data is managed?
6. The challenge for many organizations today is to align performance measures with business strategy, structures and corporate culture. What performance measurement practices are established in a company?
7. How focus on customer value creation activities is embedded in the organizational culture of the company?
8. In your opinion, digital marketing service provision refers more to financial or non-financial value provision for the customer?

## **Interview with the SEO specialist**

1. What has inspired you to pursue a career in SEO?
2. Customers are willing to see the results of the activities implemented by a specialist. How do you communicate the results of your work to customers? How SEO success can be measured and reflected to the customer?
3. What qualities are required in order to be effective in an SEO role, in your opinion?
4. What is your approach to developing SEO strategy?
5. Which SEO tools do you use and KPIs do you track?
6. What type of reporting do you provide to customers and how often?
7. During your work, have you ever received negative feedback from a customer? How do you handle customers' questions or discontents?

## **Interview with the Content Manager**

1. How do you perceive your role in the company?
2. Can you name some skills a content manager should possess to create relevant content for the customer?
3. Can you name some core activities and responsibilities that you have while combining Social Media tasks and E-mail marketing?
4. It is assumed that digital marketing activities may vary depending on the business sector. Are there any singularities of content marketing tasks performed for every client?
5. Can you describe last campaign or novel approach that was implemented, which successfully contributed to customer value creation?
6. What are the main Social Media and Email Marketing metrics that need to be tracked to measure the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns?
7. Does Content Marketing depend on SEO activities?
8. What would you consider to be good or bad website content and how do you decide what kind of content to write or display on the website?
9. According to your experience and customer feedback, can you say what your clients find as the most valuable for business development in SMM and E-mail campaigns activities' implementation?

### **Interview with the customer**

1. How did you know about the company?
2. Were you initially aware of digital marketing services provision companies?
3. What was the reason for choosing the company over the competitors?
4. What challenge had you been trying to tackle when you decided to collaborate with RS Digital?
5. How has the performance of your company improved after digital marketing strategy implementation?
6. What do you find as the most valuable in collaboration with the company?
7. How can you assess a customer service provided?
8. How can you evaluate the reporting and communication practices maintained by company specialists during the whole project implementation process?