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Digital inbound marketing as an approach to scale up B2B sales

A case study of a growing Swedish IT startup

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Abstract

Although digital inbound marketing has been widely researched within B2C industries, very little academic research has been done on the subject within B2B sectors. With today's rapid flow of information and constant change in buying behavior when purchasing consumer goods, B2B buyers are also demanding a simpler, more digitized approach of gathering information.

This master thesis focuses on identifying how digital inbound marketing can be used to scale up sales in a B2B company. The aim of the thesis is to understand and map out the relationship between the B2B selling process, the B2B buying process, and the use of digital inbound marketing methods and tactics, and use these relationships to understand which approach a small B2B company in the software/software as a service (SaaS) industry should take when designing a digital inbound marketing strategy.

A literature review on the above mentioned topics was carried out and the relationship between the B2B selling and buying processes and various marketing methods and tactics was summarized in a theoretical framework. Combined with a best practice review, this was used to develop a digital inbound marketing (DIM) model for which strategic aspects to consider when designing a B2B digital inbound marketing strategy. The DIM model focuses on four important areas: knowing the customer, creating valuable content, sharing through relevant channels and evaluating to improve.

The DIM model was applied to the case company InfraSight Labs, a small growing IT startup in Malmö, Sweden, to demonstrate the model's use and test its applicability. When applied at InfraSight Labs, the model was evolved to also include operational activities linked to each strategic aspect. The application of the new version of the DIM model generated a basis for sales and marketing recommendations and provided a possible outline for a digital inbound marketing strategy. It was concluded that the improved DIM model is generalizable and can be used to design a digital inbound marketing strategy as a foundation on which to base future operational marketing activities.

Keywords: B2B branding, B2B buying process, B2B selling process, Content marketing, Digital marketing, Email marketing, Inbound marketing, Marketing automation, Mobile marketing, Search engine optimization, Social media marketing

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Over the past few years, the B2C market has undergone major digital development, in particular within customer communication and sales (Kuchler and Cederlöf, 2016). Data shows that B2B markets have also worked actively to implement digital strategies, but that these investments have generally been made within manufacturing, logistics and internal efficiencies, and are lacking in customer interaction and sales. B2B companies appear to underestimate the strategic importance of these areas and have a lot to learn from B2C markets (Kuchler and Cederlöf, 2016; Roland Berger, 2015).

The B2B buying process is changing with digitization. One explanation is that B2B decision makers are also consumers and have grown accustomed to a smooth consumer experience from personal purchases (Catlin, Harrison, Lun Plotkin and Stanley, 2016). Another main reason for the change is the start of a generation shift. “Millennials”, generally known as the generation born between 1982 and the early 2000s (Brown, 2017), are becoming the new decision-makers in many companies, and in the USA, 46 percent of influencers in B2B purchasing are under 35 years old. Millennials exhibit a different purchasing behavior compared to earlier generations as they prefer to gather information on their own online rather than approach a sales representative. They also commonly use online media to communicate and create relationships. Additionally, having grown up in the digital age, they are fully accustomed to the simple and intuitive ways of shopping consumer goods, and have higher expectations on the customer experience in business purchasing (Roland Berger, 2015).

These changes in purchasing behavior within B2B companies today are apparent through observations but also through data. Studies show that 9 out of 10 B2B purchasers search for keywords online and 7 out of 10 watch videos online to gather information (Roland Berger, 2015). Data from 22 large B2B organizations from different industries also shows that the average B2B customer has already completed 57 percent of the purchase decision before engaging in any direct contact with a supplier sales representative. For some companies in the study, this number reached as high as 70 percent (CEB Marketing Leadership Council, 2012). A study made by McKinsey & Company reveals that B2B digital leaders perform higher financially; players in the top-quartile generate 3.5 percent more revenue as well as being 15 percent more profitable than those further behind in their digitization (Catlin, Harrison, Lun Plotkin and Stanley, 2016).

It is apparent that in this fast-paced environment, to avoid losing potential sales opportunities, B2B companies need to excel within the earlier customer information gathering stages (CEB Marketing Leadership Council, 2012). Falling behind within these areas also allows for a potential threat from digital companies coming from B2C markets where, for many years, focus has been on customer interaction (Roland Berger, 2015). It is therefore increasingly apparent that firms active in B2B markets will need to create more complete digital strategies in order to keep up with growing customer expectations (Kuchler and Cederlöf, 2016).

One possible way to meet these new demands, within both B2C and B2B markets, is through the use of inbound marketing rather than more traditional outbound marketing methods. Inbound marketing is when the company focuses on being found by customers, whereas outbound marketing is when the company concentrates on finding new customers on its own. Digital inbound marketing methods have become increasingly popular, as marketers seek to avoid the customer interruption that is normally a product of outbound marketing (Zilincan, 2015).

A higher level of digitization within marketing and sales can also provide a needed basis for a more scalable sales model. For smaller companies that are lacking in resources, a digitized approach to marketing can be an efficient way to complement sales while keeping costs relatively low (Verma, 2016). Growing in size and profitability however, also requires installation of formal systems focused on the problems the company will need to solve on its forthcoming journey. This puts higher demands on the organizational structure as well as on operational and strategic planning (Churchill and Lewis, 1983).

1.2 Problem description

The main problem areas covered in this thesis are the following:

- How the B2B selling process relates to the B2B buying process, and how these two relate to various digital inbound marketing methods and tactics.
- Which approach a small B2B company can take when designing a digital inbound marketing strategy to scale up sales.

1.3 Delimitations

The study will focus on B2B companies in the software/software as a service (SaaS) industry who have successfully implemented digital inbound marketing strategies in order to scale up sales.

1.4 Goal and project objective

The project objective is to identify how digital inbound marketing can be used to scale up sales in a B2B company. This includes the following more specific objectives:

- Understand and map out the relationship between the B2B selling process, the B2B buying process, and the use of digital inbound marketing methods and tactics.
- Understand which approach is suitable when designing a digital inbound marketing strategy for a small business aiming to grow.

1.5 Research questions

1. What digital inbound marketing methods and tactics exist in theory and are used by other B2B companies with a digital product?
2. How do different digital inbound marketing methods and tactics relate to the B2B selling and buying processes?
3. Which approach should a small B2B company with a digital product take when designing a digital inbound marketing strategy to scale up sales?

1.6 Deliverables

The following deliverables have been generated:

- Master thesis report for public presentation
- Popular scientific summary
- Public seminar at The Faculty of Engineering at Lund University
- Private seminar/workshop at the case company InfraSight Labs

1.7 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction
The thesis starts with an introductory chapter in which the background to the project and the problem being investigated are described. Further, delimitations of the study are specified, the purpose of the thesis is defined and three research questions are presented. Finally, the generated deliverables are stated and the disposition of the thesis is presented.

Chapter 2: Methodology
The methodology chapter gives an overview on how the study was executed. It starts with an explanation of the research strategy and the various methods used for data collection. Thereafter, the research process and its different steps are presented. The chapter ends with a discussion on the credibility of the study.

Chapter 3: Theory
In this chapter, the theory behind the study is introduced to create a basis for the structure of the empirical study and for the forthcoming analysis. The theory focuses on five different areas: the B2B selling process, the B2B buying process, B2B brand-building, B2B digital marketing methods and channels, and supporting marketing and sales software. The chapter is concluded with a summary of the theoretical framework, which explains how the aspects being discussed relate to each other both chronologically and conceptually.

Chapter 4: Best practice study
This chapter comprehends a study of best practice within B2B digital inbound marketing. Findings from four previous case studies are presented, which have been chosen with respect to company characteristics and to the methods and channels that the companies have employed. The chapter

ends with an analysis of the best practice cases from which a model, the digital inbound marketing (DIM) model, is generated.

Chapter 5: Case study: InfraSight Labs
The case study contains a presentation of InfraSight Labs, focusing on key aspects that affect the company's marketing and selling process. It starts with an introduction to the company's characteristics and continues with a description of the market as well as the company's customer acquisition process and marketing. The chapter ends with a summary of the challenges that InfraSight Labs is currently facing.

Chapter 6: DIM model in action
This chapter describes the application of the DIM model at InfraSight Labs. This includes insights that the application has generated in regards to the company and the development of a new version of the DIM model, as well as recommendations on how the company can improve their digital inbound marketing to complement their sales function and ultimately increase revenues. The chapter ends with a discussion on the DIM model's applicability.

Chapter 7: Conclusion
The conclusion describes the report's key insights, including the DIM model. There is also a summarizing discussion on the usefulness of this model and on whether the purpose of the thesis was fulfilled, as well as a discussion on the thesis's contribution to industry and academia.

Chapter 8: References

2 Methodology

2.1 Research strategy

In this master thesis, a qualitative research strategy has been chosen together with a combination of a deductive and an inductive research approach. The deductive approach, which can be described as a top-down approach where theory, laws and rules form the basis for hypotheses (Soiferman, 2010), was used to a limited extent since existing theory on the studied topic is scarce. It is therefore complemented by an inductive research approach, which, in contrast, is a bottom-up approach where a theory is generated based on experience and observations (Soiferman, 2010).

The overall purpose of the master thesis is exploratory, i.e. trying to understand how something works in depth (Höst, Regnell and Runeson, 2006). The research has consequently been designed as a case study, as this is a suitable research design when aiming to thoroughly study a contemporary phenomenon (Höst, Regnell and Runeson, 2006). To complement the case study and build an ample basis of knowledge, a literature review and a best practice review have been conducted.

2.2 Data collection

The data collected is both primary and secondary. The difference between the two types of data is that primary data is collected by the authors for the purpose of the current study, while secondary data is data that has already been collected by other persons with a different purpose. It is therefore important to critically assess the validity of such material (Höst, Regnell and Runeson, 2006). Primary data in this thesis has been collected through observations of sales activities as well as through interviews with management, marketing and sales personnel at InfraSight Labs. Secondary data has been collected through a literature review, internal documentation at InfraSight Labs, and from other organizations' websites.

2.2.1 Observations

Observations were used as a means to see activities as they occur at the studied case company. The activities observed were somehow connected to sales, e.g. cold calls, demo meetings, installation workshops and internal sales meetings.

As an observer, one can have different degrees of interaction with the studied phenomenon. The category of observation that was used in this case study was “observer as participant”, which is characterized by low interaction with the studied phenomenon, however the observer is visible, playing a neutral role as much as possible (Höst, Regnell and Runeson, 2006).

2.2.2 Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with management, marketing and sales personnel at InfraSight Labs as part of the case study. The interviews were of semi-structured format, during which the respondents were asked a set of predetermined open-ended questions.

The interviews were conducted in accordance with a semi-structured interview guide which contained core questions and several sub questions related to each central question. The interview guide is presented in appendix A. Interview guides serve the purpose of exploring the respondents more comprehensively and systematically, while at the same time keeping the interview focused on the desired topic (Jamshed, 2014).

The name and the position of the respondents as well as the interview setting and duration are presented in table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Interview and respondent information

Name	**Position**	**Setting**	**Duration**
Magnus Andersson	CEO, founder	Face to face	75 minutes
Konrad Eriksson	CTO, founder	Face to face	60 minutes
Anton Petersson	Product marketing manager	Face to face	60 minutes
Mikael Brostedt	Sales manager	Face to face	60 minutes
Simon Bergmark	Account manager	Video call	35 minutes

All interviews were conducted in the same manner. One of the authors asked questions and the other one took notes. Both authors were allowed to ask follow-up questions. The interviews were also audio recorded to ensure that no key points were missed. Each interview started with one of the authors explaining the context and the purpose of the interview, followed by initial warm-up questions and thereafter key questions. Finally, the interview was summarized and the respondent was given the opportunity to add any additional information they would like to share.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish. The authors then summarized each interview in English and used the information gathered from the interviews in chapter 5.

2.2.3 Documentation

Internal documentation at InfraSight Labs was studied to gain a deeper understanding of the company's organization, product, customers, competitors, customer acquisition process and marketing. This data was later verified during the interviews.

2.3 Research process

The research process is depicted in figure 2.1. Its different steps are described in more detail below.

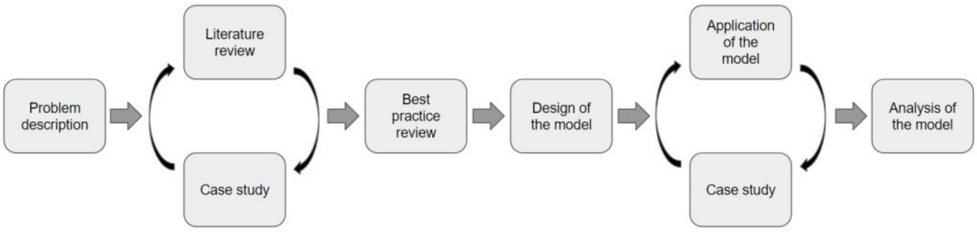

Figure 2.1. The research process

2.3.1 Problem description

In the initial phase of the research process, the problem was identified and the research questions were decided upon. This was done by reviewing existing literature and discussing with key personnel at InfraSight Labs as well as with the supervisor at Lund University. The purpose, objective, research questions and methodology of the master thesis were formulated in a project specification which was agreed upon by all above mentioned parties. This remained largely the same as the project proceeded, though minor changes were made at times to ensure a satisfactory result.

2.3.2 Literature review

In order to gather knowledge about the topic and create a basis for the forthcoming empirical study and analysis, a literature study was conducted. It focused on theory of the B2B selling process, the B2B buying process, B2B brand-building, B2B digital marketing methods and channels, as well as supporting marketing and sales software. A theoretical framework was developed as a result of the literature review. It was summarized in a figure displaying how the discussed areas relate to each other conceptually and chronologically. The process of reviewing literature was iterative and also continued throughout the empirical study.

2.3.3 Best practice review

To complement existing theory, a best practice study was carried out showing how other companies have successfully implemented a B2B digital inbound marketing strategy. The best practice study was based on four case studies conducted by a research institute. The case studies were chosen according to certain criteria, namely the characteristics of the case companies and the marketing methods and tactics they had used. Certain characteristics of the selected companies were required to match those of InfraSight Labs, i.e. operating in the software/SaaS industry, targeting B2B buyers and aiming to grow.

2.3.4 Design of the model

When the best practice case studies had been summarized, they were analyzed to identify common company traits and methods of action that had led their digital inbound marketing strategies to be successful. Based on this analysis, a digital inbound marketing (DIM) model was generated containing key aspects to consider when designing a B2B digital inbound marketing strategy. Theoretical findings from the literature review were used to validate the conclusions from the case studies and the generated model.

2.3.5 Case study

A case study at InfraSight Labs was conducted iteratively throughout the entire research process. It started during the project specification and literature review by conducting informal interviews, observing sales activities and studying internal documentation. After the DIM model had been designed, formal semi-structured interviews were also conducted with management, marketing and sales personnel. The interview questions were based on the DIM model and its key areas.

2.3.6 Application of the model

The DIM model was applied at InfraSight Labs and as a result of the application, along with the previous literature study and best practice study, a new version of the model was evolved. Based on the improved DIM model, recommendations were given on which approach InfraSight Labs should take when designing their digital inbound marketing strategy.

2.3.7 Analysis

Finally, the applicability of the DIM model was discussed with respect to its generalizability and credibility as a basis for future research.

2.4 Credibility

The credibility of a study can be assessed using different dimensions. The validity, reliability and representativity of this study are discussed below.

Validity refers to whether the study measures what it is intended to measure (Höst, Regnell and Runeson, 2006), i.e. that it corresponds to the real world in an accurate way. To ensure that the validity is as high as possible in this thesis, multiple sources have been used and the methodology has been adapted to best fit the purpose and research area. As mentioned in the delimitations section, this study is limited to B2B companies in the software/SaaS industry which are aiming to grow. Therefore, the study is only valid for companies fulfilling these criteria.

Regarding the reliability, which involves the trustworthiness of the collected data and the analysis in the study (Höst, Regnell and Runeson, 2006), a high quality and reliability in the theory chapter has been sought by using information gathered from articles and books found in university databases.

Further, the reliability of the information collected about InfraSight Labs has been assured by comparing different sources to each other; the respondents were asked the same questions during the interviews, and the data that had been gathered from internal documentation and observations was also confirmed during the interviews.

Despite the above stated efforts to attain a high validity and reliability, certain potential vulnerabilities are worth mentioning. Firstly, the interviews were summarized and not transcribed afterwards, which implies an increased risk of the respondents' comments being misinterpreted. This affects the validity, even though attempts were made to avoid ambiguities by listening to audio recordings of the interviews.

Secondly, it should also be mentioned that the DIM model that was generated in this thesis was largely a result of an analysis of best practice case studies, which had all been published by a research institute. The objectivity of the research institute was critically assessed and it was judged to be reliable source of information. The validity of the findings in the best practice review was also confirmed by theory. However, it is important to bear in mind that the best practice study is based on solely one source of information, a third-party source, which might have an effect on the results and the analysis. The fact that the best practice case studies are from different years and a few years back in time also influences the validity, since the digital environment may have changed since then.

As to the representativity of the study, which refers to the generalizability of the conclusion (Höst, Regnell and Runeson, 2006), a discussion on to which extent the DIM model could be applied again in a different setting can be found in section 6.4.

3 Theory

Academic theory on B2B digital marketing and sales is scarce (Holliman and Rowley, 2014). Therefore, the theoretical base for the paper will focus on various areas within the early stages of the B2B selling process, which can together create a basis for an analysis, as well as look at digital inbound marketing strategies and tactics used in B2B companies.

In order to understand the underlying behavior of both customers, marketers and account managers, the theory will start with a general description of the selling and buying processes for B2B firms. The focus will then move on to cover B2B branding and several digital marketing methods and channels. Finally, marketing automation as a tactic and CRM systems will be described to account for software that may be used as a support within the selling process.

The chapter will be concluded with a presentation of a designed theoretical framework. This framework will be used to understand how the aspects that have been brought up relate to each other both chronologically and conceptually, as well as be an underlying basis for the structuring of the thesis's empirical part.

3.1 The B2B selling process

In order for a company to earn revenue from its customers, the customers must first be acquired. Customer acquisition is particularly important in contexts such as when starting a new business, when entering new markets and when launching new products or services (Ang and Buttle, 2006).

The customer acquisition process can be described as a sales funnel divided into different stages (Ang and Buttle, 2006; Coe, 2004; Patterson, 2007; Yu and Cai, 2007). It illustrates the sequential narrowing of a company's customer base - from all potential customers who might be interested in the company's products or services - to customers who actually pursue a purchase. Despite the wide recognition of the sales funnel conceptualization in industry and academia, the sales funnel's stages and their definitions can vary from study to study (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

D’Haen and Van den Poel (2013) divide the sales funnel into the following four categories: suspects, prospects, leads and customers, which is illustrated in figure 3.1.

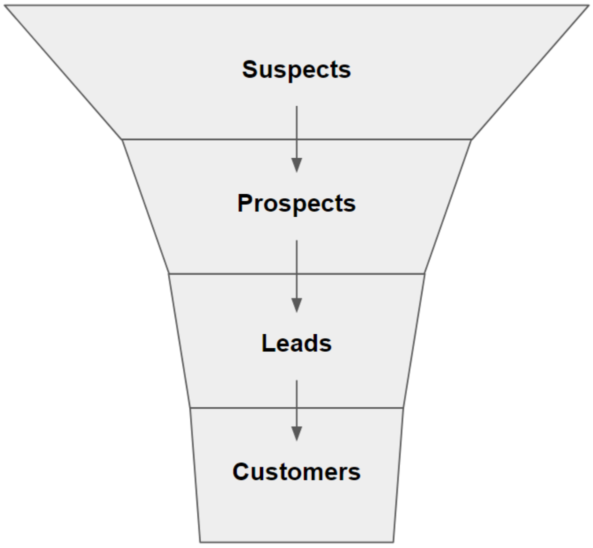

Figure 3.1. The sales funnel. Figure adapted from D’Haen and Van den Poel (2013)

Suspects are all potential new customers. In theory, the pool of potential customers can be very large since it can include every other company in a B2B context available except for the existing customer base (D’Haen and Van den Poel, 2013). In practice, however, the size of the pool is often narrowed down to a cold call list of companies purchased from specialized vendors (Buttle, 2009; Rygielski et al., 2002; Wilson, 2006). Lists like these tend to include vast amounts of information that can easily overwhelm B2B marketers (Wilson, 2003), who consequently often make selections arbitrarily. The result of this selection is a list of prospects. Prospects are thus suspects that meet certain predefined criteria (D’Haen and Van den Poel, 2013).

The next step after selecting prospects is to qualify leads. Leads are the prospects that will be contacted by sales representatives. They have been qualified as the most likely to respond (D’Haen and Van den Poel, 2013) or to offer the highest probability of profitable sales (Long et al., 2007). This qualification is often based on gut-feeling or self-proclaimed competence

(D'Haen and Van den Poel, 2013; Jolson, 1988). Finally, leads who are converted into clients become customers (D'Haen and Van den Poel, 2013).

As a derivative of the traditional sales funnel described above, Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) present a joint marketing and sales funnel, in which marketing and sales are both considered integrated parts of the selling process. In their study, the model is applied at a case company that uses marketing automation and content marketing, and is designed thereafter. Together with content creation and content delivery channels, the funnel consists of five successive stages: identified contacts, marketing leads, sales leads, opportunities and deals (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). This is illustrated in figure 3.2.

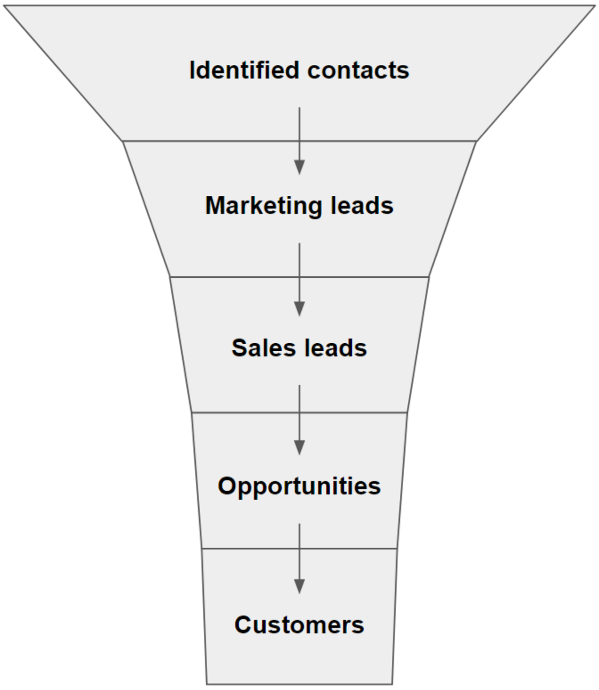

Figure 3.2. The marketing and sales funnel. Figure adapted from Järvinen and Taiminen (2016)

Identified contacts are suspects that are identified by the company. They are discovered when visiting the corporate website and leaving contact information, e.g. when filling in a contact request form, making a sales inquiry or trying to access digital content. Moreover, existing customers are identified automatically by the marketing automation software through a website login, cookies, an IP address or an email address. Data on identified contacts is stored in a customer database, and the marketing automation software will classify the contacts as either marketing leads or sales leads (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

Marketing leads are contacts that are identified and on whom there is some behavioral information, but who do not yet have shown any buying intention. Thus, they need to be nurtured and pushed closer to a purchase decision. This is done through learning more about the marketing leads and delivering personalized content based on profile information and online visitor behavior. The goal is to convert marketing leads to sales leads and a lead scoring system in the marketing automation software can be used to determine which marketing leads are of greatest value and should be passed on to the sales force (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

Sales leads are contacts who have already requested a quotation or whose online behavior shows clear signals of buying intention. Qualified sales leads are automatically sent to the CRM system and assigned the appropriate sales representatives, who will contact them and try to convert them into opportunities and eventually deals (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

The opportunities stage is characterized by negotiations between the seller and the buyer, and if successful, it will result in closing a deal (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

The way through the marketing and sales funnel is not always linear as described above, but the customer can move back and forth, and the selling company may need to make iterative efforts (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

The funnel framework that will be used in this master thesis is an altered version of the sales funnel by D'Haen and van den Poel (2013) and the marketing and sales funnel by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016). It also includes a first category, unidentified potential contacts, which represents potential contacts that have not yet been identified by the selling company and may also not be aware of the company's existence. This marketing and sales funnel will thereby include the following five stages: unidentified potential contacts, identified contacts, marketing leads, sales leads and customers. This funnel will represent the process of acquiring customers, and is what will be referred to when mentioning the selling process throughout the thesis. The funnel is illustrated in figure 3.3.

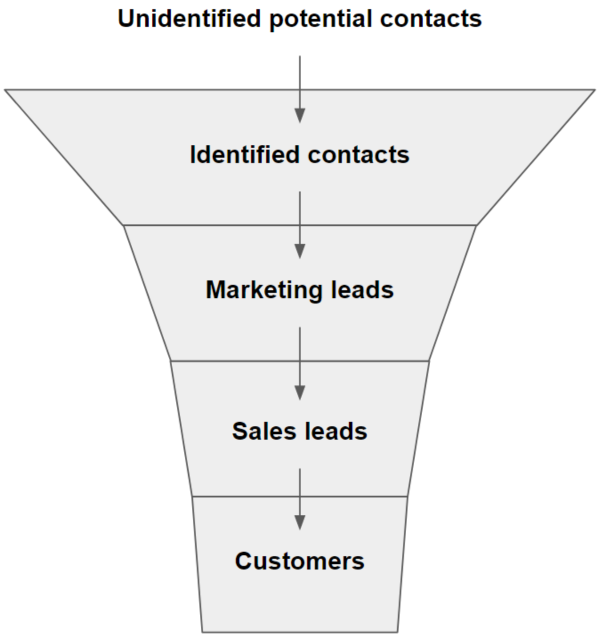

Figure 3.3. The marketing and sales funnel used in this master thesis

3.2 The B2B buying process

B2B markets are unique in the way that they are characterized by the buyers, and not necessarily by the products sold. B2B customers differ from consumers because of their budget constraints and profit-motivation. The size of B2B customers' purchases, the type of relationship that they demand from their suppliers, the concentration of the buying power and the buying process are all different from those of the household or individual consumer. Further, B2B buying is influenced by both individual and organizational decision-making processes (Webster and Keller, 2004).

Although B2B organizations rarely do impulse buying, B2B buying still cannot be seen as completely rational and objective. Subjective evaluation and persuasion do exist, and purchases are not always made with solely economic considerations. The relationship between buyer and seller involves interaction between people, and companies may buy goods and services because of pride of possession or similar, not because they necessarily need them. However, the majority of purchases are made to solve a particular problem or to satisfy a need. B2B customers are after all constrained by budgets and concerned with profit. Besides, they cannot spend money they do not have or cannot obtain (Webster, 1965).

3.2.1 The process

Webster (1965) presents a model of the B2B buying process as a process of four elements: problem recognition, buying responsibility, the search process and the choice process. In the first element, problem recognition, the buyer recognizes a problem which can be solved by making a purchase. A problem can be described as a perceived discrepancy between the company's goals and its current performance. To solve the problem, companies purchase goods or services, and a buying situation is thereby created (Webster, 1965).

Factors that contribute to problem recognition in a B2B organization and create buying situations could be for example dissatisfaction with current suppliers, initiatives from internal departments or marketing initiatives from potential suppliers (Webster, 1965).

The second element, buying responsibility, comprehends the assignment of buying authority. In B2B contexts, purchase decisions are made by individuals functioning within organizations. An individual's influence on the buying decision is determined by the amount and type of responsibility the organization has given them. This responsibility depends on a number of factors, such as how technically complex the product is, how important the product is to the organization or how much specific knowledge the individual possesses about the product. Apart from product and individual factors, the assignment of authority is also influenced by the company, the industry and the market (Webster, 1965).

In the third element, the search process, the B2B buyer gathers and analyzes information. Individuals typically have routine methods for searching information and there are two tasks included in the process: one is to establish criteria against which to evaluate the potential vendors and offerings, the other to identify alternative product solutions in the market. Attainment of the organization's goals can serve as one selection criteria, but the search may also cause a change in goals, which makes the search more complex. The more complex the search is and the more sources of information that are considered, the more costly the search process becomes. Since companies are constrained by cost and time, these factors will limit the amount of search possible and hence the number of alternative options that can be identified and evaluated (Webster, 1965).

The search process leads to the final element in the B2B buying process, the choice process, in which one or more suppliers are chosen. The product alternatives identified in the search process will be evaluated according to certain decision rules. These decision rules are derived from objectives, policies, specific criteria for evaluating product solutions and procedures for purchasing actions that are established by management (Webster, 1965).

The choice process can be described in three steps: vendor qualification, comparing offerings with specification and comparing offerings with each other. In the first step, it is determined whether the potential vendor is qualified as an approved source of supply with regard to factors such as financial strength, credit rating, years in business and management ability. The second step is to determine whether the vendor’s product offering meets the criteria or the specifications that have been established earlier in the process. These criteria could include product features, quality level, price, availability, delivery time, service or similar. The vendors that meet all criteria pass to the third and final step, where they will be compared with each other. The one that provides the greatest value to the buyer is selected (Webster, 1965). In some theory, the choice process is divided into two different phases: evaluation of alternatives and purchase decision (Quigley, Bingham and Patterson, 1997).

An additional stage, which would occur after the choice process and the purchase decision, is post purchase evaluation. It is commonly the final stage in literature about the consumer buyer decision process, but does not appear as often in literature about the B2B buying process (Harmon, Conrad and Brown, 1997). Post purchase satisfaction is about whether the seller and the product meet the buyer’s expectations. The degree of satisfaction influences future sales. If the expectations of the buyer are not met, this reduces the chance of repeat purchases in the future. Therefore, the seller should realize that their responsibility does not end with the sale, but they also ought to keep the buyer satisfied after the purchase and make this an integrated part of the overall marketing strategy (Withey, 1988).

3.2.2 Parties involved

Within a B2B organization, there are several people who participate in the buying process. Webster (1972) expresses the term buying center which is a subset of organizational actors involved in the buying process. The buying center consists of five roles: users, buyers, deciders, influencers and gatekeepers. Users are members of the buying organization that actually use the goods or services purchased. Buyers are those who have formal authority and responsibility for entering into agreement with suppliers. Influencers are people who influence the decision making process. This can be done either directly or indirectly by providing relevant information or criteria for evaluating different options. Deciders are those who have authority to choose between alternatives and select a vendor. Gatekeepers are members who control the flow of information into the buying center. It is possible for one person to occupy several of these roles, as it is for several people to occupy the same role (Webster, 1972).

3.3 B2B brand-building

For many years, brand-building or branding has been considered as a key in B2C sales, yet been named as insignificant in B2B industries. However, starting from the 1990's, this notion has been questioned and empirical evidence has been presented showing that branding can have a large impact in the B2B sector as well (Seyedghorban, Matanda and LaPlaca, 2015).

Previous research has showed many reasons for B2B companies to engage in branding. Two main causes are growing commoditization in certain product categories and an increase in online purchasing. The B2B purchasing process is usually considered more rational than that of B2C, however higher product similarity or commoditization leads to a decline in rationality in the buyer decision process. This indicates that the B2B purchasing process will be increasingly affected by product branding when product similarity among competitors increases (Ghosh, 2006).

Simplifying purchasing has also become more important with the increased information flow in today's society. This allows for human elements such as perception and perceived risk to play a larger part in the buying process which in turn leads to an increased importance of brand perception (Sheth Jagdish, 1973). Additionally, successful branding has been proved to lead to the possibility to attain a higher price premium (Bendixen et al., 2004), an increased demand by customers (Hague and Jackson, 1994), and most of all have a leading influence on creating sustainable relationships between a company and its stakeholders (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Schwaiger and Sarsted, 2011).

B2B companies also experience issues when attempting to engage in branding, with two main ones being connected to digitization. When handling brand presence online, B2B firms are experiencing difficulties in achieving trust, which is especially important during digital interaction (Ibeh et al., 2005; Li et al., 2012). Additionally, brands run the risk of becoming more vulnerable with the growing use of social media, which invites customers into more brand interaction. Some argue that this is a key reason to have an early focus on co-creating the right type of content together with other parties, as this new interactive way of doing business makes it necessary to accept the increased risk of losing control of their brands (Holliman and Rowley, 2014).

Studies have also been done on the customer perspective of B2B branding. A qualitative study of a number of Panasonic’s customers found that 4 out of 5 saw branding as an important aspect in B2B sales. The customers highlighted the importance of a positive reputation for a supplier, as it allows for promotion through several additional channels as well as providing a sense of pride in being associated with a well-recognized and appreciated brand. The customers also claimed that reliability, product quality and support made a significant impact on brand associations and brand image in general (Bolat and Strong, 2016).

3.4 Digital inbound marketing methods and channels

There are a large number of different digital marketing methods that can be used in B2B sales, and the grouping is not always consistent. The types of digital inbound marketing methods and channels that will be described in this paper are content marketing, SEO, social media marketing, email marketing and mobile marketing.

3.4.1 Content marketing

There are a number of definitions of content marketing. Holliman and Rowley (2014) were the first to explore content marketing from a B2B marketer's perspective and defined it as the following:

"B2B digital content marketing involves creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome."

According to Chaffey and Smith (2013), the most common forms of digital content are pictures, videos and animations, e-books, white papers, podcasts, webinars, infographics, blog texts and social media posts (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

There is limited research on B2B content marketing within academia, with the majority of studies having been done by commercial research institutions (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). There are however some exceptions; Rose and Pullizzi (2011) defined the main objectives of content marketing as creating brand awareness, lead conversion and nurturing, customer conversion, customer service, customer upsell and passionate subscribers. Holliman and Rowley (2014), on the contrary, identified the main objectives in the B2B setting as lead generation, brand awareness and brand-building, offering thought leadership and achieving trust brand status.

In general, "building a trusted authority position" has been identified as one of the key success drivers of content marketing (Holliman and Rowley, 2014). According to Peppers and Rogers (2011) there are four main elements that help develop this trust: shared values, interdependence, quality communication and non-opportunistic behaviour.

3.4.2 Digital marketing channels

It can be argued that the following digital marketing channels and formats can be defined as their own forms or methods of digital marketing. However, in order to create a holistic view of the relationship between the various concepts, this thesis will instead label them as channels used to spread the broadly defined concept of content marketing.

3.4.2.1 Social media marketing

There is often confusion among academic researchers as to how to explain the term social media. Keinänen and Kuivalainen (2015) described social media marketing as "the actual acts of using social networks for marketing purposes", whereas Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) decided on the following definition:

"Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content."

Constantinides and Fountain (2008) used application as a base for classifying different types of social media marketing and landed on the following types: blogs, social networks, forums/bulletin boards and content aggregators (Keinänen and Kuivalainen, 2015).

The importance of social media within B2C marketing has been widely recognized, however, B2B companies have been more hesitant to adapt the approach and many have deemed it as not important (Lacka and Chong, 2016). Research from 2015 on some of the most common social media platforms shows that a mere 41 percent of B2B marketers deem LinkedIn as an important marketing platform, with Facebook and Twitter landing on 30 percent and less than 20 percent (Richter, 2015).

A large difference between social media and more traditional B2B marketing methods is the need for an interactive and conversational approach. This may provide difficulties with creating relevant content within many B2B industries. The smaller number of customers and enthusiasts for B2B companies also leads to a greater difficulty in achieving viral effects and word of mouth marketing (Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto and Jayawardhena, 2012).

There are several potential benefits of social media use in B2B companies. Keinänen and Kuivalainen (2015) name three of these benefits as gathering valuable information from customers, networking with customers and establishing a communication dialogue with customers. It has also been proven that social media can be used to identify and attract new business partners and new business opportunities (Lacka and Chong, 2016).

A two-way online interaction can also result in a greater trust and loyalty between a company and its target market (Lacka and Chong, 2016). Social media can also contribute to creating a unique brand identity (Michaelidou et al., 2011), and help create brand awareness (Van Den Bulte and Wuyts, 2007).

3.4.2.2 Search engine optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) is by Google's Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide defined as "a series of modifications and techniques, which make it easier for search engines to crawl, index, and understand the content of a website" (Zilincan, 2015).

SEO can be divided into two groups: on-page SEO and off-page SEO. On-page SEO is based on website structure and directly dependent on and controlled by those building and maintaining the website. Off-page SEO is dependent on other parties such as visitors and other publishers, and can happen through e.g. forums and discussion boards, social networks and blogs. A combination of both SEO types is said to be needed to optimize the website's position in the Search Engine Result Page (SERP) (Zilincan, 2015).

3.4.2.3 Email marketing

Email marketing is known as promoting products or emails through the use of emails (Marketing Terms, 2012) and is used to draw the customers' attention towards a specific product or service. Email marketing is a popular method of marketing as it is cost effective and customizable, allowing a company to send out content that is specifically targeted towards the receiver (Hosford, 2011; Malhotra and Birks, 2007). As with all marketing, the ultimate goal of email marketing is to persuade the customer to act in a certain way, i.e. generally to buy a product or service. However, it is also used to share information, strengthen the brand and direct potential customers to a website (Merisavo and Raulas, 2004).

Due to a large number of customer complaints about receiving unwanted emails, most email marketing is so-called permission-based, where the recipient consents to receiving direct emails (Elis-Chadwick and Doherty, 2012). A main reason for a potential customer to agree to receiving these marketing emails is the hope of receiving material matching their interests (Grunert, 1996; Gengler and Thomas, 1995).

3.4.2.4 Mobile marketing

Balasubramanian and Shankar (2009) define mobile marketing as the "two-way or multi-way communication and promotion of an offer between a firm and its customers using a mobile medium, device, or technology". As a multi-channel communication it is an interactive form of marketing and therefore increasingly important within business today (Balasubramanian and Shankar, 2009).

Mobile devices contain three key properties that are significant to marketers: location-specificity, portability and wireless features (Balasubramanian and Shankar, 2009).

Location-specificity refers to the possibility for many mobile devices to keep track of their physical location. This makes it possible for marketers to offer location-specific marketing messages. Although this is possible in certain traditional marketing forms as well, for example billboards, these are not able to be both location-specific and personalized toward the user (Balasubramanian and Shankar, 2009).

Portability is connected to the small size of mobile devices, allowing them to be carried with the user at all times. This makes it possible for marketers to quickly reach the user at all times, although the smaller screen size can limit the amount of information that can be absorbed in the messages (Balasubramanian and Shankar, 2009).

Finally, the fact that a mobile device is usually not connected by a physical wire leads to an increase in usability. Mobile devices are therefore more frequently used than other common devices such as desktop PCs. This allows marketers more possibilities to reach out with their messages, but also results in the need to keep these messages concise, as the information needs to be absorbable within a short time frame (Balasubramanian and Shankar, 2009).

These three properties lead to certain differences between mass marketing and mobile marketing, which are summarized in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1. Differences between mass marketing and mobile marketing. Table adapted from Balasubramanian and Shankar (2009)

Dimension	**Mass marketing**	**Mobile marketing**
Scope of audience	All existing and potential users of the product	Existing and potential product users owing mobile devices who opt-in to receive communication
Potential type of communication	Text, voice, and video in rich formats	Text, voice, and video in very limited visual space with limitations in transmission speed
Typical direction of communication	Marketer-to-consumer	Interactive between marketer and consumer
Ability to deliver message by target location	Low	High
Ability to measure and track response	Low	High
Consumer targetability	Low	Medium
Cost per target audience	High	Low

3.5 Supporting marketing and sales software

Various types of software can be used to support activities within the B2B selling process. Below, the definition and the use of marketing automation and CRM will be described.

3.5.1 Marketing automation

Marketing automation is one of several new digital marketing trends that has a tremendous impact on a company's marketing strategy (Grossberg, 2016). In the B2B sector, marketing automation has attracted increasing attention. It is assumed to result in a higher amount of generated leads by using personalized content to target potential buyers (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

Marketing automation includes the use of a software platform to automate marketing processes and activities, such as customer data integration, customer segmentation and campaign management. It enables new processes and makes current processes that would normally have been performed manually more efficient (Todor, 2016). The users set specific rules for content to be delivered and the software acts accordingly. The objective with marketing automation is to attract, build and maintain trust with potential and current customers by automatically personalizing content which is relevant and useful for meeting the customers' expectations and satisfying their needs (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), the more personal and relevant a message is, the more effective it is due to a higher probability of the message being noticed.

Hubspot (2017) describes successful marketing automation as "software and tactics that allow companies to buy and sell like Amazon - that is, to nurture prospects with highly personalized, useful content that helps convert prospects to customers and turn customers into delighted customers. This type of marketing automation typically generates significant new revenue for companies, and provides an excellent return on the investment required."

When a person visits the company's website, the marketing automation software tracks the visitor's online behavior, i.e. its page views and navigation path. This is done through cookies and the use of IP addresses. These techniques are similar to web analytics tools such as Google Analytics, but with fewer limitations. Marketing automation has more advanced functions and also allows to identify individual customers and study their online behavior over a longer period of time. However, to be able to track individual customers' behavior over time, the visitor must first fill in a contact form on the website in order to identify itself (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

To learn about potential customers, marketing automation uses active as well as passive approaches. Active methods includes asking questions straight out, e.g. "would you like to learn more about this topic?" associated with a link to a related website. Passive methods includes the utilization of clickstream information or data on previous transactions (Järvinen and

Taiminen, 2016). By the means of these two approaches, the marketing automation software can discover which stage of the buying process the potential customer is at, and tailor messages accordingly. For instance, a click on the pricing page on the website would indicate that the prospect might be prepared to make a purchase and content relevant to that stage in the buying process can be delivered (Kantrowitz, 2014).

3.5.2 CRM

Customer relationship management (CRM) is concerned with the management of relationships with clients and involves identification, attraction and retention of high value customers. It is built on the philosophy of relationship marketing and advocates customer loyalty and long-term customer commitment. An important objective is to increase the number of transactions with the best customers in order to generate more profits. CRM is also referred to as the software and technologies used to manage the customer relationships, e.g. data warehousing, data mining, database marketing and sales automation. CRM has also moved to managing relationships between customers and companies employing blogs, forums, RSS, social networks and other online platform tools, known as CRM 2.0 or social CRM (Brambilla and Dalmarco, 2014).

3.6 Relationship between B2B digital inbound marketing and sales

Figure 3.4 summarizes the relationship between the concepts discussed above and demonstrates their chronological and conceptual groupings. With a chronological order from left to right, and a conceptual grouping from top to bottom, the concepts are placed in relation to each other. A divide is made between the selling/buying processes and the other concepts to demonstrate that these can vary chronologically in relationship to each other. Each B2B selling and buying process is unique and can differ due to specific circumstances. Due to this, the most typical selling and buying processes have been assumed.

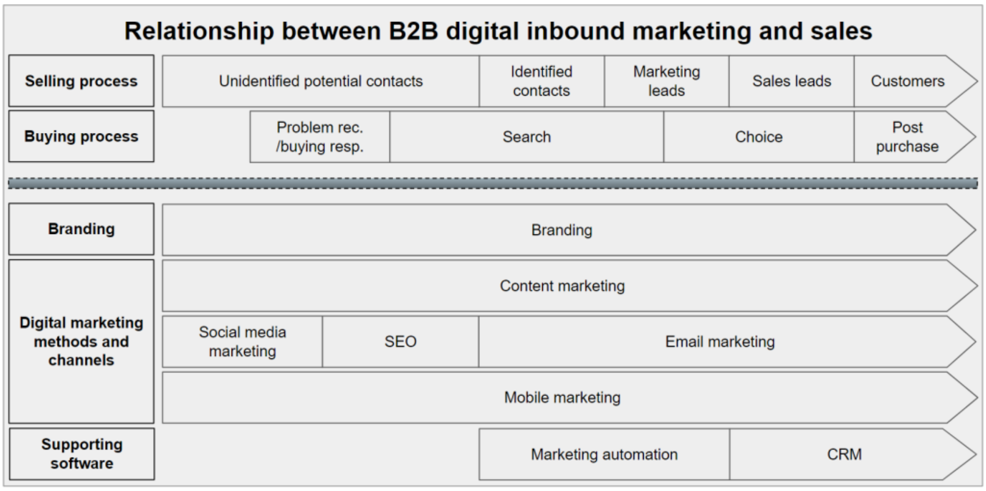

Figure 3.4. Summary of theoretical framework

The altered version of the marketing and sales funnel presented in figure 3.3 lies at the top of the figure, displaying the selling process. A typical customer buying process is then placed underneath as a second layer, in chronological relation to the selling process and its marketing and sales funnel. In the buying process, when the customer has recognized the problem, their search process will typically lead them to the company website, on which they become an identified contact and eventually a marketing lead. The buyer's choice stage then stretches from marketing to sales leads in the sales funnel as the product is considered and tested before the buyer finally becomes a customer.

The third layer in the framework is branding. This is stretched throughout the entire process as branding has been shown to have a continuous impact throughout a selling and buying process. A company brand will affect the customer's view of the product and their attitude towards the company even before their buying process has begun. The company's brand will also continue to impact and be impacted after a sale has been made and the customers are in a post purchase stage.

The next layer is made up of digital marketing methods and channels. The content produced during content marketing needs to be delivered throughout the whole selling and buying process. The channels used to deliver this content however have been placed according to chronological relevance. The potential viral effects of social media makes it a useful tool in the beginning of the selling process and may even lead to the customer recognizing the problem that the product solves. When this problem has been recognized, the customer enters the search stage, raising the significance of SEO. However, once a contact has been identified and provided an email address, email marketing is preferred as it allows for a more personalized way of delivering information. Regardless of which marketing channel is used throughout the sales process, mobile marketing also demonstrates the importance of adjusting all of the marketing methods and channels to a mobile marketing layout and time-frame.

Finally, the bottom layer of the framework demonstrates how further support can be added to the process through software. As soon as a contact has been identified, marketing automation is a useful way to scale up sales without putting a strain on marketing resources. When more information about the customer has been received and its sales relevance has been assured, a CRM system may instead offer better software support.

By mapping out the different concepts by type as well as chronological order, it is made clear which concepts are relevant to focus on at which time in the selling and buying processes. Earlier theory has been lacking a holistic view of the relationship between these concepts as well as B2B digital inbound marketing and sales, and the empirical part of this paper will therefore be dedicated to using this view to create more comprehensive digital inbound marketing and sales strategies.

4 Best practice study

4.1 Findings from previous case studies

Below, findings from four previous case studies are presented. The case studies were chosen according to the following criteria: the companies operate in the software/SaaS industry, they target B2B buyers, and they adopted digital inbound marketing strategies for the purpose of increasing sales. Three out of four of the best practice companies are of small or medium size. In the fourth larger company, the case study is about one of its divisions.

When researching previous cases, all studies that were found which fulfilled the above mentioned criteria had adopted content marketing as a main marketing strategy. Therefore, the best practice study will also indirectly be specified to companies using content marketing as a basis for digital marketing. This would appear to be the most successful method and can entail many different things depending on its implementation.

Each case study is summarized by a short introduction to the case company, the challenge they were facing, the actions they took, and their results.

4.1.1 Sherpa Software

Sherpa Software is a software solutions company that was started in 2000. It started by selling products to help companies manage policy enforcement, archiving and compliance. The services were used to complement companies like IBM and Microsoft who did not provide these specific solutions (Hogg, 2014).

The company grew to provide other software solutions and eventually moved into information governance, with the goal of providing a technology platform targeted at organizations of all sizes. The product was provided through Sherpa Software's own cloud service and its key selling point was that it offered a large variety of information governance elements within the same platform. Any organization with electronic assets was a potential target and Sherpa Software obtained customers in various industries such as legal, healthcare and finance (Hogg, 2014).

Challenge

In 2009, Sherpa Software had mostly used traditional marketing campaigns such as brochures. They had also recently started with email marketing and producing white papers, but without a consistent strategy (Hogg, 2014).

To complement more traditional marketing methods, social media accounts on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter were created and a company blog was started. A software was implemented that made the company’s blog posts appear on third-party websites, giving it a higher rank on the SERP. However when Google changed their search algorithms this practice was subject to penalties and no longer advantageous, meaning that Sherpa Software needed to rethink its strategy (Hogg, 2014).

Actions

Sherpa Software decided to focus on inbound marketing and to generate leads through producing relevant content that would bring in interested readers. The first step was to remove the third party software and bring all previous content under the Sherpa website. Then they could shift focus towards generating relevant fresh content (Hogg, 2014).

Generating relevant content - blog and white papers

To come up with useful content, the company’s marketers reached out to other employees to gain ideas on potential blog topics. They also looked at what was trending in the industry, particularly in professional information management associations. In addition to this, they gave product managers room to add their own content through product release updates. Employees and possible content contributors were also encouraged to consistently send in own ideas of potentially relevant topics. An important aspect was that the blog posts were not to sound like sales pitches, but simply be perceived as interesting to the customer and relevant to their industry. Sherpa Software had noticed a change in customer perception; people were no longer interested in sales pitches, but wanted to search for information on their own. It was thus important to give the customers the content to make this possible. The topics that had been decided on were scheduled to be released in a continuous stream of fresh content (Hogg, 2014).

To build up a larger content base, Sherpa Software complemented their blog with educational white papers for download. The idea was to demonstrate know-how to website visitors and make it a habit for them to look towards Sherpa Software for solutions. A successful white paper example was a four-part series about building a corporate information governance program. The particular content was downloaded more than 1 000 times (Hogg, 2014).

The strategy for all of the content produced was to consistently use multiple channels, whether it was supporting the blogs with newsletters or a trade show with webinars and white papers. In general, all channels and formats were aimed toward providing the reader with educational content on best practice scenarios. When possible, thought leadership was also produced and those considered thought leaders within the company were met with weekly to discuss ideas. Third-party content could also be shared if it was deemed relevant and helpful to the readers (Hogg, 2014).

Sharing the content

When the content had been created, the next step was to share it. One way this was done was through the company newsletter every other month, which contained links to the coming blog posts. These were then released over time for website visitors who were not newsletter subscribers. Subscribers to the newsletter were generally customers and potential prospectors whose email address had been entered on the website (Hogg, 2014).

Sherpa Software also used its social media channels to spread content and conducted internal social media training with employees. They learned that keeping a diversified strategy with many channels was vital when such a large part of the marketing efforts were reliant on a large player like Google. Being able to adapt to the players' quick changes became important (Hogg, 2014).

SEO strategy

Sherpa Software implemented a keyword strategy in their content to better their search engine results. Through highlighting specific keywords in all of their content, visitors had several ways of entering the website, instead of relying on solely the landing page (Hogg, 2014).

To figure out which keywords were important in the information governance industry, Sherpa Software searched other websites and organizations to see their choice of words for defining relevant topics. They also focused on long-tail keywords as these would achieve more specific results. They also systematically developed a register of important words and phrases on which they could run a statistics review for more details (Hogg, 2014).

Targeting customers

To correctly target content to their customers, the company implemented marketing automation software and developed customer personas based on information gathered through various forms on the site (Hogg, 2014).

The sales and marketing teams collaborated to figure out who were the key buyers in their audience. This was done by looking at the prospects' job titles, industry and their place in their organization. The persona's buyer journey was then mapped up and it was decided which content was valuable for each particular stage, starting with the problem recognition phase, and ending with a buying decision in mind. The company saw the importance of moving in small steps throughout the selling process. A customer could be put off if expected to move directly from downloading a white paper to buying the product (Hogg, 2014).

The marketing and sales team met every week to discuss how the sales team could complement a lead moving through the sales funnel with relevant content. They saw an importance of building a trusting relationship. By being helpful, the prospect would come back when they needed something even if it was much later (Hogg, 2014).

Monitoring

To assure themselves of what was giving positive results, monitoring engagement and analytics on the content was key for Sherpa Software. By looking at not only specific pieces of content but also monitoring the entire user journey and movement through the sales funnel, the marketing and sales team could compare the online journey with what information was being requested in the sales field. With proper communication between the physical and virtual selling process, it was made clearer which actions provided value to the process and brought prospects and leads closer to a sale. Sherpa Software highlighted the importance of sticking to a long-term strategy while continuously measuring analytics and engagement to see what was actually working (Hogg, 2014).

Results

After implementing the new marketing strategy, Sherpa Software achieved a 60 percent increase in site sessions, a 67 percent increase in new site users and a 137 percent increase in conversions (Hogg, 2014).

4.1.2 SuperOffice

SuperOffice is a Norwegian company founded in 1989. It provides CRM software for marketing, sales and customer service and targets small and medium sized businesses in Europe (SuperOffice, 2017).

Challenge

SuperOffice targets European small and medium sized businesses in eight countries across six languages with its CRM software, but despite focusing on a specific market niche, it has to compete against big enterprise companies like Microsoft and Salesforce. In 2012, the company needed to find new ways to grow market share and capture traffic and leads. However, they wanted a strategy that was possible to pursue without increasing the budget or the number of employees, and which they could start with immediately (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Actions

The marketing team decided to adopt a content marketing strategy to fulfil the above mentioned requirements. When implementing this new strategy, the team set a goal to increase the number of organic visits to the website from 32 000 visits in 2012 to 72 000 visits in 2013 and 100 000 visits in 2014. To achieve this goal a multi-channel approach was used. The main focus of the campaign was content marketing, which was supported by three channels: SEO, social media marketing and email marketing. The content was distributed via social media and email, and also had direct impact on SEO. At the same time, the needs of each of these channels also shaped what content would be created (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Content marketing strategy

One of the main aspects of the new marketing strategy was that content marketing was to be made the core of all activities, driving other marketing tasks around it. The marketing team decided on white papers as the most important piece of content to focus on, and to complement them by blog posts. The team would pick a topic for each new white paper and write the paper themselves. The selection of topic was done based on keyword research, industry trends and data from Google Analytics. Topics from previously published blog posts that had generated a lot of website traffic were also revisited and elaborated on further in white papers. The entire process of producing a white paper included writing, translating and designing the paper, and took about 10-15 weeks. The designing of the paper, however, was not performed in-house, but outsourced to a marketing agency (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Something that was made clear to SuperOffice during their change in marketing strategy was that content marketing was about quality rather than quantity. In 2012, when SuperOffice started with their blog, they had 14 different authors and released three posts per week with a length of approximately 500 words each. This did not lead to much improvement at all in organic traffic, however, when they revised the strategy and decided to publish only one blog post per week of higher quality and a length of 1 000 words, they started to see an explosion in organic traffic (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

SEO strategy

In the SEO part of the strategy, the marketing team decided to focus on three different areas: keyword research, on-page optimization and internal linking (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

For keyword research, the team utilized commercial keyword planning tools. They also analyzed SuperOffice's competitors and used that information to target keywords that had high search volume but not too much competition. The reason behind this was that they could not outspend their large competitors. The tactics were therefore to first identify keywords

SuperOffice could rank high on, then create content of high quality around them (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

For instance, the team found that the phrase “Customer service email templates” had very little content around it, so they published content around that keyword on their website and posted a blog post named “7 Customer Service Email Template Every Business Needs”. This blog post eventually became the most popular content on the website and, at the time the case study was written, generated 50-60 leads every month (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Regarding on-page optimization, one issue SuperOffice faced was having eight websites in six different languages. To overcome the SEO problem, the team decided to create content in English and optimize the English pages for search engines. Local offices across Europe were then guided to optimize the pages in their local language. However, this proved to be a challenge since not all employees were familiar with SEO tactics. The marketing team therefore tried not to overwhelm the local offices with too much new content (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Social media marketing strategy

As part of the overall strategy to achieve the goal of increased organic traffic to the website, SuperOffice adopted a social media strategy with the purpose to share the content they had created. The company became active on several social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook and Google Plus because of their popularity, and LinkedIn because that was where their target audience was to be found. Content was then published on each platform according to specific guidelines (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Content on Facebook, Google Plus and LinkedIn was shared only once, whereas on Twitter it was shared between three and four times on the same day it was published and once to twice throughout the following week (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Email marketing strategy

SuperOffice also adopted an email marketing strategy with the goal to send at least one email newsletter per month to all email subscribers. They built an email subscriber list of 50 000 persons via white paper downloads, the blog and contact forms on the website, as well as by collecting email addresses at events (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

All these subscribers were sent an announcement via email every time a new piece of content was published. A link to download the content was included in the email. After a while, SuperOffice also started to send second emails - with a new subject line or body - to those subscribers who did not open the first email, in order to increase white paper downloads (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Content calendar

To manage their content marketing, the team followed a methodical approach and created a content calendar consisting of weekly, monthly and quarterly activities (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Every week, new content was published on the blog, including posts written by SuperOffice staff and posts submitted by guest writers. The guest writers had to follow certain guidelines available on SuperOffice’s website. The objective of each blog post was to increase organic traffic to the website and much effort was put on ensuring a consistency in quality. All posts were also analyzed for how many visits, content downloads and social shares they had generated. Quarterly, the team reviewed all blog posts that had been published during the past quarter to see which content had been best received by the audience, and then published more content around that topic. For instance, the team discovered that the most visited blog post categories were CRM and customer service, and therefore focused on writing content around these topics. The blog content was written in English and shared via social media platforms on a weekly basis, but not via an email newsletter (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

The monthly activities consisted of releasing a new white paper, guide or ebook around areas such as CRM, sales, marketing and customer service. The piece of content created would be translated into six languages and published on the website in the fitting language. The translation was performed by a professional service and the local European offices would do some editing afterwards. The content published in a white paper, an ebook and a guide was essentially the same content, but in different formats and of different length. The pieces were marketed in similar ways. Big pieces of content, however, were promoted more heavily during CRM software high seasons. After having launched a new white paper, the team created a blog post to announce the publication of the paper, which was shared across all social media channels. Emails were also sent to the email subscribers with a direct link to the download form (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

The quarterly marketing tactic did not involve any creating or publishing of new content, but instead reviewing and optimizing existing websites. It mainly included on-site optimization and the team analyzed keyword rankings to determine which pages to focus on in order to improve rankings and generate more organic traffic. In the optimization process, several steps were followed: reviewing search query reports, analyzing the average rank or average clickthrough rate data, reviewing existing title tags or meta descriptions, creating new title tags or meta descriptions, and continuously monitoring the performance. The team also worked with internal linking as part of the quarterly activity, and looked at new ways of linking blog posts, content and web pages together (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Results

The social media strategy led to SuperOffice growing from in average 20 social shares per post to over 200 social shares per post. The email marketing strategy resulted in an increase in content downloads as well as an increase in shares across social networks. This had a positive impact on brand awareness and organic searches (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

In total, from 2013 to 2014, the new marketing strategy resulted in an increase in organic traffic with 97 percent and an increase in organic leads with 43 percent. Additionally, 10 000 leads were generated through the blog, whitepapers, guides and ebooks, and the amount of blog readers increased by 108 percent. Additionally, the blog posts were shared over 8 500 times (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

4.1.3 DLT Solutions

DLT Solutions is an IT solution provider that partners with technology and software vendors to sell their products to the American public sector such as schools and government agencies (Eckerle, 2017).

Challenge

After 25 years of business, DLT Solutions had an aesthetically unappealing website with a lot of outdated content, which led to trouble filtering out highly qualified leads. As a company focused on providing customers with the newest technology, having a professional appearance through a modern website was especially important. Additionally, the website was not as user-oriented as was required for that industry (Eckerle, 2017).

Actions

DLT started by redesigning and modernizing the website, making it more user friendly and visually pleasing. This was important to be able to show customers that they were capable of utilizing web space properly. They also changed the overall website focus from their solution-providing partners to themselves, making it clear that it was thanks to DLT that the solutions were adapted to the market (Eckerle, 2017).

In order to center the experience around the customer they also implemented a marketing automation platform and a content personalization and account-based marketing tool. This allowed the content on the website to match the visitor’s stage in the user journey. This also helped bridge certain gaps between the market and the sales team, as the company was able to efficiently provide the visitor with fitting content digitally before they were approached by a sales representative (Eckerle, 2017).

Even if the visitor had not revealed its identity by leaving their business card at a trade fair booth or providing their email address, the software stored the visitor’s IP address which could be used to make an intelligent guess as to the type of customer and which problem it was trying to solve. Thereby a judgement could be made of which content would be relevant to promote.

The method not only helped move prospects along the sales funnel but also filtered out unqualified leads instead of passing them on to sales (Eckerle, 2017).

Content audit

Using a color-coded spreadsheet, the company also performed an extensive content audit, going through old content and deciding what should be allowed to stay and what should be put behind forms in order to gather information on potential prospects. To figure out what was worth keeping they had conversations with their vendors to see what could still be helpful to professionals within the industry. The goal for the pieces of content was that they would help generate demand, convert leads, build thought leadership or create better SEO (Eckerle, 2017).

The pieces of content that were not considered useful were either deleted or archived. To complement the existing content that was kept, DLT also started publishing blog posts and thought leadership pieces two to four times a month (Eckerle, 2017).

Catering to the customer

In order to efficiently reach various customer types, DLT implemented different versions of the website. For those cases in which a website visitor's industry was known, e.g. after a sales follow-up or after it had been entered into one of the website forms, a specific text script and background image would be showed to target its particular interests. For example, if the visitor worked for the Air Force, a background image of a jet would appear and the tag line would be targeted at the Department of Defense. Similarly, if the visitor worked in higher education the tagline would change and the background would instead be a picture of a classroom (Eckerle, 2017).

A visitor's interactions on the website could also help determine their customer type. Putting content as accessible only after completing a form also helped provide the company with more information (Eckerle, 2017).

Lead nurturing

DLT described their ideal user journey as a target visiting their website, seeing potential, and searching through their products for a solution to their particular problem. If the person was a known contact they would be given follow-up information reflecting on previously browsed content. If the person had a clear area of interest they would either be put into a sales call list or placed into a nurture program to help lead them through the sales funnel.

The nurture program could for example include a series of webinars to demonstrate the product with the aim to make sure the leads were qualified enough and had achieved a large enough lead score before being passed on to the sales department (Eckerle, 2017).

In certain instances a lead could be sent back from the sales department to marketing. This could happen if for example the timing was off, or if the companies were a good fit but the customer had been lost to a competitor. The customer would then be placed in either a short- or long-term nurture program depending on the reason for sending the lead back (Eckerle, 2017).

If the prospect was instead successfully converted into a customer, it would be entered into a revenue performance program which would encourage cross- or up-selling. The company highlighted that the process was not linear; the customer would never reach an end, but simply be put in a new cycle (Eckerle, 2017).

A key success factor in this process was named as the relationship between the marketing and sales team and their open communication. To achieve this the sales team was included in the annual and quarterly marketing reviews. There was also a focus on not overwhelming the sales team with leads but handing them over in order of quality and engagement level. Pushing too many leads onto the sales team could also risk damaging the relationship between the departments (Eckerle, 2017).

Results

DLT named their improved communication as one of the best results of the changes made, claiming that the relationship to their partners had improved significantly. The changes also resulted in better website metrics with an increase of average session time by 34 percent, an increase in pages viewed per session by 33 percent, and a decrease in bounce rate by 19 percent (Eckerle, 2017).

4.1.4 IHS

IHS (originally Information Handling Services) is a London-based information services company founded in 1959. It provides information, analytics and expertise for effective B2B decision making and serves customers ranging from governments and multinational companies to technical professionals and small businesses worldwide (IHS Markit, 2017).

Challenge

IHS Jane's is a division of the company which operates an online news portal called Jane's 360 and a magazine called Jane's Defence Weekly. The two medias had for a while been popular reading for people who wanted to take part of the latest defense industry news, and their parts of the IHS corporate website received hundreds of thousands of visitors each month. However, the vast majority of the visitors were only interested in reading the news and did not look further at the intelligence and analysis products that the company was offering for defense and security. These were to be used as a support when making B2B buying decisions (Eckerle, 2014).

At this time, IHS was also using ineffective email and blast marketing to reach out with information on their products to government, military and defense industry professionals. As the marketing team had very little information about the customers other than their email addresses, it was difficult to target the information in their emails, which resulted in low conversion rates and customers becoming cold and unresponsive (Eckerle, 2014).

IHS had a long list of contacts of over 140 000 recipients, but there was no segmentation or consistent data on them. In addition to this, many had become irrelevant due to employees changing jobs and switching email addresses. As the military business is very secretive and actors are unwilling to share information, it is necessary to make own contact lists instead of buying ready made ones, as is possible in most industries. This led to a difficulty in making potential customers aware of the diverse solutions IHS could offer, and the company needed a new sustainable solution that would profile and segment the already existing legacy contacts stored in the database, as well as the 1 000 new contacts entering the database every month. They also needed a way to stay in touch with valuable prospects and keep themselves updated on them (Eckerle, 2014).

Actions

To solve the problem, the marketing team at IHS reviewed their current way of working and decided to modernize the entire process - from profiling and acquiring leads, to nurturing them and creating content that would engage them (Eckerle, 2014).

Reviewing current systems

With the current situation, the marketing manager had experienced that some sales representatives complained about not getting enough leads, and others about getting too many leads, though not enough qualified ones. The marketing team concluded that IHS had to create better content if they wanted to engage the product market and decided to define personas for their business line, which until then had not been done properly (Eckerle, 2014).

However, what the sales representatives thought of the personas did not match with what the product management staff did. This resulted in the marketing team conducting interviews and holding meetings with both sales and product management personnel to discuss personas and reconcile differences (Eckerle, 2014).

The cross-team conversations resulted in a two-tiered persona structure with primary personas on the top and secondary segmentations beneath them. With this structure, it would be easier to identify broader primary personas. Six primary personas were created for the email marketing automation program. New contacts were given one of these personas and received email content targeted to their type. One “uber persona” was also created as a source that encapsulated the existing 140 000 legacy contacts on which no persona data was available (Eckerle, 2014).

In order to be able to assign new contacts into different persona types, IHS needed to capture more information about them when they visited the website. The web pages were modified so that forms on the website would collect the necessary data from the visitors. It was even made possible for leads to segment themselves by filling in a primary buying persona field that had been added (Eckerle, 2014).

Mapping out a lead generating email program

The next step after segmenting and knowing more about the people who visited the website was to make them acquainted with IHS' offerings. Jane’s 360 was a well-known name in the defense industry, but people did not understand the depth of the products and solutions IHS was offering. To solve this problem, a one-month long email program with four automated touches was set up (Eckerle, 2014).

An issue the marketing team discussed regarding this email program was when to ask for a sale without being too pushy. They designed the email program to let people fill out forms in the emails progressively so that, in the end, when they were encouraged to talk to a sales representative, it would not feel like a large step (Eckerle, 2014).

The persons who would enter the four-touch email program were contacts that had been placed into one of the seven personas after having visited the website. The emails would then be personalized after persona type and vary in which content and forms that were included (Eckerle, 2014).

First, within 16 minutes after the contact was pulled into the campaign, a welcome email was sent out. It introduced them to something called Jane’s 360 Insider Program and proposed various ways to stay connected, e.g. through Twitter, Facebook, other newsletters or opt-in pages. The purpose of the welcome email was to let the contacts know that they would receive more information further on (Eckerle, 2014).

One week after the welcome email, the first touch email was sent out. It was a “Did you know?” message that introduced the contact further to Jane’s Insider Program and particular content, e.g. a white paper. The content varied depending on which persona the contact had been placed into, but one important aspect was that no contact was pushed into filling out any form in this early stage (Eckerle, 2014).

In the second touch, the content had a little more depth and could for instance include a case study. The case study aimed to show how to solve a problem relevant to the contact’s persona type. The goal with this email was also to warm up the contact before pushing for more information (Eckerle, 2014).

The third touch was the first gated email which required the prospect to confirm their persona type and also give IHS information on which secondary persona in the second tier they belonged to, in order for IHS to gain deeper insight into which areas the prospect was interested in. The marketing team was surprised with how much the prospects were willing to engage with IHS by sharing information about themselves, after having gotten only three touches so far. Of the prospects entering the email program organically, the rate for opening was 29 percent and the click-through rate was 13 percent in this touch. Comparing to the corresponding numbers for the legacy contact group, this was an increase with 119 percent and 981 percent (Eckerle, 2014).

In the fourth and last touch, the content with the highest value was sent out. It could be a report or a webinar that was supposed to be worthwhile reading to such an extent that the prospect would be willing to give IHS more information about themselves in order to access the content. It was also an opportunity for prospects to announce that they wanted to talk to the sales department (Eckerle, 2014).

Nurturing leads with quality assets

People could only progress through the four-touch email program once and after having gone through the entire process, they were automatically set up for a monthly newsletter campaign. In each email, the prospects were provided with relevant content combined with information on IHS' product offerings. This information would rotate through different product portfolio areas over a year (Eckerle, 2014).

The newsletter was not persona based or personalized, so there was a risk of all content not being relevant to everyone, but the idea was to provide broad content that would be valuable to multiple personas. The objective with the monthly newsletter campaign was to educate people about IHS' product portfolio and keep IHS top of the prospects’ mind. It was also a way to keep leads active and give the company another opportunity to convert them into customers if they had not yet been successful in doing so (Eckerle, 2014).

Results

Compared to the control group consisting of legacy contacts, i.e. the “uber persona” group, the email marketing automation program resulted in a click-through rate that was 112 percent higher in touch one, 741 percent in touch two, 981 percent in touch three and 398 percent in touch four. Interaction with the program also led to almost 1 000 persons updating their profiles to include more segmentation fields, such as area of interest and secondary buyer persona (Eckerle, 2014).

The marketing team learned that the program could also be replicated in IHS' other business units. Nurturing could be done across the entire business; it was basically about communicating with contacts and keeping them warm (Eckerle, 2014).

4.2 Analysis of best practice

After looking at the different best practice case studies, it is clear that most, but not all, methods and tactics that were brought up in theory are also used in practice, and that all four case companies have certain methods and practices in common. These similarities have been summarized and categorized into four key areas: knowing the customer, creating valuable content, sharing through relevant channels and evaluating to improve. The best practice actions within each area are described and analyzed below.

Knowing the customer

The first aspect that becomes evident from the best practice case studies is the importance of knowing the customer and treating every customer differently. Focusing on the customer has been the first step for all the best practice companies and has consequently formed the basis for the following development of the companies’ marketing strategies. Depending on the customer’s industry and field of interest, what role a person has within the buying organization, and which step in the marketing and sales funnel the customer has reached, different content and ways of reaching out to the customer are suitable. It is therefore necessary to gather this information in order to personalize and target the interaction with the customer in the best possible way.

In several case studies, the companies have developed buying personas to target their content to. The persona types can however be complicated to define, since it means pigeonholing many complex characteristics. Therefore, in the case companies, different perspectives were brought in to get a better result. At IHS, the persona structure was a result of cross-team discussions between marketing, sales and product management personnel, and at Sherpa Software, both marketing and sales were involved. Data on existing customers was also gathered to determine who the key buyers in the audience were. This was done by analyzing prospects' job titles, which industry they were operating in and which role they had in the organization.

In the best practice cases, the next step after having defined personas, was to map up which content is relevant for which type of buyer, depending on the type of organization and step in the buying journey. It is important to know where in the buying journey the customer is in order to provide them with the right content without risking to push the customer away. A small step approach was emphasized by both Sherpa Software and IHS and allowed them to progressively gather more information about the customer, which enabled them to nurture the leads by personalizing the content further.

Sherpa Software, IHS and DLT Solutions have all three used a marketing automation program that categorizes visitors on the website into different types of customers or personas depending on the information they give in forms they fill in, their IP addresses, or based on their navigation pattern on the website. Qualified leads can thereby be separated from unqualified ones. The marketing automation program also maps out which step in the marketing and sales funnel the customer has reached. All of this information is used further on in their marketing strategies to keep engaging with valuable contacts and personalizing content.

Sherpa Software used marketing automation to target content to move the prospects through the sales funnel - from the awareness phase to the purchase decision. IHS used it to send out targeted emails in a four-touch campaign to nurture leads and keep them active. DLT centered their website around the customer and had different views displayed for different visitors. Promising visitors would then either receive follow-up information digitally, be placed into a nurturing program or be put on a sales call list directly. Once they were approached by a sales representative, they had already been provided with useful and relevant content, thanks to the marketing automation program.

Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) also highlight the importance of creating and delivering interesting and meaningful content based on each customer's needs, and targeting the customer with the right timing. The content needs to be personalized and aimed at solving the customer's problem, rather than promoting the company's products like a sales pitch. Their empirical study gives evidence to marketing automation being a successful tool to nurture leads and target promising customers with valuable content at the right time.

According to Webster (1972), in a B2B buying organization there are persons with different roles involved in the buying process, with different authorities, responsibilities and impact. This would support the idea that it is not only important to personalize content after type of customer, but also after which buying role a person has in a B2B organization.

Creating valuable content

All of the best practice companies used content marketing as the core of their marketing activities, putting a high focus on content creation. The case studies mentioned the importance of creating content that is relevant to the customer's interests and helpful for solving specific industry-related problems.

As mentioned when discussing the importance of knowing the customer, it is important to make the content sound genuine instead of like a sales-pitch. This was demonstrated by Sherpa Software who was not against posting third-party content as long as website visitors could consider it interesting.

This customer hesitance towards pushy content was also demonstrated by IHS and DLT Solutions. In both cases, marketing automation was used to carefully lead customers through the sales funnel, focusing on taking them one step at a time before finally passing them along to the sales staff who would then push a specific product. This strategy was used to avoid putting pressure on too early before the customer had seen all the benefits of the provided solution.

This need for objective content could be considered related to the general change in customer behavior described in section 1.1. This phenomenon was also mentioned by Sherpa Software who had noticed that more website visitors were now looking to search for information on their own. Providing them with a large amount of relevant content helped make that possible. However, for the customer to feel like they have the possibility to make their own decision, the content also needs to be perceived as objective.

The best practice companies also provided a number of different types of content, complementing more general blog posts with educational white papers, best case scenarios and thought leadership. Sherpa Software named the purpose of this type of educational content to be to demonstrate competence within their area and make it a habit for visitors to look towards their company when needing solutions. It is also arguable that the demonstration of know-how and providing solutions is a way for companies to build trust with potential customers early in the pre-purchase stage. Considering that B2B firms are generally known to experience difficulties in achieving trust, which is especially important during digital interaction (Ibeh et al., 2005; Li et al., 2012), this could partly explain the companies' marketing successes.

Holiman and Rowley (2014) also identified "building a trusted authority position" as one of the key success drivers of content marketing, which could be another underlying reason for the importance of high-quality non-opportunistic content.

The fact that content quality is more important than quantity was also made clear by SuperOffice, who found a significant change in organic traffic to their website after cutting back on the amount of content published and instead focused on making it more relevant and detailed. This also shows that content quality is directly related to SEO.

All the companies based their perception of what content was considered relevant on what was trending in their industry. DLT had discussion with their vendors, Sherpa Software looked at other associations within the information governance industry and SuperOffice based their content choices largely on keyword research done on competitors' websites. A clear similarity was that the marketers for all the companies listened to those active in the industry they were selling to instead of making their own judgements on what should be perceived as relevant. Sherpa Software encouraged employees from other departments to share ideas on interesting subjects which not only led to larger insights into the customers' fields of interest but also more communication between the sales and marketing departments. This positive result of improved communication was also shared by SuperOffice.

One last common factor for all the companies content production was consistency and timing. They all followed consistent schedules of when and where content would be released, some incorporating both shorter and longer term schedules with weekly up to quarterly schedules.

Sharing through relevant channels

The best practice companies all used a number of channels to spread the content they had created in order to reach a larger range of potential customers. Placing all or the majority of their content on their website provided them with a both a platform to store the content and a place to which to lead targets.

As the companies were targeting different customer types they used slightly different channels. However, what they all had in common was choosing their channels carefully based on their customers. DLT and IHS used detailed customer personas and marketing automation to personalize emails as well as their website pages, thereby providing several channels and different user journeys within the basic content platform.

Sherpa Software and SuperOffice incorporated a multi-channel method, utilizing various forms of social media. Both companies created Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter accounts, and SuperOffice also started using Google Plus, as this had proved to be a popular network among their customers. For SuperOffice, the main goal was to drive organic search traffic to their website, and they saw a clear correlation between their success in this field and growing their social media network. This shows that success on one channel will also affect the other, and could explain why the multi-channel method has proved successful.

As discussed above, the optimal channel for a specific customer depends on a variety of criteria. Apart from understanding the customer's fields of interest and job situation, a company needs to understand how and in what context it uses various channels.

How a potential customer relates to certain social network may be very individual. If a prospect is the head purchaser for a larger company they may be less open to information on a product that has been seen on Facebook than for example a developer who generally shares cutting-edge IT products with their friends every day. From a selling perspective however, the developer may be a large influencer and is therefore just as important to impress as the purchaser. Similarly, if a lead is close to a sale and has already gained a general picture of the company or product, more personalized content through an email may be preferred to a general blog post promoted through social media. Keeping track of the customers and when and what they use their channels for is key, and should also be kept in mind when creating the content.

Evaluating to improve

When designing their digital marketing strategy, all four best practice companies were clear about what they wanted to achieve. Many also set specific goals for which key metrics to fulfill. To follow up on the accomplishment of these goals, they monitored engagement and measured analytics.

For instance, SuperOffice regularly engaged in measurement activities. They focused on optimizing the website, analyzing keyword rankings and reviewing content. This was essential since their content strategy was built on reviewing previously published content to see which topics were most popular and then create more content around them.

The companies all used a different mix of metrics. For the company websites, examples of relevant metrics were number of organic visits, number of new site users, number of site sessions, average session time, number of page views per session, conversion rate and bounce rate. When using a multi-channel approach, it also appeared to be useful to measure how many visitors each channel has captured, as well as how many leads have been generated through blogs, white papers, ebooks, guides or other content resources.

Metrics are a helpful way to measure specifics, however the Sherpa Software case also advocates for the need to evaluate the entire user experience and how the customer moves through the buying journey.

In summary, a company's digital marketing activities have to be measured and followed up in order to find out what is working and what is not. It is necessary to continuously evaluate the performance to be able to make adjustments and improve. However, what metrics should be measured depends on which goals have been set and is therefore individual for each company. It is important to be consistent in measuring and following up on a company's marketing and sales tactics, so that the company can change direction if the implemented strategy is not working.

4.3 Digital inbound marketing (DIM) model

Based on the analysis of the best practice case companies, a model has been generated displaying the areas discussed above. It is referred to as the digital inbound marketing (DIM) model and is presented in figure 4.1. The purpose of the model is to act as a guideline and provide key focus points when designing a digital marketing strategy.

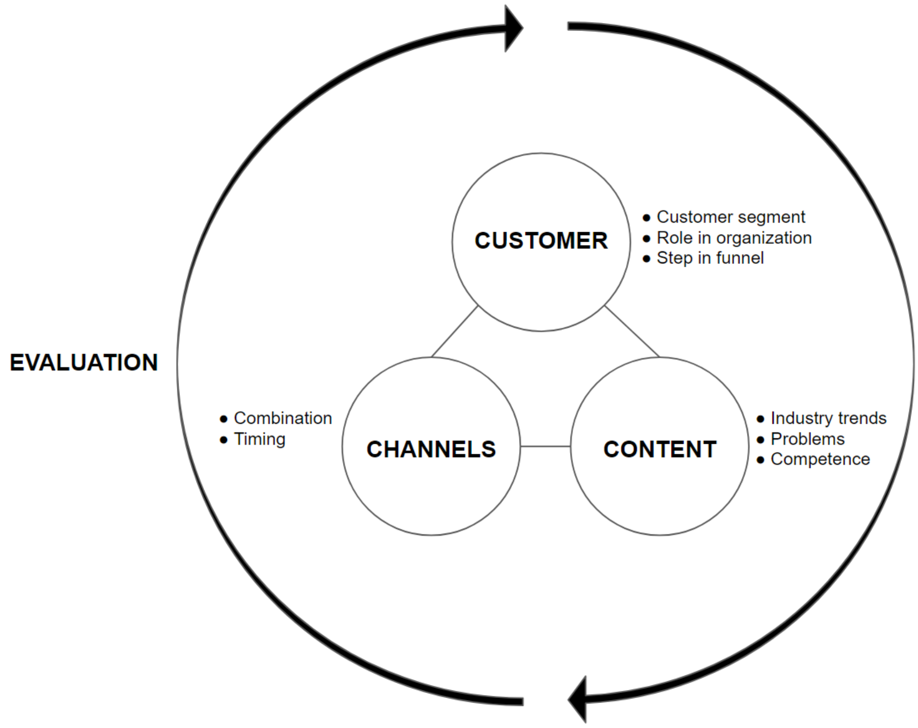

Figure 4.1. Digital inbound marketing (DIM) model

The DIM model shows the importance of the four key areas customer, content, channels and evaluation. It is vital to know the customer in order to create the right content and share it through the appropriate channels. Similarly, it is important to understand how the channels are used by the customer to influence the type of content that is created. Moreover, it is important to realize that content can also be used to gain further information on the customer. Lastly, to improve within these areas, goal-setting and continuous evaluation of the performance is essential. This is demonstrated by the circle of arrows surrounding the core of the model.

To demonstrate the DIM model's use, test its applicability, and further develop the model, it has been applied at InfraSight Labs, a company looking to implement a digital inbound marketing strategy.

5 Case study: InfraSight Labs

The information in the following chapter has been gathered through a combination of interviews with various InfraSight Labs employees as well as internal company documentation. For more information on the data collection process, see section 2.2.

5.1 Company characteristics

5.1.1 Background

InfraSight Labs AB was founded in Malmö in 2010 by Magnus Andersson and Konrad Eriksson. Eriksson, who is highly experienced in programming, saw potential in a new technology and as a result contacted Andersson, a previous colleague who had a background in sales. This technology was eventually turned into an IT management system called vScope. During its first years, the company spent the majority of its resources on interviewing IT managers and service technicians, and developing the product. As the product has improved significantly over time, a larger focus has been placed on increasing sales by expanding the sales force and connected departments.

5.1.2 The product: vScope

InfraSight Labs operates in the software/SaaS industry. Their product vScope is sold on-premises, which means that it is installed and run within the premises of the buying company. The payment model InfraSight uses, however, is in subscription format which is normally used by SaaS companies that run the software remotely.

vScope is a product for IT management which can be used by any organization that relies on IT. The product consists of a basic platform and several product modules which represent different functions in the organization’s datacenter. In general, vScope has two main functions, IT documentation and data-driven analysis.

IT documentation

A company's IT infrastructure is made up of many IT solutions within different technological areas and from several suppliers. For the IT environment to function smoothly, a deep specific knowledge is usually required in each of these areas. Most IT management software providers have targeted their products at only a handful specific areas, whereas vScope will document the complete datacenter setup.

Data-driven analysis

vScope contains over 1 000 built-in configuration controls that analyze the data it collects. It shows trends and draws attention to weaknesses that could be of interest to the customer. vScope lets the customer work with improvements proactively, rather than forcing them to work reactively like the real-time systems that many companies use today. For example, the system can tell the user three months in advance that a file system will run out of space, giving the technician the possibility to plan to set aside time to handle the problem instead of suddenly having to deal with it while working on other activities.

Values of vScope

vScope can solve many problems for the customer, which can all be linked to saving time, money, or both. The product can solve many individual problems and some of its main values are listed below.

First of all, vScope makes it easy for managers and other employees to understand how the different areas of the IT system fit together and demonstrates their relationship with each other. This along with the ability to gather and structure information from the different areas helps provide those higher up in the organization with valuable insights for decision-making and gives them the chance to get specific information without having to disturb a technician or risk accidently changing something in a system. The product also makes it simple to share information and insights with colleagues, which can be helpful in day-to-day routines as well as during personnel changes.

Secondly, the opportunity to realize possible future IT issues gives technicians the chance to work proactively instead of reactively. This saves the technician time, as well as potentially the company a lot of money, as they may be able to avoid a temporary shut-down of systems or lack of space in a database. It can also lead to finding unused licenses or user accounts that are unnecessarily being paid for. Similarly, it can help avoid high penalties if the company is missing certain licenses.

Finally, the IT documentation is done automatically and kept updated. Many companies today rely on simple spreadsheets which need to be updated manually, and it is easy to fall behind. This time is freed up and can be spent on doing more valuable tasks such as looking at how to further develop and optimize the infrastructure.

5.1.3 Organization

The company consists of a CEO and three departments: product development, marketing and sales. The product development team consists of four developers and one of the co-founders as department head. The marketing team consists of a lone product marketing manager and the sales team consists of one sales manager and five account managers. One account manager is located in Denmark and the others are based in different areas of Sweden. In addition to this, there are also several interns that have been helping out, in particular with sales, but also with marketing. The company has also recently hired a customer success manager who will help throughout the selling process and they are looking to expand further in all departments.

InfraSight Labs' goal is to globalize and grow as large as possible. Since their product can be used by any company using IT, the market is enormous. After having spent a long time building the product, the short-term goal is to increase sales. Previously, InfraSight Labs has not wanted to spend too much time and resources on promoting something that does not always deliver. Now that the company has reached a point where the product is commercially viable, it is looking to expand, particularly its sales and marketing departments.

The company founders describe InfraSight Labs' core competences as the strength of the product and the uniqueness of applying the technology in this domain. They also mention their business experience within the IT industry, having seen more IT environments than most IT department heads and having spent a lot of time selling to the people running them.

The employees at the company express the core competences as the knowledge and experience of the founders in their respective domains as well as the high level of competence found in the company board. The fact that the company is small and dynamic in comparison to many others in the industry is also mentioned.

5.2 The market

5.2.1 Customers

The customers InfraSight Labs targets are basically all organizations that rely on IT. Today, InfraSight Labs uses a segmentation model consisting of six main target customers. These six target customers have been divided into two different types of customers: “own IT operations” and “IT service providers”, see figure 5.1.

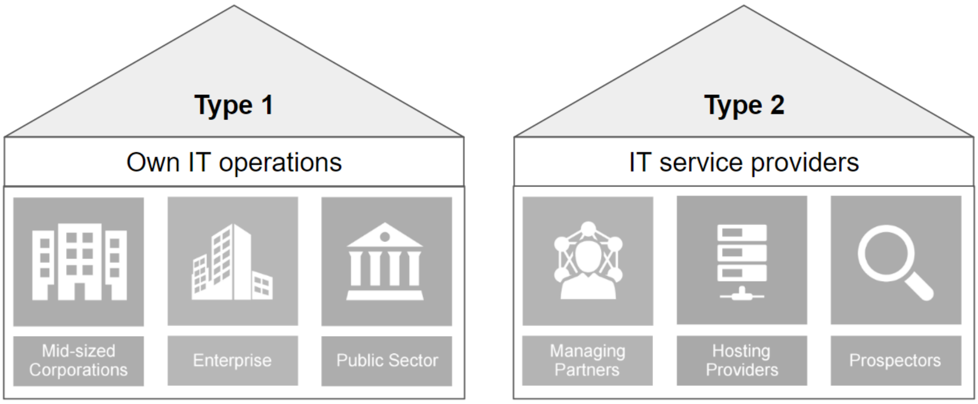

Figure 5.1. InfraSight Labs’ customer segments. Figure adapted from InfraSight Labs (2015)

The first type comprehends customers where IT serves as a support function and an enabler to fulfil the organization’s business goals. Thus IT is perceived as a cost. The target customers of this type are mid-sized corporations, enterprises and the public sector. Mid-sized corporations are companies that have a traditional IT department, normally with 3-10 employees. Enterprises are large corporations that have larger IT departments, typically with more than 10 employees and a larger IT budget. The public sector consists of public organizations, e.g. municipalities. Their goal is not to make a profit, but to increase social benefit. Depending on the organization’s size and budget, their IT department is similar to either that of a mid-sized corporation or that of an enterprise.

The other type, IT service providers, represents customers where IT is their main business and what they make money out of. IT is thus closely connected to their competitive advantage. The target customers of this type are managing partners, hosting providers and prospectors. Managing partners are IT consultants or IT management service providers that manage their customers’ IT infrastructure. Hosting providers are companies that provide hosted infrastructure to their customers. Prospectors are companies that in shorter projects work with assessing their customers’ IT environment.

InfraSight Labs created this segmentation model as a result of an investigation of the market and how different companies manage and use their IT.

In their lead generation, InfraSight Labs has chosen to focus on customers with an annual turnover that exceeds 100 MSEK. They have made the estimation that companies with this turnover have a large enough IT budget to benefit from vScope and generate high enough order values to make the selling of vScope profitable and worthwhile.

Historically, InfraSight Labs has been most successful with serving the segment mid-sized corporations. It has been easier to get these customers to sign a deal and an expansion within this segment is also what InfraSight Labs has been able to handle so far, with respect to product development and support. In the future, however, many of the employees at InfraSight Labs see large potential in the enterprise segment. The order value for enterprises is higher, often as much as ten times, and InfraSight Labs is now also ready organizationally to expand within this segment.

Which parties within the buying organization that are involved in the purchase of vScope depends on the organization. In general, the service technicians are the ones using the product in their daily work. The one making the formal buying decision is the person with budget responsibility, normally the IT manager. However, this can vary. At times, there is an informal IT manager who actually makes the decision or a service technician that has the greatest influence, whereas the official IT manager is more of a figurehead. In larger enterprises, there may also be a CIO that has to give their approval. Sometimes, the CFO or even the CEO and the board members are involved. However, this highly depends on the type of customer and in some cases the situation is completely different. It may as well be the IT manager who takes the initiative to buy vScope and uses the product in their daily work, while the service technicians may be less involved. Representatives from InfraSight Labs are often in contact with each of these parties at some point during the selling process.

Employees at InfraSight Labs describe the industry as very traditional and quite slow-moving. It is characterized by long decision making processes and a lot of bureaucracy. Further, among InfraSight Labs' customers, many employees are afraid of change and worried that the new technology will make their jobs redundant and eventually replace them.

5.2.2 Competitors

The employees at InfraSight Labs claim that the company has no direct competitors since no other player in the market today can offer such a comprehensive and holistic solution as vScope. The employees mean that the closest competitors to InfraSight Labs are companies whose offerings overlap with single parts of what vScop does. There are tools for e.g. documentation, configuration controls and real-time systems which touch on some of the product's dimensions, but the personnel at InfraSight Labs means that there is no comparable product existing today. While other products can be described as separate tools, vScope can be described as a Swiss army knife which incorporates many, while also providing a holistic view.

5.3 Customer acquisition process and marketing

5.3.1 Customer acquisition process

The customer acquisition process at InfraSight Labs today is made up of four main parts: lead generation, demo meeting, installation for assisted trial and contract signing. As with any sales funnel, the goal of each stage is to convert the potential customer to the next stage.

Leads are generated through a couple of different channels. Most leads are generated through cold calling, using self-made phone lists with contact information to different organizations. The company also acquires leads through conventions and trade fairs. In a couple of cases, customers have found their own way to the product through the website.

When a lead is contacted, the goal is to get them to agree to a demo meeting in order to allow for the possibility to showcase the product. During a demo meeting an account manager will travel to the customer where they will spend 1-1.5 hours explaining and showcasing the product through a live demo displaying InfraSight Labs' current IT management.

The goal of the demo meeting is to collect information for a customer need analysis and get the customer to agree to a trial of the product for a minor fee. The trial is used as a proof of concept and is accompanied by a workshop where the values of the product are demonstrated. Hopefully the customer will appreciate these values when they have had the chance to see the product in action on their own system. If successful, the trial will eventually lead to a contract signing and thereby a subscription.

According to the account managers, InfraSight Labs generally has a high success rate once they have a chance to demonstrate the product at a meeting and especially if the potential customer agrees to a trial. The step of the selling process that has the lowest rate of conversion is the initial lead generation and lead qualification, and then convincing prospects to agree to the first meeting.

5.3.2 Marketing

Today, InfraSight Labs uses both physical and digital channels to reach out to potential and existing customers. Physical channels include phone calls as well as various fairs and networking events. The latter has shown to be an effective means to acquire customers, but is time consuming and expensive, and thereby not easily scalable.

In the beginning of 2017, the company launched a new website. Before then, very little marketing, especially digital, had been done. After the launch, an increasing effort was made to use digital forms of marketing and the digital content and channels InfraSight Labs uses today are centered around the website.

The website contains blog posts, news, release notes, tips and tricks, use cases, videos and an FAQ. The web content is shared via social media through LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. InfraSight Labs has also recently started with ads on LinkedIn and posts on review pages for IT tools to create exposure. A monthly email newsletter which summarizes the content that has been created during the past month is also sent out. In addition to this, customer specific emails are sent out to current customers directly from vScope containing information on vScope's discoveries in their IT environment. The intention of the marketing is to publish content related to the industry and the customers. If something new comes up in the market, InfraSight Labs tries to adapt their content around this.

The most effective channel in generating traffic has shown to be the FAQ page. A lot of the content on the page contains more general information on solving e.g. configuration problems, which can be relevant also for people not using vScope. Providing useful answers to more general questions has proved an effective way to bring people to the website and has in certain cases also proved successful in introducing them to vScope and InfraSight Labs. To develop the FAQ section further, the product marketing manager tries to make a note of customer issues when communicating with them, and add helpful content surrounding these topics on the website. The videos on YouTube have also generated many views and are an effective means for customers to learn more about vScope without having to talk to anyone at InfraSight Labs in person. However, InfraSight Labs has not yet been able to see any direct contribution to increased sales.

Today, the marketing is not customized based on customer segment, a person's role in the buying organization or their step in the marketing and sales funnel, and anyone who has a relation to InfraSight Labs will receive about the same content with the same frequency.

The content on the website is managed and updated by the product marketing manager, often sporadically when there is time. Videos and new FAQ content are created when questions arise amongst customers. Release notes are published when there is a new release, which normally means once per month. An email newsletter is sent out once per month and the content is shared via social media approximately once per week.

Marketing material in form of videos or other web content are since recently also used as a support to the account managers in their contact with customers, and has shown to be appreciated by both parties. The account managers have therefore expressed a desire for more such material.

InfraSight Labs does not follow a formal procedure to evaluate and improve their marketing today; it is more of a trial and error process. The product marketing manager informally keeps track of certain metrics, e.g. number of visitors on the website and open and click rates of email newsletters. Blog posts, release notes and LinkedIn analytics are not evaluated except for those that lead to website clicks. All activities are evaluated based on website interaction, which is the product marketing manager's key focus point. Though InfraSight Labs has no official goals for their marketing, the product marketing manager sets unofficial ones. For instance, he aims to double the number of visitors to the website 2017 compared to 2016.

5.4 Challenges

InfraSight Labs faces several challenges within their sales and marketing departments when aiming to increase revenue and expand the business. One of the main challenges is that scaling up sales using the current sales model is strongly correlated with a raise in headcount. To allow for an increase in sales, without scaling costs at the same pace, an improvement of the communication of the product and its values is needed.

vScope is a broad product with a wide range of uses depending on the customer. It is difficult to find one word or even a sentence that can explain what makes the product unique. The lack of direct competitors also adds to this difficulty as there is no competing product suitable for benchmarking. In addition to this, the product is technically complex and used in the IT field - an industry many people see as necessary, but too complex to fully understand.

The company's current position also requires a new outlook on marketing. In the early years of business, when the company was focusing on building a good product, InfraSight Labs spent very little resources on marketing, meaning that the company is now starting almost from scratch. A new website has been created and a few different methods are being used to reach out to prospects. However, due to previous lack of time and resources there is no consistent strategy. There is also no measurement strategy of how changes in marketing affect sales.

Moreover, the current selling process also presents certain challenges. A lot of time is spent on making cold calls towards leads that many times have not been qualified. When a prospect is eventually reached, they are often busy or not truly open to listening to a proposal, making it difficult to move them forwards through the sales funnel. Additionally, the buying processes in the prospect companies are generally long and slow, with several parties involved who all need to be convinced of the product's value. In general, the industry is quite slow and reluctant towards change. Some of the influencers in the buying process may also be afraid to be made redundant with new automation.

Furthermore, this sales method puts a major dependency on the account managers, as they play a vital part throughout the whole selling process. The need for a certain level of technical understanding also adds to the difficulty of finding fitting account managers.

6 DIM model in action

6.1 Application of DIM model

When applying the DIM model at InfraSight Labs, the model's different areas were used as a basis for gathering information in order to receive a comprehensive picture of the company situation and make future considerations. After the information had been gathered it became apparent that in order to use the model when analyzing this information, it would have to be made sequential, with steps that are clear to follow. The sequence that was used when applying the DIM model is presented in a matrix format in figure 6.1 and the process of application is explained in brief below.

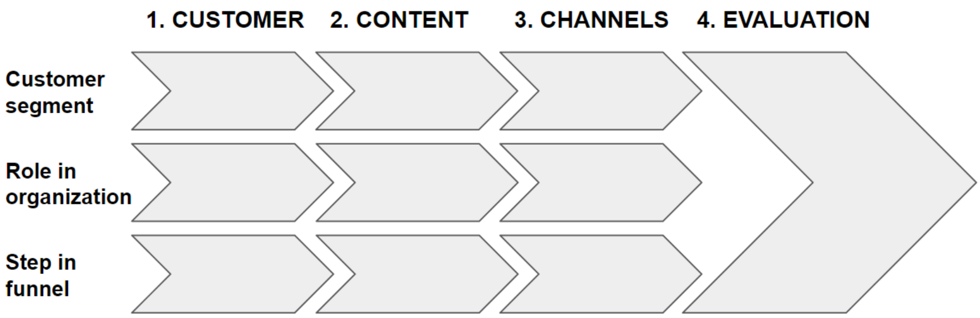

Figure 6.1. Application of DIM model in sequential steps

It can be argued that the key to both marketing and sales is knowing the customer. Therefore it was concluded that the area of the customer would be the best place to start the sequential application of the DIM model. This then provided a base on which to build the following areas of the model.

The customer was considered according to the three criteria stated in the DIM model, i.e. customer segment, role in buying organization and step in marketing and sales funnel. Firstly, two of InfraSight Labs' previously defined customer segments were chosen as main target groups. Thereafter, generalized roles within the buying organization were defined. Finally, different steps within the marketing and sales funnel were considered.

After this, these three customer-related parameters were used to look at the remaining areas - content and channels - to ensure that all marketing activities and activities in the customer acquisition process were targeted correctly. Finally, an internal analysis of the company's evaluation methods was made.

The application of the DIM model in its sequential steps is described below and depicted in figure 6.2, 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5 respectively.

6.1.1 Customer

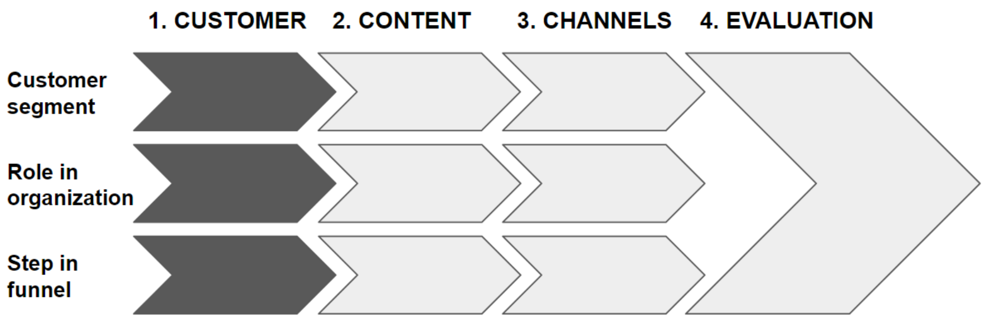

Figure 6.2. Application of Customer

Customer segment

The case study revealed that InfraSight Labs uses a segmentation model consisting of six target customers divided into two groups depending on which role IT plays in the customer's business: "own IT operations" and "IT service providers". Among these six customer segments, InfraSight Labs has been most successful in serving mid-sized corporations so far and they also see large potential in expanding further within this segment. The segment which contains the highest potential revenues, however, is the enterprise segment. The application of the DIM model will therefore focus on these two segments. Both of them belong to the "own IT operations" type, where IT is perceived as an enabler to the business and thus a cost.

Role in buying organization

There are normally several persons with different roles involved in the buying process. The users of the product are in general service technicians, but can also be IT managers or people that are even higher up in the organization. The one making the formal buying decision is typically the one with budget responsibility, i.e. the IT manager or the CIO, but in some cases it can also be the CFO. Influencers can be anyone from service technicians, IT managers, CIOs and CFOs to CEOs and board members.

Which person occupies which role depends on the organization. What can be concluded, however, is that there are normally two main types of roles involved. One is the person who consistently uses the product and thereby cares about the technology as well as about saving time. For the simplicity of the further analysis, this role is assumed to be occupied by the technician. The other role is the person with budget responsibility who is concerned with keeping costs low, seeing results and gathering information for future decisions. For the same reason as above, it will be generalized that this role is held by the IT manager.

Step in marketing and sales funnel

The customer proceeds through the marketing and sales funnel in successive steps. In this analysis, the marketing and sales funnel will be focused around the website, since it has been described as the core of the digital communication at InfraSight Labs and the company centers their digital marketing around it.

The first step in the funnel is characterized by the customer not knowing who InfraSight Labs is or what they and their product vScope do. Organizations in this step have never been in contact with InfraSight Labs and are defined as unidentified potential contacts.

In the second step, the customer has found InfraSight Labs' website, perhaps by searching for information on a search engine and landing on InfraSight Labs' FAQ page. The traffic to the website may also be a result of clicking on a post, an ad or a video on social media, or on forums or review pages. By visiting the website, the customer reveals some form of information about themselves, such as an IP address, cookies and visiting behavior. The customers that have reached this far are called identified contacts. In addition to the landing page, they may also have moved on to other pages on the website and caught an interest in what InfraSight Labs does.

Based on the identified contacts' interaction in the above mentioned step, the contacts can be divided into two categories representing the next steps in the marketing and sales funnel: marketing leads and sales leads.

Marketing leads are those contacts that have visited the website, but have not yet shown any buying intention. Perhaps they have visited more FAQ pages, read blog posts or signed up for the email newsletter. The marketing leads need to be nurtured to eventually be converted into sales leads.

Sales leads have shown an interest in buying the product, either after having been nurtured marketing leads or through moving directly from being identified contacts. For instance, they could have downloaded a trial of vScope from the website, asked for a demo meeting or requested to be contacted by an account manager.

6.1.2 Content

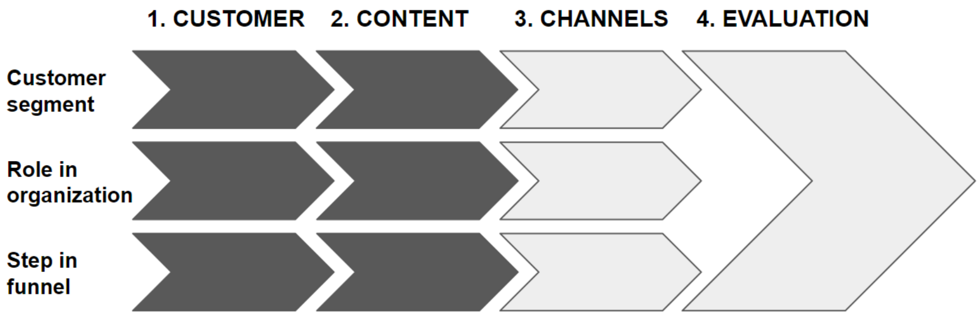

Figure 6.3. Application of Content

Industry trends

As in any industry, the software/SaaS industry as well as the IT industry in general have their own current trends and hypes. The case study does not however reveal any specific differences in trends between mid-sized corporations and enterprises. Similarly, how far a customer has reached in the marketing and sales funnel does not seem to affect which trends it finds interesting.

The parameter that does seem to affect trends is the role the customer has in its own organization. The interviews reveal that technicians have a more specific interest in new technology and what can be done with it, while IT managers are more interested in industry business trends in order to save money or uphold legal standards. The managers may also be interested in new technologies if they are mentioned on a higher level and therefore can have an effect on long-term strategic decisions.

Problems that need solving

Interest in industry trends is closely related to which problems customers need to solve and their fields of interest in general. Which organization role the person who is being marketed to holds at their company also seems to affect their fields of interest. The case study shows that technicians are more focused on solving specific technical problems and saving time in their day-to-day activities while IT managers are more focused on putting together a working budget.

This aspect also seems to differ depending on customer segment. Enterprise IT departments are larger than mid-sized IT departments and tend to hold larger technical expertise. This may therefore lead to a larger technical interest amongst managers within the enterprise segment than amongst managers within the mid-sized corporations segment. Enterprises also tend to have higher budgets, giving them freer reigns to buy a product and try it out. This means that they may generally have less of an interest in the product's addition of value to the company as a whole. Mid-sized corporations who tend to have tight IT budgets however, need to be able to defend any purchase financially, giving them a large interest in the product's cost effect on the entire company.

The DIM model shows that it is also important to relate marketing and sales content to the customer's current stage in the marketing and sales funnel. This seems especially important for InfraSight Labs as their product is technically complex, and the customer's level of understanding and thereby interest in the product will change a lot as it moves along the funnel. Therefore, one can assume that the customer would be more interested in solving generic problems and understanding the product in the earlier stages of the funnel. In the later stages, more detailed and specific information on improving an IT environment like their own may be more useful.

Demonstrating competence

Demonstrating competence is an essential factor in building a trusting relationship with a customer. The case study does not reveal any difference in how this is best done regarding to the customer's step in the marketing and sales funnel, however, it does show certain differences depending on role in organization and customer segment.

As mentioned previously, the larger IT departments within enterprises generally hold larger technological competence, whereas in mid-sized corporations a manager will most likely hold more general competence. Therefore one can assume that to demonstrate competence towards an enterprise will require a demonstration of detailed technical expertise. In mid-sized corporations this is of less importance and competence within understanding the whole business value may be of larger importance.

Similarly, more technical expertise will need to be demonstrated towards a technician than a manager. A manager may instead be impressed by demonstration of business competence through e.g. thought leadership. The general consensus at InfraSight Labs was that their core competence lies in their founders, one with high technical expertise and one with strong business skills. Therefore, competence in the form of technology as well as business methods and thought leadership should be demonstrable.

6.1.3 Channels

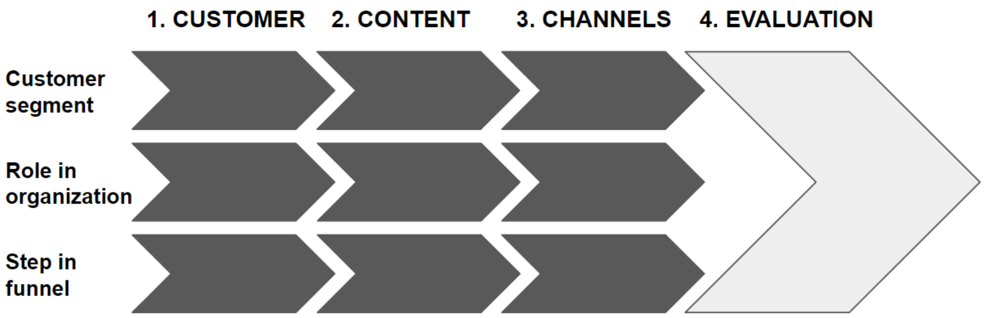

Figure 6.4. Application of Channels

Channel combination

Finding the right mix of channels is the last step to ensure that the content reaches the right customers in an effective way. The channel combination should be chosen with respect to both which customers InfraSight Labs are targeting and what type of content the company intends to share.

There does not seem to be any differences in channel preferences between the two customer segments mid-sized corporations and enterprises, however, it may matter which role a person occupies in the buying organization. Although both technicians and IT managers visit InfraSight Labs' website, technicians usually visit the FAQ page more, and are also more likely to write on online forums and read online tech magazines. IT managers, on the other hand, may be more active users on professional social media networks such as LinkedIn.

The channels that the customer uses may also alter depending on which step in the marketing and sales funnel it has reached. For contacts in the beginning of the funnel, whose attention needs to be captured, SEO and social media seem to be effective channels. For leads in the later steps in the funnel, however, email marketing becomes more important, serving more of a nurturing function.

Timing

Timing refers to at what time a company should reach out to the customer and share content, as well as to with which frequency this should be done, which are both important aspects to consider to successfully deliver a message.

The customer segments mid-sized corporations and enterprises differ from each other in terms of how clearly defined the employees' roles are within the organization. In enterprises, people have specific roles and it is often easy to get hold of the right person, whereas employees in mid-sized corporations may be less available due to the employees having cross-border functions. In addition to IT responsibility, an employee is likely to also have other responsibilities that occupy their time, which may lead to a lack of receptiveness for reflecting on IT issues at a given moment.

How far the customer has come in the marketing and sales funnel may matter for the frequency with which they should be contacted. It is important to remind inactive leads of vScope's existence and try to move them further along the funnel, as well as to keep promising leads engaged, without being too pushy.

6.1.4 Evaluation

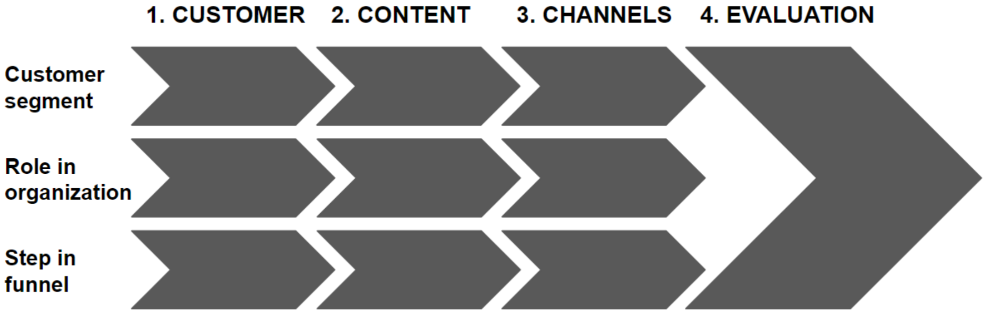

Figure 6.5. Application of Evaluation

From the case study it is clear that InfraSight Labs works with evaluation to some extent, but there is room to improve. The company already sets official goals for sales and uses certain marketing metrics which are followed up once per month, but the company does not have any official marketing goals and does not evaluate what effect marketing has on sales or brand awareness. Improvement of their current sales and marketing functions is indeed in the personnel’s mindset, but they do not work with it in a systematic way.

6.2 DIM model improvement

The DIM model was generated by observing four B2B companies’ digital inbound marketing tactics and analyzing the strategy behind them. It proved itself useful in generating a digital inbound marketing strategy on an abstract level, however, it lacks guidance on how this strategy could be realized through operational measures.

To provide guidance on how the strategy should take shape operationally, a new version of the DIM model has been developed. The new version of the model was created based on the theory and best practice cases presented in the thesis, as well as lessons learned from the application of the original version of the DIM model at InfraSight Labs. The improved DIM model is presented in figure 6.6.

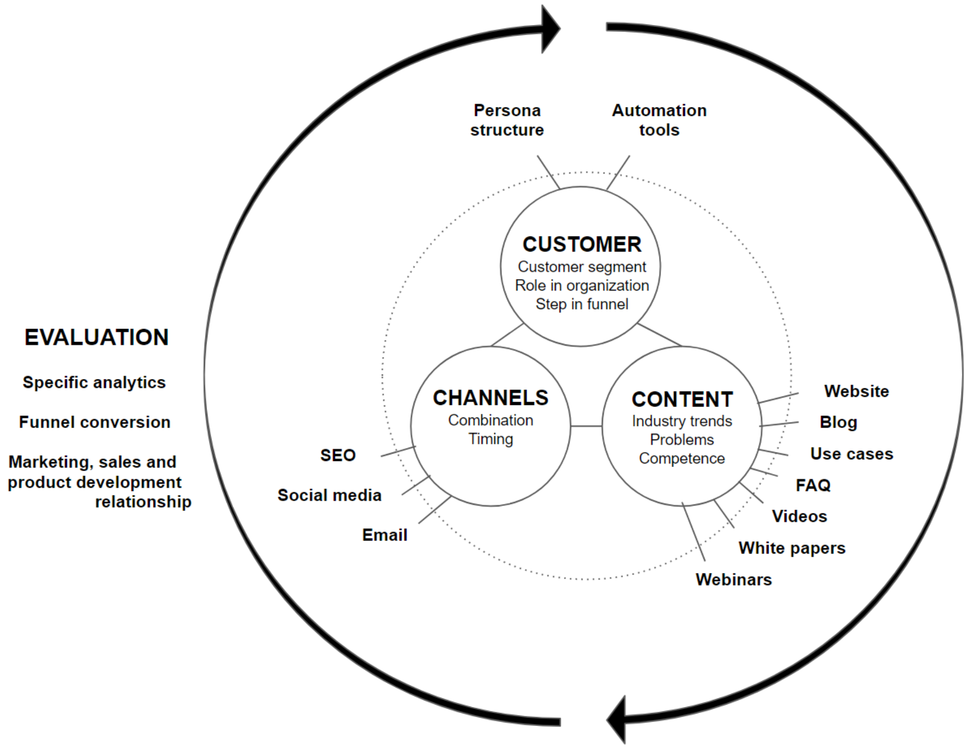

Figure 6.6. Improved DIM model

The new version of the DIM model contains a center which consists of the same strategic aspects as the previous version. It focuses on customers, content and channels along with their sub-points. Outside of this inner circle, an operational layer has been added, containing specific marketing methods, types or channels that can be used to realize the inner strategy. Each activity has also been connected to the inner theme it belongs to.

The listed marketing activities have been chosen due to their relevance to the type of company that the model has been limited to: a software/SaaS company looking to grow. When using the model, it is important to realize that the activities are listed to demonstrate possible methods a company can use to achieve their strategy, and that it is not necessarily recommended to use them all.

Finally, specific areas to evaluate have been added to the evaluation part of the model. The new version highlights the need for specified analytics, a constant evaluation of how customers move through the marketing and sales funnel, and the importance of constantly improving the relationship and communication between the marketing, sales and product development departments.

As a complement to the new DIM model, tables has been created for each of the four areas, see table 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4. These describe the usability of the activities in the operational layer of the model. The aim of the DIM tables is to bridge the gap between the strategic uses of the model and the operational ones by providing information on the usefulness of each activity and which type of company or product it may be valuable for.

Table 6.1. DIM table: Customer

Customer	**Usage**	**Company applicability**
Persona structure	Pinpointing who to focus on, and how to do so, using customer segments and roles in the buying organization.	Should be used by all companies, however on different levels depending on company resources and the amount of customer variety in the market. Smaller companies will need to focus on less personas which are more generalized, whereas larger companies can focus on a larger number of personas with more detailed qualities.
Automation tools	Classifying a customer into a persona and a funnel step automatically.	May be redundant for companies with a small customer base and small potential market. Can however save a lot of time for companies with a lot of website visitors.

Table 6.2. DIM table: Content

Content	**Usage**	**Company applicability**
Website	Leading a visitor through its website user journey. All website pages such as the	Vital for all companies.

	landing page, product pages etc. are of high importance in order to move the visitor through the funnel and should provide the user with enough information to make, or at least move closer to, a buying decision. It needs to be user-friendly and have an intuitive layout with the user journey in mind.	
Blog	Bringing in visitors to the page and sparking their interest in a topic, industry trend or product. Can be used to increase brand awareness and demonstrate domain-specific competence as well as thought leadership. A good way to lift other content such as videos or white papers. Should be kept generic; quality is more important than quantity.	Useful for all companies, including resource-strained companies, as it can be useful even if it is done on a small scale.
Use cases	Building trust and brand awareness as well as demonstrating competence and problem solving abilities. Also a good way to demonstrate how the product can be used.	All companies, but especially those with new and/or complex products.
FAQ	Showing customers how to solve their own problems and thereby minimizing the need for customer service. Demonstrating domain-specific competence and through this bringing in	Companies with complex products that touch upon generic issues.

	new visitors.	
Videos	Introducing or explaining a product and its values, as well as demonstrating its use. Provides a lot of information in a short amount of time.	Companies with complex products that are difficult to understand without visual aids.
White papers	Creating brand awareness and demonstrating competence through heavier, more educational content. If popular, they can be useful for gathering information by requiring a reader to fill out a form before downloading.	Companies with high levels of expertise that can be used to offer advice or insights. Should not be taken on by too resource-strained companies as it takes a lot of time and effort to do it properly.
Webinars	Demonstrating competence and explaining a product and its use. Also useful for interacting with potential customers.	Companies with complex products that need to be demonstrated. They need to already have a large amount of interest surrounding the product to assure that people will attend the webinar.

Table 6.3. DIM table: Channels

Channels	**Usage**	**Company applicability**
SEO	Drawing in new visitors. A high SERP ranking will increase brand awareness.	All companies. Necessary in order to be found at all, even by current leads or customers.
Social media	Drawing in visitors, keeping leads and customers updated and creating exposure through many channels - thereby increasing brand awareness. Also helps create interactive	All companies. Even if done on a low level of engagement, a social presence should exist.

	relationships with customers, supports branding, and helps with getting to know them.	
Email	Reminding contacts of the company's existence and showing what the company is working on. Email marketing creates a relationship with the contact and help find out more about them and their interests. A good way to spread published content.	All companies. Getting someone's email address is an invitation to provide them with more information and should be used, even if it is only possible on a low scale due to scarce resources.

Table 6.4. DIM table: Evaluation

Evaluation	**Usage**	**Company applicability**
Specific analytics	Evaluating detailed analytics on the content and channels used, in order to see which specific activities are working. Example of metrics: ***Website:*** *site sessions, site users, new site users, session time, pages per session, bounce rate, keyword ranking, blog readers, downloads, form fill-outs.* ***Social media:*** *followers, views, shares, clicks, comments.* ***Email:*** *opening rate, click rate.*	Essential for all companies.
Funnel conversions	Looking at how the customers enter and progress through the	Essential for all companies.

	marketing and sales funnel, and calculating the conversion rate between each step.	
Marketing, sales and product development relationship	Evaluating if the company departments are interacting and whether it is done in a formal or informal way. Measuring how marketing contributes to sales, as well as how sales and product development are contributing towards creating relevant marketing material.	Essential for all companies. For smaller companies it may be easier to interact between departments, however formal systems need to be put in place early to enable for continued collaboration even after growth.

6.3 Recommendations

Applying the DIM model at InfraSight Labs has resulted in several recommendations for the company. InfraSight Labs is currently in a stage where it is looking to grow, both organization- and revenue-wise, but scaling up sales without scaling up costs to the same degree is a challenge. Implementing a digital marketing strategy to complement the current selling process can be a useful solution.

When building a new organization, it is vital that formal systems are in place, and now that the company's product is well-developed, resources can be used to implement such a system for their marketing strategy.

InfraSight Labs is generally successful in many parts of its selling process. However, the initial stage, where many cold suspects are contacted, leaves room for improvement. As described in section 5.4 above, InfraSight Labs faces difficulties in communicating the values of vScope, many of which can be related to brand awareness. It takes time and can be difficult to explain why the product is needed due to its complexity and its uniqueness in its range of applications. Once a potential customer has understood the product, it is usually positive towards a trial and possibly eventually a purchase.

The following recommendations are made to provide guidance in the implementation of a digital inbound marketing strategy, with the aim to improve the conversion rate in this initial part of the marketing and sales funnel. This is recommended to be used as a complement to the current selling process, and the main goal of the strategy is to provide the company account managers with qualified sales leads and thereby lessen the need for cold calls. An additional goal is to provide the account managers with useful content which can be used as a support during sales.

As in previous parts of the thesis, the recommendations will be presented according to the four areas of the DIM model: customer, content, channels and evaluation.

Customer

InfraSight Labs' product can be used by any organization that uses IT. This provides a very wide potential customer base. Though the company has identified different customer segments, they have not chosen to focus specifically on any of these segments, making their communication strategies incoherent and not optimal for any customer segment.

As displayed in the DIM model, InfraSight Labs is recommended to develop personas based on two aspects: customer segment and role in buying organization. As InfraSight Labs is a small company with limited resources, it is suggested that they start off by using a simple persona structure, with the opportunity to expand it into a more complex one, containing more customer segments and roles, as they grow.

Due to previous success with attaining mid-sized corporations as customers, and the large potential that exists within enterprise, InfraSight Labs is recommended to focus on these two customer segments. There is also a similarity between the two as both segments use IT as an enabler for their core activities.

When analyzing the different roles within the customer organizations, it was concluded that two main types of roles existed. These roles have been defined as technicians and IT managers and have been explained in section 6.1.1, which also mentions that they have been largely generalized in order to be of use for creating personas.

Based on the two aspects described above, a basic structure of four persona types emerges: technicians within mid-sized corporations, IT managers within mid-sized corporations, technicians within enterprises and IT managers within enterprises. This persona structure is depicted in figure 6.7.

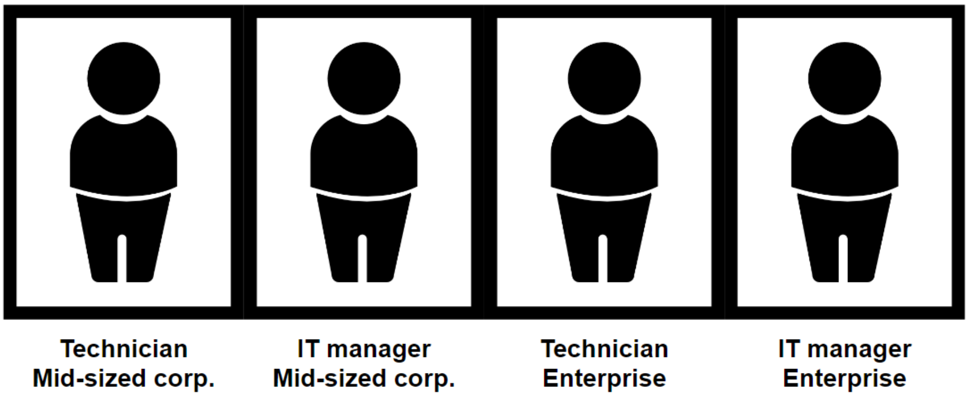

Figure 6.7. Suggested persona structure

In order to further define these personas and pinpoint the best ways to reach them, it is recommended that sales, marketing and product development personnel work together to note down more precisely which problems the personas need to have solved, their areas of interest, and what channels they appear to use. The three department functions at InfraSight Labs can bring different and complementary perspectives on who the customers are and what defines different roles within the buying organization.

Today, InfraSight Labs' departments are small enough to engage regularly, but in a non-formal way. As this is done inconsistently, there is a risk that customer interests and needs may be missed. When the departments grow, this contact will also be increasingly difficult to maintain unless formal systems are put in place. To keep communication flowing and the personas updated, it is therefore recommended to hold monthly meetings between the sales and marketing staff, where customer concerns and interests as well as industry trends are discussed. The findings from this meeting can then be used as a basis for the coming month's content planning.

Finally, the DIM model states a last aspect to consider when looking at the customer: its step in the marketing and sales funnel. In the analysis, five steps were defined and customer types were identified according to how far they had reached, resulting in the following types: unidentified potential contacts, identified contacts, marketing leads, sales leads and customers. It is recommended that InfraSight Labs uses these five types to classify all visitors to the website as well as contacts met through other engagements such as trade fairs or cold calls. This can help decide which type of information is relevant to give each specific customer, and thereby target each one correctly to move them through the funnel.

With InfraSight Labs' current amount of website visitors and contacts overall, this classification can be done manually. However, if the company succeeds in continuing to grow, this will become very time-consuming and it may even become impossible to keep up with the website traffic. Therefore, as website visits and amount of leads pick up, it is recommended that InfraSight Labs starts looking into marketing automation software to lessen this future load.

Content

When using content marketing as a digital inbound marketing strategy, the main aspect to remember is to target the content to the customer. When developing more detailed customer personas for the groups identified above, it should be clear which problems each group needs to solve, which industry trends they would be most interested in and which type of competence they are looking for in a company selling a product. These personas will then create a basis on which to build future content.

InfraSight Labs' current situation and factors such as size, organization and product have been cross-referenced with the operational activities mentioned in the DIM model and the corresponding tables. This has resulted in a number of recommended forms of content to be used in their digital inbound marketing strategy. The suggested content types are described below, in order of their appearance in the DIM tables.

Website

The overall layout of the website it vital for the digital inbound marketing strategy to work, as it is the main platform used to provide content and information, and make conversions. As mentioned in the DIM tables, the website needs to be user-friendly and have an intuitive layout. InfraSight Labs' website works well on these accounts, however it lacks on others.

One of the main points of the website should be to provide the customer with enough relevant information to make their own purchase decision, or at least make them open to hearing more from an account manager. This is a difficult task for InfraSight Labs, due to the complexity of vScope and its many possible uses. At the moment, it is difficult to understand how vScope can be used by only looking at the website, especially as several informative videos which include more details are hidden in subpages. Therefore, if a visitor finds its way to the website there is a large chance it will leave before understanding vScope or any of its values. As a result, it is recommended that InfraSight Labs focuses more on explaining the product on the website and especially the landing page, or other pages that are linked to through different channels.

Additionally, the visitor's user journey in total should be taken into account, and analyzed from the point of view of different funnel steps. For instance, when a reader has finished reading a blog post or an FAQ page there should always be links to other topics. This gives InfraSight Labs yet another chance to demonstrate competence, raise brand awareness, as well as possibly provide the marketing department with a marketing lead. Related links have already been implemented on certain web pages, however the website is still lacking a distinct plan of how the links should work together to introduce the user to all the important parts of the website, and the company is recommended to look closer at the overall user journey of the website.

Blog

Blog posts are a good way to touch upon potential customers' problems and fields of interest as well as to demonstrate competence. It is also a good way to keep a visitor on the website by touching upon several related topics. Therefore InfraSight Labs is recommended to create generic blog posts around different customer-related topics. An example would be to create a more generic blog post for each of the most popular FAQ subjects which could be linked to at the bottom of that FAQ page. This would help visitors move along to other parts of the webpage instead of only moving throughout FAQ posts, or exiting after their question has been answered. The blog posts should also be tagged internally to make it clear which persona they are aimed at. For example, while FAQ related posts should be targeted at technicians, thought leadership posts should be written with managers in mind.

Use cases

Today, InfraSight Labs' website contains a few shorter use cases. Use cases are useful for building trust and improving branding. They also help demonstrate the use of a product, even if it is complex. For all these reasons, receiving more testimonials from current customers would be of high value to InfraSight Labs. However, due to the secrecy that surrounds companies' IT today, this is not a simple task. Even so, it is recommended to look into what possibilities exist. For example, maybe a discount can be offered when signing a new customer in exchange for them writing a use case after a certain amount of time.

FAQ

InfraSight Labs' FAQ section contains some of the most viewed pages on the website. Some of the questions have proved to be generic and of interest even to those who do not use vScope. These pages provide InfraSight Labs with the opportunity to demonstrate technical competence and bring in potential customers to the website. Is it therefore recommended that InfraSight Labs expands its FAQ section. In order to find relevant content, it is recommended to hold regular meetings between the product development and marketing departments. As the developers hold the technical expertise they will be the key to knowing which content will be of interest to a larger audience.

Videos

InfraSight Labs has already made several videos which are featured on their website and YouTube channel. These mainly provide short use cases and have at times proved useful as supporting sales material to the account managers. However, they are mainly used by current customers who have already grasped the product's key values.

A video's ability to provide a lot of information in a short amount of time and demonstrate difficult-to-grasp concepts is also useful when promoting complex products. InfraSight Labs is therefore recommended to create a more general video explaining vScope to prospects that are completely new to the product. This video could be promoted on several pages on the website as well as be sent through email as a follow-up to an initial sales call. Additionally, it could be used as a support to account managers during trade fairs or sales calls.

Preferably, this introductory video would also exist in different formats, depending on which persona it is aimed at. For example, one version could be more technical and aimed at technicians, and one could be more general and aimed at IT managers.

White papers

Due to InfraSight Labs' strain on resources, it is not recommended to start producing white papers at the moment. However, it could be relevant to consider in the future when the company has grown. White papers could be created as a channel for heavier content, perhaps based on important customer issues or specific competence within the IT infrastructure area. If the content is desirable enough, these papers could be made locked until the reader enters their email address, providing InfraSight Labs with more information on their interests and organization roles.

Channels

When choosing which channels should be used throughout the digital inbound marketing strategy, the DIM model states that a company needs to consider both timing and combination.

Since resources at InfraSight Labs have been scarce, the timing for releasing content has generally been inconsistent. The best practice cases show that consistency is key, and that less content, but at more regular intervals can provide better results than more content which is published irregularly. The use of a monthly/quarterly content calendar is therefore recommended, where the content's theme, format and target group are mentioned. This will make it easy to keep track of how often a persona is targeted at as well as provide a good basis for SEO through a wide range of continuous relevant content. Additionally, it will provide a simple way to evaluate which type of content is effective and provide information on what can be improved.

The best practice cases also show the benefits of using a multichannel approach in regards to channel combinations. This can also be useful for raising brand awareness, which is highly relevant for InfraSight Labs.

Recommendations on the usage of specific channels are discussed below, in order of appearance in the DIM tables.

SEO

Search engine results will be improved by simply adding more relevant content to the website. However, it is recommended to use keyword research to find a small number of specific keywords to include in all content and build SEO upon. One of the difficulties of vScope is communicating its many uses and building SEO around all of them is not easy. However, since vScope is in many ways a unique product and many people do not realize that such a product exists, it is reasonable to assume that new prospects will not be searching for a product that looks exactly like it. Therefore, simply choosing a few uses to focus on for SEO in order to get a high SERP ranking for these words may be enough, or at least a good start. This will be especially useful if these words are also chosen based on low implementation among competitor websites, leading to low competition on the SERP.

Social media marketing

To draw in website visitors and spread brand awareness through a multichannel approach, blog posts and videos should be marketed regularly through social media. The specific channel used should depend on the persona the marketing is aimed at. Which channel should be used to reach out to each specific persona should have been defined with other persona criteria.

The IT industry does not appear to be very active, at least professionally, on social media. However, in today’s digital world, all modern companies are expected to have an online presence, and in order to spread the InfraSight Labs and vScope brands it is recommended that InfraSight Labs be active on the most common social media channels. Based on the best practice cases that have been analyzed, the most useful channels for InfraSight Labs would appear to be LinkedIn and Twitter. However, this should be analyzed continuously.

Email marketing

At the moment, InfraSight Labs uses email as a marketing channel in two regards. First of all, they send monthly newsletters to the contacts in their email list. The list is made up of mainly existing customers, but also a few potential ones. Secondly, the account managers have experimented with sending emails before and after sales calls, containing information about the product and links to different pages on the website or videos.

It is recommended that InfraSight Labs continues with their monthly newsletter, but to make three slightly different versions depending on the customer’s step in the funnel. One version should be aimed at marketing leads, one at sales leads, and one at existing customers. The newsletters should contain links to blog posts and videos from the past month which would be of interest to each group, with more explanatory content towards marketing and sales leads and more detailed towards current customers.

In regards to complementary sales emails, the relevance and frequency of this should continue to be decided by the account managers. However, it is important that the account managers are kept up to date regarding new blog posts or videos that could be linked to in potential emails, once again highlighting the importance of regular contact between the marketing and sales functions.

Until they have succeeded in attaining a much larger email subscriber list, it is not recommended that InfraSight Labs spends resources on doing any more extensive email marketing campaigns. However, if they succeed in obtaining many marketing leads in the future, email marketing can be a useful way to help convert them into sales leads.

Evaluation

To keep track of the digital marketing progress, it is recommended that InfraSight Labs sets clear goals and determines which metrics should be used to evaluate their fulfillment. As demonstrated in the DIM tables, there are three main criterias that should be evaluated: specific analytics, funnel conversions, and the relationship between marketing, sales and product development.

The specific analytics that are recommended for InfraSight Labs are dependant on the types of content and channels chosen for a digital inbound marketing strategy. Based on the recommendations that have been given to the company above, specific analytics have been suggested and are summarized in table 6.5 below. The listed analytics should be evaluated during bi-weekly or monthly marketing meetings in order to look for improvements and to make sure that any changes are in line with the metrics.

Table 6.5. Recommended evaluation metrics

Content/Channel	**Recommended evaluation metrics**
Website	Site sessions, site users, new site users, session time, pages per session, bounce rate, downloads, form fill-outs.
Blog	Readers, new site visitors that enter through each page, click-throughs to other pages on the website, referral links.
Use cases	Readers, new site visitors that enter through each page, click-throughs to other pages on the website, referral links.
FAQ	Readers, new site visitors that enter through each page, click-throughs to other pages on the website, referral links.
Videos	Views.
SEO	Visitors from organic search, keyword rankings.
Social media	Views, shares, clicks, comments, followers.
Email	Opening rate, click rate.

Funnel conversions should be measured constantly, to find any potential weaknesses in the marketing and sales strategy. It will be vital to measure the conversion rate between the determined steps: unidentified potential contacts, identified contacts, marketing leads, sales leads and customers. Additionally, it will be essential to identify how leads enter the funnel, as well as what part specific digital marketing methods play in each step.

Since the main goal of the digital inbound marketing strategy is to arrive at demo meetings, the overall conversion to this step will be an especially important metric.

Finally, it will be important to evaluate how well different company departments interact when developing and implementing the marketing and sales strategy. Cooperation between the marketing and sales departments is essential, but there should also be regular communication with the product development team. Time should be set aside with regular intervals. For example, shorter intervals such as once a month could be used during initial implementation of the digital inbound marketing strategy, and longer intervals such as once every quarter could be used when employees have become accustomed to the new way of working.

6.4 Analysis of DIM model

In section 6.2 it was concluded that the DIM model in its original shape proved itself to be useful on an abstract level, however it needed to be developed in order to provide guidance on how the digital inbound marketing strategy could be realized through operational measures. Observations from theory and best practice had not been made visible in the original model and had therefore been missed out on. Along with findings from theory and best practice, insights from the case study at InfraSight Labs were added to the DIM model in order to present a more generalizable model.

By means of the development of the original model and the addition of complementary tables, the gaps between strategy and operational activities were filled. After having applied the new version of the DIM model at InfraSight Labs, it became clear that the model had evolved into being more concrete and generalizable. There is now an apparent connection between strategic concerns and how the strategy can take shape in practice.

The DIM model is not only specific to InfraSight Labs, but can be applied to an arbitrary company that fulfills the criteria stated in the delimitations section in 1.3. However different aspects may be of different relevance. When applying the model at a different company in a different setting, it is important to have gathered information about the the company, its customers and its industry to an extent large enough to be able to perform all the analyses that the model requires. It is also vital to be objective when using the model to get an accurate analysis and a successful application. Furthermore, when applying the model, it is recommended to read the entire master thesis in order to fully understand how the model should be used.

7 Conclusion

The objective of this master thesis was to understand which digital inbound marketing methods and tactics exist in theory and in practice, as well as to investigate which approach a small B2B company should take when designing a digital inbound marketing strategy to scale up sales.

The methods and tactics that exist in theory are presented in chapter 3. These are focused around brand-building, content marketing, digital marketing channels, and supporting marketing and sales software. Their relationship to each other and to the B2B selling and buying processes is also depicted in a theoretical framework which is summarized in figure 3.4. A description of how companies have successfully employed the methods in practice can be found in the best practice study in chapter 4.

The best practice study resulted in the conclusion that four main areas are important to consider when designing a digital inbound marketing strategy. These realizations are depicted in a digital inbound marketing (DIM) model which can be used as a guideline for companies looking to expand their digital marketing strategy. The DIM model is presented in figure 4.1 and illustrates the importance of the following areas: knowing the customer, creating valuable content, sharing through relevant channels and evaluating to improve. However, the original model lacks guidance on how to realize the strategy through operational measures. A newer version of the model, now also including operational activities linked to each strategic area, was therefore developed and is presented in figure 6.6. The improved DIM model proved successful when applied at InfraSight Labs and was found to have a higher degree of generalizability than the initial DIM model.

The master thesis treats the subject B2B digital inbound marketing, which is a modern phenomenon that is frequently employed in industry and often an important aspect of a company’s marketing strategy. However, academic research concerning the topic is scarce. There are many articles on B2C markets, but when it comes to B2B markets, and especially case studies on B2B companies, the literature is limited. This thesis thereby contributes to academia by presenting a case study within the contemporary phenomenon B2B digital inbound marketing. Moreover, the thesis makes contributions to industry by mapping out the relationship between different methods and tactics. It also illuminates important aspects to consider for a small B2B company, when designing a digital inbound marketing strategy with an aim to grow.

The DIM model's applicability is subject to further research. To investigate whether the model could be developed to provide even more concrete guidelines on operational activities, more best practice studies are needed to draw from. To explore whether the model could be generalized further and thereby also be applied to companies in other industries and situations, the model would need to be tested on more case companies. Furthermore, this thesis treats the subject of B2B digital inbound marketing from the selling organization's view. For further research, it is also suggested to explore the phenomenon from the buying organization's perspective.

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Appendix

A Interview guide

Grundläggande information

1. Hur länge har du arbetat på InfraSight Labs?
2. Vilken är din position på företaget?
3. Vilken är din inofficiella roll på företaget?

Kunden (Customer)

1. Vilka kunder riktar ni er till?
   a. Hur segmenterar ni idag? (t ex industri, storlek…)
      i. Hur har ni kommit fram till den här segmenteringen?
   b. Vilka fokuserar ni på? Varför?
   c. Var ser du finns störst potential?
2. Vad har kunderna för intresseområden?
   a. Vad söker de information om?
   b. Vilka problem vill de ha lösta?
3. Vilka parter i kundens organisation är inblandade?
   a. Hur ser inköpsprocessen ut?
   b. Vem tar initiativ till inköpet?
   c. Vem fattar beslut?
   d. Vem påverkar beslutsfattande?
   e. Vem använder produkten?
   f. Andra partner som är inblandade?
4. När du har kontakt med en potentiell kund, vilket stadium i inköpsprocessen befinner den sig i? (problem recognition, information search osv.)
   a. Hur drivande är kunden i att ta sig vidare i köpprocessen?
      i. På vilket sätt?
   b. Hur anpassar du ditt beteende/stöd till kunden därefter?

Innehåll (Content)

1. Hur skulle du beskriva industrin InfraSight Labs verkar inom?
   a. Hur informerar ni er om vilka trender som råder?
   b. Hur anpassar ni er efter rådande och kommande trender?
   c. Är det lätt/svårt?
2. Vilka problem löser er produkt hos kunden?
   a. Hur förmedlar ni den informationen till potentiella kunder?

    b. Finns det några utmaningar här?
3. Vilken ser du som InfraSight Labs kärnkompetens?
    a. Vad utmärker er från andra aktörer vars produkter er konkurrerar mot?
    b. Vad uppskattar befintliga kunder med InfraSight Labs och er produkt vScope?
4. Vad publicerar ni för innehåll idag?
    a. Vad finns det för tanke/strategi bakom det?
    b. Varifrån får ni inspiration till innehållet?
    c. Hur är responsen?

Kanaler (Channels)

1. Hur når ni ut till kunden idag?
    a. Har ni en övergripande strategi för era kanaler idag?
    b. Vilka fysiska kanaler använder ni er av?
    c. Vilka digitala kanaler använder ni er av?
    d. Hur är responsen på respektive kanal?
    e. Vilka utmaningar finns i respektive kanal?
2. Anpassar ni era kanaler och frekvensen på kontakt efter olika kunder?
    a. Kundsegment?
    b. Personens roll i företaget?
    c. Steg i köpprocessen?

Utvärdering (Evaluation)

1. Hur följer ni upp försäljningen idag?
    a. Hur sätter ni upp mål?
    b. Vilka mätetal använder ni?
    c. Hur arbetar ni med utvärdering och förbättring?
        i. Hur ofta?
        ii. Vilka är involverade?
2. Hur följer ni upp marknadsföringen idag?
    a. Hur sätter ni upp mål?
    b. Vilka mätetal använder ni?
    c. Hur arbetar ni med utvärdering och förbättring?
        i. Hur ofta?
        ii. Vilka är involverade?
3. Hur ser samspelet ut mellan marknadsförings- och försäljningsfunktionen?
    a. Mäter ni marknadsföringens inverkan på försäljningen?

b. Sker det regelbundet utväxling av kunskap, erfarenheter och insikter mellan de två områdena?