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**IMPACT AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT OF  
ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR SMALL  
AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES**



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## **TURUN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU THESIS**

Internet has opened many opportunities for businesses. Indeed, it let them sell their products without a physical store and market their brand image faster than ever. The science of being visible online is called online marketing and it evolves every day. It is interesting to know that these strategies are less expensive than the traditional ways of marketing such as TV spots or magazines advertisement. It makes it perfect for small and medium enterprises which are limited in term of capital. The previous literature on the topic has presented the different aspects of online marketing such as the search engines optimization or the social media optimization. Nevertheless, the impact of such strategies on small and medium enterprises and its possible return on investment remain poorly discuss.

**KEYWORDS:** Online marketing, Return on investment, Search engine optimization, Social media optimization, Web development.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The emergence of the Internet

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been strongly marked by the explosion of the Internet. This phenomenon shattered the economy, the politics and the social behaviors (Castells, 1996). Concerning politics, Internet has been seen and used as an indicator of a country's level of democracy (Anderson, Bikson, Law & Mitchell et al., 1995) but also as a way to bring back participatory democracy (Anderson, Bikson, Law & Mitchell et al., 1995; Naisbitt, 1982; Deaken, 1981; Rheingold, 1993; Geser, 1996). In terms of social behaviors the web leads to the access to low-cost information. It acts as a moderator of inequality and discrimination as everybody is allowed and able to find it (Anderson Bikson, Law & Mitchell & al., 1995; Hauben & Hauben, 1997). Nevertheless, according to Novak and Hoffman (1998) and NTIA (1995, 1998, 1999) the Internet has also created and increased inequalities since it is not equally distributed all over the world. In addition, it has been shown that Internet has widened the information gap between people as the Internet users inform themselves not only by online sources but also with the traditional TV, radio and Newspaper (Robinson, Barth & Kohut, 1997; Robinson, Levin & Hak, 1998). It does not mean that Internet as a whole is negative. On the contrary its impact is huge and it incredibly participates to the globalization of the world. Therefore, it is not rare that a developed country in which Internet is everywhere occupies a high place in the global economy.

## 1.2 The Internet as a tool for businesses

Meanwhile the Internet arise, many companies have seen its potential. According to Internet world stats, the numbers of Internet users grew by 528,1 per cent between 2000 and 2011 (fig.1). Some of them understood that using the web for their commercial activities would make them really successful. Indeed, the Internet made the communication between businesses and customers much more effective, easier and faster (Rowley, 2001). Thanks to the elevation of the Internet and its technologies, companies are now able to reduce their costs significantly while they can extend their geographical boundaries. For small and medium enterprises,

Internet is also the tool that allows them to access and maintain their presence on certain markets ruled by giants groups.

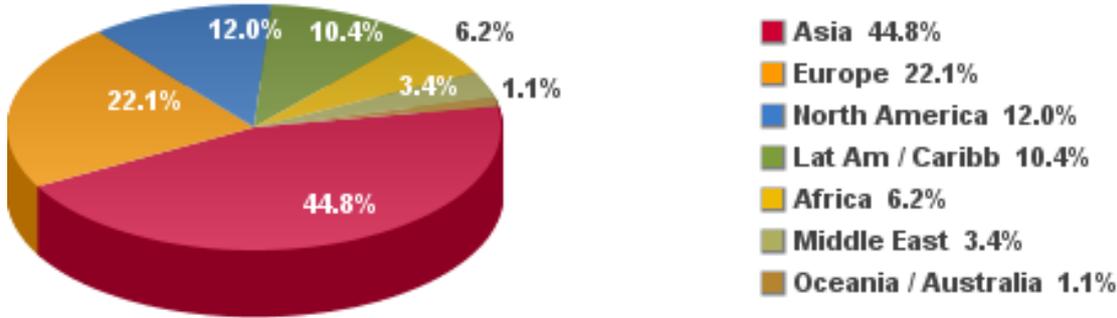


Figure 1: Numbers of Internet users over the world in 2011

### 1.3 Being visible on the Internet

As seen above, today's world is dominated by the Internet and its numerous possibilities. For companies it is a place where it is essential to be. Indeed, Internet is a tool to sell, advertise and become popular. But it is not always easy to control it and no business has fully exploited its powerfulness. The art of being visible on Internet for a company is called online marketing. Either managed internally or by an external actor these strategies are more or less expensive and difficult to position. Online Marketing is the gather of Search Engine Optimization, Social Media Optimization and Networking and Website Optimization. This set of work is essential to perform on the web and it needs to be perfectly held in order to generate results.

## 2. Research Objectives

### 2.1 Research questions

There are a lot of questions that need to be answered in order to draw the conclusion of the thesis. But the research previously made before conduct to raise these main questions:

- Is online marketing effective for small and medium businesses?
- How to determinate the return on investment of online marketing for small and medium businesses?
- Is it relevant for small and medium enterprises to outsource such strategies?

### 2.2 Why this topic

This subject is largely discussed in our today's environment. Internet is widely used and marketing is following this trend. Traditional ways of marketing as TV's or magazine's advertisement are less powerful and often not adapted for SMEs because of huge costs and low return on investment. For instance, 78% of customers trust peer recommendations online while only 14% and only 18% of TV campaigns generate positive revenue (Box Hill statistics). Therefore I think it is relevant to show how a small to medium business should deal with small revenues and stay competitive in their marketing strategies.

### 2.3 Key concepts

**Small and medium enterprises (SME's):** According to the European Commission, 'the category of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is made up of enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million euro, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million euro.'

**Online Marketing:** For Susan Ward expert in e-marketing, 'it is the art and science of selling products and/or services over digital networks, such as the Internet and cellular phone networks. The art of online marketing involves finding the right online marketing mix of strategies that appeals to your target market and will actually translate into sales. The science of online marketing is the research and analysis that goes into both choosing the online marketing strategies to use and measuring the success of those online marketing strategies'.

**Return on Investment (ROI):** 'Return on Investment (ROI) analysis is one of several commonly used financial metrics for evaluating the financial consequences of business investments, decisions, or actions. ROI analysis compares the magnitude and timing of investment gains directly with the magnitude and timing of investment costs. A high ROI means that investment gains compare favorably to investment costs' (Encyclopedia of Business Terms and Methods, 2011 by Marty J.Schmidt).

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 Online Marketing

As the term Online Marketing has already been defined in the Introduction, this part will be used to describe its most important components. The focus will be Search Engine Optimization, Social Media Optimization and Networking and Website Optimization. The aim of this part is to broaden the mind of any person who would like to know more about the fundamentals of Online Marketing.

#### 3.1.1 Search Engine Optimization

A Search Engine is a website which aim to index and class other web sites according to its content. The ultimate goal for any web site is to being easily reachable on these Search Engines. The most famous and used all over the world is the well-known Google heading Yahoo and Bing (Ghose and Yang 2009). As Google is the uncontested leader of the market (Fig.2), most of the theory is based on it (definition, technics etc.). The impact of the Search Engines is huge for any website as in 2009, 81 per cent of the Internet users start their surf on search engine web pages. For instance, 80 per cent of people, who want to buy car, search for a car by using search engines (internet 2, 2009).

Search Engine	Total AVG	Oct ´11	Nov ´11	Dec ´11	Jan ´12
Google	80,40%	81,09%	79,21%	80,87%	81,10%
Bing	8,81%	8,49%	9,46%	8,55%	8,40%
Yahoo	7,96%	7,73%	8,54%	7,76%	7,43%
Ask	1,51%	1,27%	1,44%	1,57%	1,71%
AOL	1,32%	1,41%	1,34%	1,24%	1,36%
Other	0,01%	0,00%	0,01%	0,01%	0,00%

Figure 2: Search Engine Market Share

In order to determine the relevancy of a web site and its rank compare to others the Search Engine will go through different and complex steps by using software. They are commonly called crawlers, spiders or bots. These programs will navigate through the web pages of web sites by their hyperlink structure. Data about the web sites are collected to be indexed and stored on a database. Consequently when someone is looking for something on a Search Engine, the query is analyzed and the information is found contingent on the related database. Each Search Engine follows its own algorithm and it keeps evolving over the time to display the most relevant results for users (Iyiler, 2009).

The science of Search Engine Optimization is a continuous process of understanding and adaptability. Indeed, most of the Search Engine users only visit the first few results pages (Fig.3). Only the following of certain rules and principles allowed a web page to move to the top pages of the Search Engine and to an incredible number of potential clients.

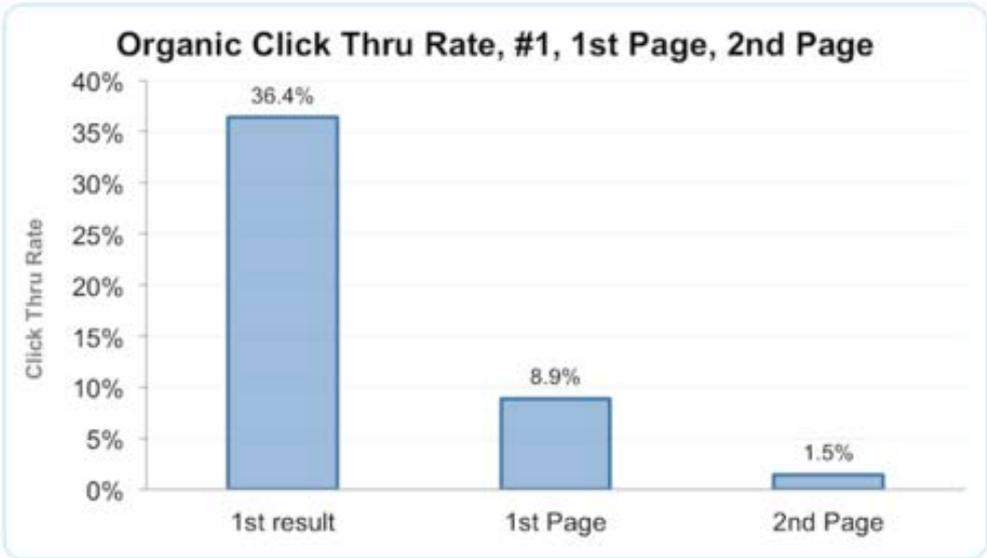


Figure 3: Importance of search engines page one

### 3.1.2 Keywords

According to Westbrook, optimizing Search Engine starts with the identification of the right keywords for each of the page of a website. A keyword is a word or a couple of

words that characterize a business and that potential customer will type on the Internet to find out what they are looking for.

Identifying keywords is a quite easy job when the target is clearly defined. If not, the first step is to brainstorm and think about the right person to advertise the products. Then a keywords analysis needs to be performed by writing down a large list of keywords and narrow it down afterwards. Some free tools can give a good help. For instance, the Google keywords tool is able to tell the local and global number of view per month of any Keywords. It will also propose related keywords to the ones you type which can always bring to mind forgotten ideas (Ledford, Jerri L., 2008)

In the keywords research, it is important to take in account not only single keywords but also what are called “long tails” keywords. This expression have been made famous by Anderson (2006) and reemployed through studies from Brynjolfsson et al. (2007) and Elberse and Obergolzer-Gee (2006). They have been explaining that “the phenomenon that the distribution of demand across products has shifted away from blockbuster products to niche products” meaning that there are an incredible numbers of keywords available and many internet users are likely to type two or three words to execute a search on a Search Engine. The other advantage is that the competition is lower compare to single keywords. This way of optimization is an easier way to reach the first pages of the search engines results with a low time and cost consuming which is great for small companies. Of course the numbers of searches per month are less important with long tails but in some cases they could be really interesting. Therefore, from these “long tails” keywords opportunities, it will be possible for small businesses to expand their visibility online.

As seen before the relation between keywords and Search Engines is crucial. Hence, the previously sectioned Keywords need to be present in the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) of the website, in all the Meta tags, in pictures URL or files and spread all over the pages of the website. Obviously, the goal is not to flood the web site with its keywords as it can easily be considered as spam by the Search Engine bots. In general, the keywords density is around 3 to 5 keywords for 100 words (Chris Genge, 2010).

### 3.1.4 Links

Being visible on Search Engines is also a matter of interaction between websites. It is compulsory for a website to include links to other content related web sites and the other way round to be linked on appropriate web sites. Graham and Pettijohn stated that “the primary means through which new web pages are discovered is when they are linked to from existing indexed pages”. There are various opinions about linking strategies but mixing up the different strategies will lead to the best results in order to generate better position in the search engines results pages (Shaun Anderson Hobo, 2012).

One of the first things to do is to get linked with pages which get a high Page Rank. Page Rank is a complicated algorithm invented by Google representing a numeric value (between 0 and 10) and which determine how important a page is on the web (10 being the highest PR). Google figures that when one page links to another page, it is effectively giving a vote for the other page. The more votes that are given for a page, the more important the page must be. Also, the importance of the page that is driving the vote determines how important the vote itself is. In general, a high page rank gives trust to the eye of search engines. And being linked with trust sources led to a better consideration towards search engines (Ledford, Jerri L., 2008).

Then it is important to include keywords in the anchor text which is simply the text in the link. In fact, writing click here in the anchor text will not bring anything to the search engines. On the contrary, including keywords there is more likely to be noticed and taken in account by the same search engines. It is therefore susceptible to make the page web increase its results (Ledford, Jerri L., 2008).

Good links are the links surrounded by text, the ones inside articles. In other words, a link to a website from another website is more valuable by search engines if it is displayed close around text that is relevant to the web site and not only thrown on a list of hundreds of links. There are difficult to obtain but are really worth it. In fact, they appear as more natural for the search engines bots (Fig.4).

Finally, it is better to link a website to another one according to their content. They should be about the same subject matters or related ones (Ledford, Jerri L., 2008).



Figure 4 Linking Pyramid

### 3.1.5 Directory Submission

Directories are online platforms that organize links in many categories and sub-categories. The two main existing directories are DMOZ and Yahoo. Indeed, directories are seen as potent referral systems by search engines and people who are searching for something through directories are targeted traffic as so far as they find trusted links through really detailed categories. The submission to such platforms has to be done manually and it consists most of the time on a questionnaire together with a short summary about the matters of the website that will be submitted. Secondly, the application and the links provided will be reviewed by a human who deliver a high trust level. Since a website is registered to these directories, the search engines will see it easily and give it more credits than another one which is not submitted to a directory.

The other advantage of submitting web sites to directories is the fact that they are crawled by the search engines first. In other words, the provided link will be indexed

in priority by the search engines and the time to be more visible online is therefore reduced (Ledford, Jerri L., 2008).

Even if the action of submitting a link to the directories is long and repetitive, the outcome is really worth it. Besides the previously mentioned advantages, directory submission also delivered one-way links (or inbound links) that are high valued by the search engines. What is more, while submitting links to these directories it is possible to write a different anchor text than the link provided. It means that once again it is possible to add keywords that will improve the search engine ranking. Last but not least asset of the directories is that there are mostly free.

## **3.2 Social Media Marketing**

The phenomenon of social media is recent but important. Previously considered as a little part of search engines optimization, social media are now everywhere. They are defined as the technologies and the practices that are using to share various content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and multi-media (Ledford, Jerri L., 2008). Social Media are the results of social networks sites interaction. The aim of these sites is to allow people to create a profile and connect with other people (Danah m. Boyd, Nicole B. Wllison). Some of the most famous social networking sites are LinkedIn (2003), Facebook (2006) and Twitter (2006). For instance in 2011, Facebook counted around 750 million active users which spent 700 billion minutes connected on one single month (Facebook, 2011).

### **3.2.1 Web 2.0**

While talking about social media, the concept of web 2.0 needs to be presented. In fact, it describes well how the use of internet changed. Before, people were using internet to inform themselves and their peers. But that was it. Now, opinions and information are shared with everybody and instantly. Consequently, the brand image of a company can face quick and strong changes either positives or negatives. The internet is now used as an application were people exchange and communicate about their common interests (Danah m. Boyd, Nicole B. Wllison).

From there on, any business should be aware of these new tools and use them as strengths. This is called social media optimization according to Rohit Bhargava is a “process of optimizing a site/blog to be more visible in social media searches and sites, more easily linked by other sites, and more frequently discussed online in blog posts and other social media. It is all about spreading news and information about the company and building a strong online presence in order to get more traffic”.

### **3.2.2 Social media optimization strategies**

The first thing to know is that optimizing a business to social media is not a huge monetary investment. In fact, it will take time to get results and this implies human resources expenses but tools are in general all free. Understanding social media optimization is taking into consideration that people are not waiting for something. The social media journey starts with joining communities and creating relationships by providing useful contents and participating by sharing expertise to the existing members of these same communities (Danah m. Boyd, Nicole B. Willison). At this point, people can eventually give credibility to the company and relayed it to other connections. It is the beginning of the brand image development and the expansion of the network.

Moreover social media optimization strategies imply complete different tasks compare to the search engines optimization but they have to be done in parallel. The term of social media optimization has been defined by Rohit Bhargava through five essential steps. Its first analyze has been made in 2006. But since the world of social media never stops to grow and change, he updated his findings in 2010.

Create shareable content is the first step to optimize social media according to Rohit Bhargava. Indeed, in his first work he focused more on getting a lot of links which was the only way to bring traffic to a web site. Today, with new platforms like tweeter the content is liked (Facebook) or tweeted (Twitter) by the users. The advantage is that it is really fast but also it automatically shares it on their social networks profile to all their connections. It could be explained as a virtuous circle. The more the content is liked, the more it is shared and the more people will see it.

In addition to a shareable content it is important to make it easy to share (Rohit Bhargava). That people has only to click on one button to make it available to their networks without thinking too much and in two seconds. This is really easy to create and to use. The person only has to click on the icon of network where he wishes to share it. A confirmation box will appear and he can also leave a comment. Then it is automatically published on his profile (figure 5).

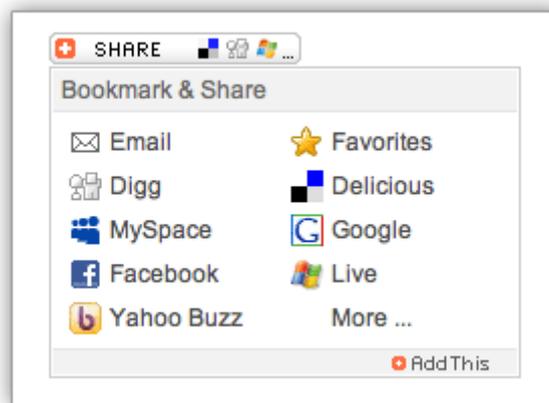


Figure 5: A social widget

The third step mentioned by Rohit Bhargava is to reward engagement. It is not new that recognition has always been a very important factor for everybody on earth as Abraham Maslow explained it in his famous research about the human's hierarchy of need (Maslow, 1943). Hence, findings ideas to thanks involved people/customers will encourage them to continue to be active around the business and very positive about the brand image.

Then another key of success in the social media optimization is to proactively share contents. It can be articles, free papers, videos or information related to the area of the business they are looking for. This content has to be published on different social networking platforms in order to touch as much persons as possible and on frequent bases. The followers have to stay fed by new contents but not to feel flooded by it.

The last basic step to be effective in the understanding of social media optimization is to encourage mash up. In social media optimization, it refers to fact that people will transform what is given to them by adding their own inputs and thoughts. For that

matter, the social media expert Rohit Bhargava said that “allowing people to take an ownership over the social content you publish will continue to be a key way that you can optimize your content for the social web”.

### **3.2.3 Role of SMO on online reputation**

Social media optimization is playing a crucial role in online reputation management. It can be seen as a process of monitoring the feedback of users on the internet, then using the online and offline techniques to promote the positive and neutral content and pulling down the search engines results pages those who are with the goals of negative mentions to reduce the visibility (Etisbew Technology Group, 2011).

In other words, it is essential to set up a strategy towards the e-reputation in order to protect the image of the company from negative bloggers or defamatory content submitted anonymously from competitors. Indeed, for the majority of the consumers, the information they read online build their own opinions. Besides, search engines rank a web site by its relevancy and not its quality. Consequently, a bad online reputation even it is not justify can be very damageable for any business (Allison Goldberg, 2012).

On the contrary, the benefits of having a good online reputation will increased traffic to your company's website and generate more sales.

### **3.2.4 Measuring social media optimization**

As mentioned before acting in social media takes time. It is then necessary to talk about the relapse of the efforts involved in these strategies.

The easiest thing to do is to check the traffic on the website and how it evaluates after the optimization of social media. If it is on positive arrow it probably means that the work that has been done is effective.

Thanks to web analytics software it is possible to track which content is the most popular on a web site, as well as where the visitors come from and how long they are staying on the different web pages. The aim is to know which articles, video or section of a web site attract people. It is as a consequence a good way to prepare the next content (Ledford, Jerri L., 2008).

Another way to be aware of your success on social media is to see how the people are interacting with the published contents. In other words, the frequency on which they are giving feedbacks, debating about your posts or participating on the page of the social networks sites (Ledford, Jerri L., 2008).

The next step is to take in consideration the number of people who are linking to the web site. This is possible with some analytics tools or either with free website like <http://www.yourwebsite.com> (Danah m. Boyd, Nicole B. Willison, 2007). Getting your links on other web site will bring you traffic and as seen with SEO it will increase the Search Engines Results Pages of the web site. Finally, it is evident that it is a sign of popularity.

The last easy way to measure the success of the effort put in social media optimization is the number of connection the business page own. The connections are recognized as friends on Facebook, followers on twitter or colleague on LinkedIn.

Measuring social media optimization requires patience and a particular attention on the long term. Results will not appear in the following weeks of the start of the optimization work. What is more, there will be months were the activity will be dense and others were it will be really calm. In social media networking and social media optimization, “it is fundamental to build the relationship first and the rest falls into place” (Danah m. Boyd, Nicole B. Willison, 2007).

### 3.3 Web design

The conception and the structure of a web site are part of the search engine optimization process. In general neglected by web designers, web sites which follow few optimization principles are more likely to get better search results position.

This part is a bit more technical and apart from the rest of the thesis. Nevertheless the main goal of the web site optimization is to make the search engines access to it as easily as possible.

#### 3.3.1 Few rules to follow while building a website

As long as a web site is reviewed by bots or software (and not human) they are not capable to read all the content of it. It is important to take it in consideration. In fact, if one of these bot cannot read one of your pages, it will simply not be indexed in the search engine meaning that it will not appear in the search results.

The first page of a website, the home page, is often the highest ranking page for the search engines. As a matter of fact, the spiders have to get access to it and find keywords and link to the web site main pages. It is not recommended that the homepage is a banner image with a link "Enter here" as there is nothing interesting for the search engines software to crawl. Also, if this link is part of the flash object, the spiders will even not be able to follow the link.

Even if using flash content give a nice look to a web site, its use in term of search engine optimization has to be really minimal. Indeed, the links under flash content will not be followed because there are not seen by the search engines. The same problem has been discovered with important content such as keywords in the flash content.

Another thing to pay attention to is to be sure that the image alt attribute is not empty. This is the description of the image usually used by blind users. But what is more, the search engines cannot see the picture as well meaning that they will take in account

what is written in this alt attribute. Consequently this alt attribute should describe what the page is relevant for.

Moreover, unfriendly URLs have to be avoided in the way that they are damageable for both potential customers and search engines. A friendly URL should look like this: Domain-name.com/page-title and not like this: domain.com/?p=12356.

To continue with the optimization of URLs, a web master should always search for broken links and fix them. A broken link is simply a link of a web site that a visitor cannot access. These broken links, if you are not aware about it can hide an important page of the web site. If a section of the web site is removed on purpose by the web designer, it is recommended to use a robot.txt to prevent the search engines that they do not have to follow the related pages. Additionally, if the web site is moved to another URL it is possible to redirect it easily with a 301.htaccess.

A web site URL can start either by www or not and there are considered as different by the search engines. If a web site is built on one of these forms it has to be promoted with the same structure.

Finally, the submission of a sitemap is a really good added value to a web site for the search engine. In fact, the site map is the place where all the link of the web site can be fined. It is also a way for spiders to get a total access to the web pages. A site map is a file in which there is the structure a web site.

### **3.4 Following the results of the previous optimizations**

The process of optimization for search engines is long and complicated whether for search engines optimization, social media optimization or web development. But what is at stake is huge. This part of the paper will be used to maintain the results of the different process of web site optimization and also to highlight the return on investment of such strategies.

Getting the first results of the optimization does not mean that the work is done. In few weeks, the achievement of a good rank can easily be lost. It is also not rare to assist to fluctuation in between the weeks of the optimization effort. Therefore, it is vital to keep working on it over the time, at least few hours per day.

### **3.4.1 Keywords rank and analytics**

The first thing to think about is to constantly check the rank of the keywords optimized. There are a lot of free tools which will check the rank of the desired keywords. In addition, it is always important to follow the keywords of the business concerned as they can change really fast and become obsolete. From there, few adjustments are of course necessary. The position monitoring is the first indicator of success of a website but it does not give any special data. In order to be more precise and get information about the visitors, control web analytics is definitely the right action to perform. In facts, these software, for instance Google Analytics, will tell were the visitors come from, how long they stayed on the web site and which content they have been visiting. Another data available is the bounce rate which determinate the percentage of people who leave the website right after they enter on it. This is often the results of a wrong web site optimization. People arrive on a webpage that does not correspond to their expectations (Ledford, Jerri L, 2008).

### **3.4.2 Adding new contents**

To stay on the top of the search engine page results, it is mandatory to update your content. Adding new pages to the web site, new posts on blogs or keeping your tweeter alive are all ways to maintain the interests from both potential customers and search engines. These updates can be performed on regular basis and more or less frequently depending on the support. Indeed, the social networks need to get fresh information everyday while a website could be updated one a week or once a month. When the web site grows, the search engines will take in account the changes when they will crawl it. For that reason, all the new links of the web site have to be carefully adding to the internal page link in order to get a clear and complete structure easily reachable via the spiders (Ledford, Jerri L, 2008).

### **3.4.3 Keeping an eye on the competitors**

A web site is public and everybody can access to it. Therefore, it is a good thing to study how different businesses reach the first pages of the search engines. The goal is not to copy them but more to understand better the expectations of the search engines.

In this kind of analysis, it is expected to review the essential competitor strategies as their number of indexed pages, how their title pages and Meta data are built as well as the design of their website. Additionally, it is important to get informed about the quality and the quantity of their content and links.

When enough information is gathered, the task is to compare to the optimization efforts involved and avoid little errors. In fact, small misunderstandings of the science of optimization can be the results of bad search engines result pages.

### **3.4.4 Monitoring search engine optimization results with Google webmaster tools**

Finally, the idea of keeping good results from the effort involved in search engines optimization is to update and adapt all the time what has been done before. The online environment, the competition and the search engines algorithms are examples of things that can evolve and turn your previous achievement into the past (Ledford, Jerri L, 2008).

To help business to understand how Google sees web site as a search engine, it provides a friendly-user tool called Google Webmaster Tools. Thanks to this online software, any business is able to follow how Google crawl and indexes its pages. In other words, how the Google bots are accessing the web site. Another great feature is that it is possible to organize and classify internal and external links. Hence, it is easy to monitor the search queries that drive traffic to the website. It also displays the broken links and facilitates the fixing process. Finally, Google Webmaster Tools let

its users to upload a sitemap to be sure that every pages of the website are accessible to the Google bots.

Using tools like Google Webmaster Tools is an asset for every business and more particularly for small and medium enterprises as it is a completely free tool.

### **3.5 Return on investment**

The search engine optimization strategies even if they are costless require a lot of time and a particular attention on the long term. This time involved is not free as a business will pay an employee to do the work or the services of an online marketing based company. What is more, there are numerous ways of determining the return on investment of such strategies and there are all reliable (Patrick Keeble President and CEO, Raven, 2008). As there are various ways to tackle the topic, it is necessary for a business to define objectives.

The return on investment for online marketing involves a constant attention on targeted traffic from the search engines results pages. The targeted traffic is the traffic that completes the goals of the website including subscription, community involvement, newsletter signups or purchases. To do so, it is important to link different data and information given by the tools previously presented. To establish relations and build reports Google provides free software named Analytics. In this paper the return on investment is based around the use of this powerful software and the lack of published studies on the topic.

#### **3.5.1 Google Analytics**

To determine the return on investment, analytics software are commonly used. Google Analytics is one of them. It is once again provided by Google and fit into the scheme of costless strategies as it is very complete and totally free. The main use of this software is to support decision making, measure performance of keywords and advertisements and provide detailed metrics on various factors. In fact, it allows

websites to measure the quality and effectiveness of the content of their websites. It provides a detailed analysis which enables the business of the website producers to pinpoint the improvement areas compared against successful periods varying across visits, traffic, bounce rate etc. It offers many valuable features for businesses to use to succeed with their online marketing and ensure that their websites are used in a fulfilling sense to reach their goals. The next parts will present the main characteristics of Google Analytics more in detail.

### **3.5.2 Analysis Tools**

The main feature of Google Analytics is to build quickly standard reports to measure and understand the engagement on a website (Fig. 6). It is also possible to create customized reports to highlight the specific needs of each user.

One of the advantages of Google Analytics is that everything that happened on the web site is directly transmitted to the software. Hence it is possible to see the number of people on the website at this time, their geographical position, the traffic sources that referred them and which page they are viewing. This is a good feature to see instantly the effectiveness of any added content or evolution on the web site.

The custom reports are available to let the user elaborate more complicated analysis by choosing the dimensions (City and Browser, for example) and metrics of it (Visits, Page views, and Bounce Rate, for example).

Additionally, the user can display several reports on one single page. This is made to compare and isolate some data from different analysis. Besides, it is possible to understand the success or not of the web site over the time.



Figure 6: Standard report on Google Analytics

### 3.5.3 Content Analytics

Google Analytics is used to find the web site top content (Fig. 7). It includes the time people spend on each page, how many times they visited them and how often they convert a visit to a purchase. These features are very interesting to understand to what potential customers are really looking for and how they move within the web site.

In search engines optimization, it is important that the web site is fast to load. As a matter of facts Analytics proposes a site speed analysis in order to fix little optimization problems that could costs a low ranking in the search engines results pages.

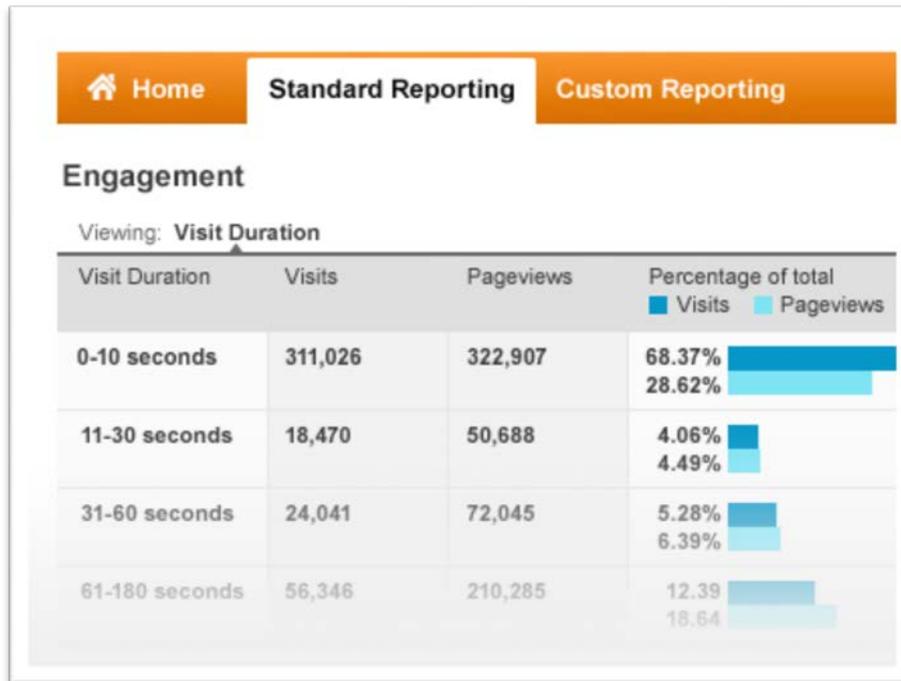


Figure 7: Content report on Google Analytics

### 3.5.4 Social Reports

Since social media is a big part of online marketing, Google Analytics propose to establish social reports. The goal is to measure the wait of social media strategies on a business goals and conversions.

Highlighting the return on investment of social media is not an easy task. These reports show conversion rates from the visits of the social networks and the monetary value of them. It is perfect to see the impact of social networks on the business' goals as well as which content drives conversions from social audiences.

New social platforms appear every month. It is important to understand from which one the business is making the most profit and is driving the highest quality traffic and that is what it is possible to see in the social reports from Google Analytics.

Finally, the last feature for the social media strategies is that it is possible to follow how the visitors appreciate the articles on social platforms and how they share it. For

example, the business will be able to know who likes their blog posts (Google +1, Facebook likes).



Figure 8: Social reports on Google Analytics

### 3.5.5 A closer insight to the conversion

Google has developed a conversion tracking tool to measure conversions, and ultimately, help to identify the advertising and web site optimization success for a business (Fig. 9). A conversion is a form of website traffic analytics that measures the effectiveness of a website directing and persuading visitors to achieve a desired goal of the business. Defining site goals and tracking goal conversions is one of the best ways to assess how well a site meets its business objectives. A goal represents a website objective. A goal can be for example, a page viewed by the visitor once they have completed a desired action or a specified number of pages viewed by the visitor on the website etc.

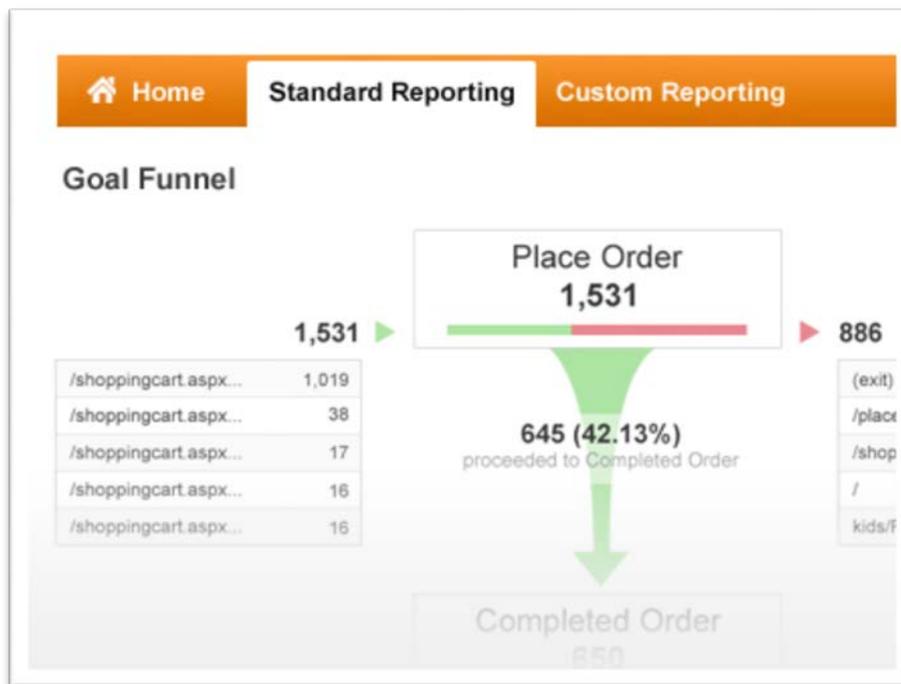


Figure 9: Conversion report on Google Analytics

Conversions are divided into two categories, the monetary ones and the non-monetary ones also known as revenue conversions and pre-revenue conversions. The firsts ones are the sales from the website while the second ones refers to people who subscribe to a newsletter or a potential client who will contact the business in order to get more information. In these cases, no monetary transaction is involved but that would probably lead to sales later on. To perform conversions it is important that the website gets special pages like a “thank you page”. Therefore, the potential clients will go through this page to confirm a sale or subscription and at the same time it let the web site know the conversions in accordance to the goals previously defined.

Like all the search engine optimization efforts, conversions need to be followed quite regularly as any negative fluctuation is probably the results of something missing on the web site or that the competitors made a better optimization. Consequently, these fluctuations should be a hint to make the business, the web site, the newsletter etc. change.

### **3.5.3 An example of return investment from social media optimization compared to Pay per Click advertisement**

This case study comes from Jerri L. and Ledford (2009). The investigation tried to compare the return on investment of social-media marketing and its cost compare to pay-per-click advertising. The experience has been calculated in a one year time simulation.

The outcome is interesting as it shown that the social-media optimization cost \$3,600 for the pilot company. This represents the salary and the formation (\$10 per hour) of an employee and only one over all the year. Thanks to the work of this employee, the social-media marketing bring 93,207 visitors to the site over the site. If we calculate the price of the visits per visitors it would cost \$0,4. Let's now talk about the PPC strategy. It has been providing faster results as the ad is immediately available online and it does not requires like for the social media optimization to be effective. In term of cost, for the pay per click advertisement the company spent \$1,250 and it bring 2,057 visitors. For this strategy, the cost per visit for one visitor is \$61.

As a conclusion, the social media has been much more valuable. This organic result (non-paid advertisement) only requires brains and has been revealed to be a good solution to raise the brand image of a small or medium company which does not own a lot of money to invest.

## **4. Outsourcing the online marketing efforts: The example of Lead Creation.**

This part will link and continue the theoretical review as the case study will permit to describe one of the possibilities that any small and medium enterprises can choose to deal with its online marketing strategies. The goal is to answer the research question previously raised. This part will be surrounded by a questionnaire designed for the employees of the company. In this questionnaire they will tell more about the return on investment of these strategies as well as why it is relevant to use their services.

### **4.1 Presentation of the company**

Lead Creation is a firm based in Sydney that specializes in marketing for small to medium enterprises. A number of clients use the services provided by Lead Creation from financial firms to alternative health therapists. Although some of the clients that are served are directly targeting consumers, most of their clients are operating in the business-to-business market. Although only a relatively small business, Lead Creation has a number of specialist divisions whose expertise combined can create a well-rounded online marketing strategy for their clients? These divisions include social media marketing, search engine optimization, human resources, web design, multimedia, strategy and copywriting. Clients using Lead Creation's services therefore have access to a wide range of skills and resources that can help boost their online identity. Their opinion is that the most effective and efficient way for small to medium sized enterprises to market their business is online. Therefore, the main strategy of Lead Creation is about 'getting found online'.

The typical projects that the Lead Creation team are assigned are to develop a marketing strategy for a company, create their website from scratch, improve their ranking on search engine results pages and develop a social media strategy. The Lead Creation team sees their clients through from the beginning of their online marketing plan to the final finishing touches.

## **4.2 LC Clients**

The ideal profile for the company is any small and medium businesses in the region of Sydney in Australia that is aimed to get more clients/leads by using the biggest network of the world: the internet. Most of the time, they are not aware of the benefits they could get on the web. Moreover, they do not know too much about new technologies and in general, do not trust them. Consequently, the goal is first to familiarize them with these new ways of marketing to then implement the strategy for them for a very interesting price.

## **4.3 What they need and why?**

In order to generate leads the clients need to know their target audience. In other words: their niche market. A good niche is a narrowed and focused group of people interested by the company products/services. Additionally, they must have money to spend now. Clients need to know the words that their future clients will type into Google to search for products or services like the ones their company offers. These are also called keywords and they are the foundation of their online marketing strategy. The third vital thing is to build a website that people can easily find when they search for it online. The website also needs to be interactive to engage their future clients and gets them subscribe to its content (newsletter, blog, social networks). It is important to remember that effective marketing with new media is an ongoing process.

## **4.4 The first steps to be found online:**

Our world is moving and businesses as well. Mostly everyone is using Internet and is able to buy online. The fundamental first step that Lead Creation performs for a client is a keyword research (Keywords are the words the most commonly search into Google to find a business like yours). From the keywords list, Lead Creation will build the content of web site. The chosen keywords are selected in function of certain criteria: high traffic, low competition, long tail (association of two or three keywords that have not necessarily a lot of traffic but that are sibling the good person to buy your product with a low completion) etc. Besides, Lead Creation provides help to

understand the concept of social networking. LinkedIn Twitter or Facebook are free platforms that permit to increase networks easily by turning it into “business network” and publicize advertisement content online. To continue, Lead Creation proposes an effective copywriting. Its aim is to ensure that messages read by potential clients are persuasive and position the company as the expert in its field.

#### **4.5 Convert browsers to buyers**

The next step for Lead Creation is to provide a white paper (a guide) to their clients in which the prospect clients will find all the information they need to confirm their purchase. More than just information, it is an emotional copywriting that encourage clients to perform the final act of a sale. The white paper can be the additional material that will make the difference. Related to the white paper what is important is to prove what you advance is true. For that reason, video testimonials are extremely recommended (more than audio and text).

#### **4.6 Ongoing process**

After the keyword research has been done, the website has been built, the content has been uploaded and related to your keywords the work is not finished. In fact, the internet is moving every day and it is hard to stay on the top of search engine page results. Optimization is a continuous work where search engine optimization, copywriting and social media activities have to be updated again and again. It is called ongoing work or process. Lead Creation is in charge of this long and tricky process.

First in term of Search Engines Optimization the work consists to track the rank in search engines results pages of the optimized keywords. At the same time they will send monthly report from Google Analytics. It generates detailed statistics about the visitors to a website. Google Analytics can track visitors from all referrers, including search engine (Google is the only one we are working for in Australia as it is the 98% of the market share), display advertising pay-per-clicks networks and e-mail marketing. This tool could be integrated to Ad words the pay per click software from

Google. These tools let the users review online campaigns by tracking landing page quality and conversions (goals). The goals can be the number of white papers downloaded or the number of view of a specific page. Thanks to this tool it is possible to determine which ads are performing or not and also which pages are successful or not, the average time visitors have spent on the website or the percentage of bounce rate (percentage of people going to the website and leaving without going to visit the other pages). All these reports permit to Lead Creation to find out possible problems during the development of the website of the clients.

If there is any problem in the process, it has to be resolved. It is also a source of motivation to improve even more the clients' benefits. To do so, copywriters update the content of the website and rewrite Ad-words ads. Their work is very complicated as it always has to feet into the clients' shoes to create emotional content and make them buy the product.

At the same time the social and media team also composed with copywriters. They are setting up social networks platform for the clients. Indeed, getting an updated account on Facebook and LinkedIn with keywords results in the construction of a strong business network. As equivalent, writing frequent tweets raise business awareness thanks to fresh information. The other place that Lead Creation works on is YouTube where they upload testimonials and videos related to business. Like the others networks it is important to get all the descriptions and titles optimized with your keywords. The creation of tribes on LinkedIn is a new service offered by the company to its client that will place them in a group of potential clients. In the tribes clients are the expert of the field. Tribes are not aimed to be a place where people sell product but where people talk about their expertise and were people help each other. These actions will generate leads and as the same time the tribe is more likely to grow.

To resume, the offers from Lead Creation are overall packages that includes strategy, multimedia, web development, search engine optimization, social media and copywriting.

## 4.7 Competition and advantages

The number of competitors for Lead Creation is huge. There are many businesses doing search engine optimization and other stuffs more or less close to what Lead Creation provides. Unfortunately it is the same for web development and multimedia... But where Lead Creation creates the difference is that they gathered all these different fields. As a consequence, they can easily adapt their offers to each client's needs.

The other notable advantage of this small business is that they mainly hired both local and international interns. Thanks to a complicated process, they choose the highest motivated persons who fit the most to the culture of the company. This leads to lower prices compare to their competitors. It also brings fresh and creative brains to the business. In addition, each employee is very motivated and is passionate about what there are doing. Moreover, they are encouraged to work on other project during their office work hours as for example the creation of a modern, relax and environment friendly office.

# 5. Methodology

## 5.1 Research methods

The research method which will be used in this thesis will be both qualitative and quantitative research.

On the one hand, qualitative research has been defined by many researchers (Patton, 1990; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). It has been established that qualitative research is “multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (Jha, N.K, 2008). It means, that qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Jha, N.K, 2008). Any qualitative research includes various empirical materials as “case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactions, and visual texts -the described routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives” (Jha, N.K, 2008).

On the other hand, quantitative research is often referring to “hypothesis testing research” (Jha, N.K, 2008). The idea behind this statement is that the quantitative research is made to reduce errors and avoid bias. In general it takes the form of a questionnaire where the sample of subjects is aimed to reflect the population (Jha, N.K, 2008). When enough answers are gathered, a process of data analyzing starts in order to write the findings that will confirm or not the original hypothesis.

The purpose of this thesis is to raise awareness about online marketing for small and medium businesses and what can they get out of these strategies. For the first part, it was obvious to choose a qualitative approach which includes a presentation of the main characteristics of online marketing based on previous literature review. It also includes a presentation of a small online marketing company based in Australia where I made six months internship. This experience has changed my life and it is the main reason why I chose this topic; I really became passionate about these strategies. Using the description of this business was the opportunity to be a

connection between the theory and a questionnaire which refers to quantitative data. The idea behind the case study was to present one of the solutions that a SME can choose to perform its online marketing efforts. Indeed, the final goal of this paper is to understand how it is possible to make profit from these strategies.

The questionnaire which follows the case study is also about the return on investment for small and medium entities. It has been answered by twenty two persons. They are all working in online marketing fields, either in search engines optimization, social media optimization, copywriting or web development. To perform the questionnaire I used free online based software named Kwiksurvey. This application is very complete in term of questionnaire design but it is also friendly user for the people who will answer to it. Gathering the answers and exporting them is also facilitating. The data have been analyzed through Microsoft Office Excel. Based on the findings, conclusions and recommendations will then be given.

## **5.2 Data collection**

The data collection is the gathering of information. These information are categorized as primary, secondary and tertiary data. The primary data are the information collected by the researcher for its study as for example a personal experiment. The secondary data is the collection of information from other researchers and the tertiary data are less detailed information found for instance in dictionary (Sanders et al, 2006, 248). The theoretical part of this paper is based on qualitative research. The sources are mainly from articles and books found on Google Scholar, the Harvard Business Review, Science Direct and the online library of the Turku University of Applied Sciences called the Nelli Portal.

## **5.4 Validity and reliability**

Validity can be defined as “the extent to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure in every research”. Reliability in every research is defined as “the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same result on repeated trials”. The researcher

would be unable to draw satisfactorily conclusion, formulate theories or make generalized claims without the agreement of independent observers' ability to replicate research procedures, or the ability to use research tools and procedures that yield consistent commitments (<http://writing.colostate.edu>).

The topic of online marketing is recent but many researches have been performed. Hence, the relevance of the data gave a significant issue to this paper. It is less evident for what does concern the return on investment of online marketing strategies. Therefore the literature about return on investment in online marketing is scattered so electronic sources have been used. As online marketing is a very wide topic, the paper is presenting online marketing in general and everything is not covered intentionally. The case study is about a company in Australia, so it can hardly be generalized for international small and medium enterprises. Nevertheless, it gives an insight of a dynamic online marketing company. For the questionnaire, a sample of twenty two answers cannot reflect the population. Still, it remains an adequate support for the theory as it represents people who are expert in the field of online marketing.

## 6. Research analysis:

### 1. In which field lies your expertise?

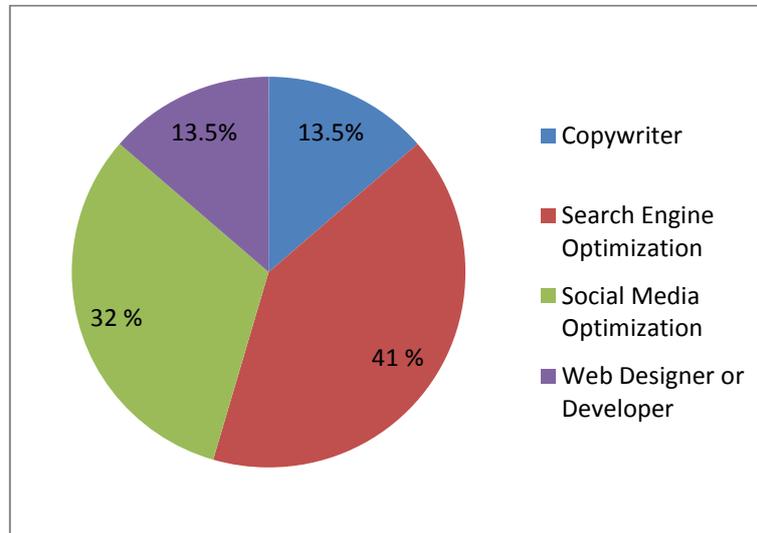


Figure 10: Proficiency of participants

While 41% of all the respondents are proficient in Search engine optimization, 32% are experts in Social Media Optimization. The remaining 26% of the answerers are divided in Web designer/developer and Copywriter in equal parts (both 13.5%).

### 2. Why online marketing is a cost effective strategy for SMEs? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

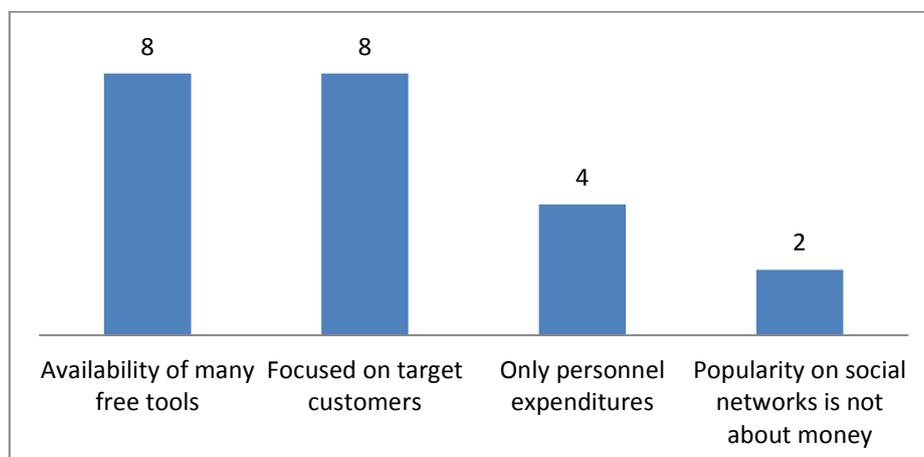


Figure 11: Perceived reasons for cost-effectiveness of Online Marketing

Eight experts share the opinion that online marketing provides many divers and free tools. Eight others see the advantage of online marketing in the clear focus on the targeted clients. Four respondents remark that online marketing is cost effective due to the relatively little expenditures just for the employed personnel. Only two participants see the opportunity of social networks being a key driver of a company's popularity without huge expenditures.

**3. What is the first thing to consider while starting online marketing strategies?  
(Choose the most relevant answer for you)**

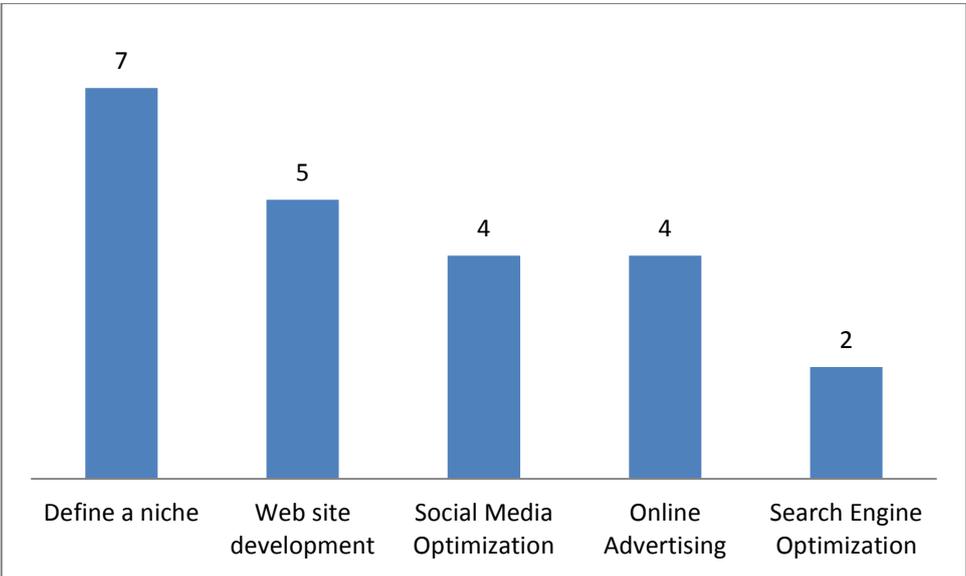


Figure 12: Prime strategy of online marketing

With seven answers, the majority of the experts is convinced that the first step of implementing an online marketing strategy is the definition of a niche. For five respondents, the website development has the biggest priority when starting the marketing strategy. Four in each case prefer Social Media Optimization or Online Advertising. A minority of two participants has the opinion that SEO is the most important strategy to start your online marketing activities.

**3. What are the most effective keywords? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)**

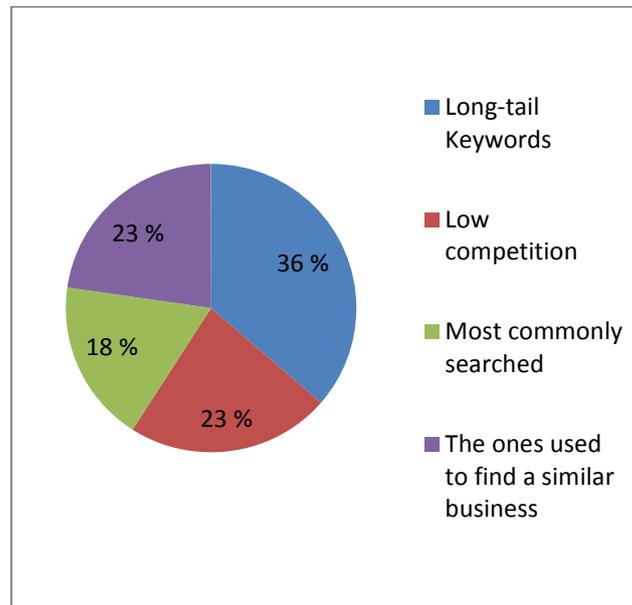


Figure 13: Most effective Keywords

Even though the majority of the respondents consider Search Engine Optimization not as the most important strategy to start online marketing, it is crucial to explain the relevance of different kind of key words. 36% of all the respondents consider long-tail keywords as the most relevant. The priority of 23% of the experts would use keywords that derive from searches for similar businesses. Another 23% share the opinion that keywords that face little competition are the most important. By contrast, 18% of the company respondents prefer to use the most commonly searched items.

**5 & 6 Would you advice to SMEs to use Google Ad-words to advertise their business? Explain your choice for the previous question: (Choose the most relevant answer for you)**

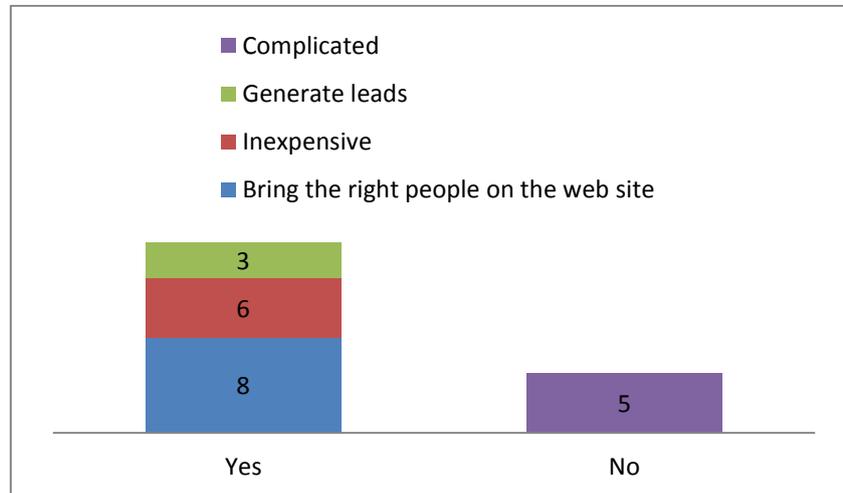


Figure 14: Relevance of Google Ad-words

The majority of the experts (16) recommend Google Ad-Words to advertise for their business. They justify this with the opportunities of enticing potential customers to the company website (eight answers), with the cheap application (six answers) and with the generation of leads (three answers).

**7.How can SMEs benefit from social media platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter)? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)**

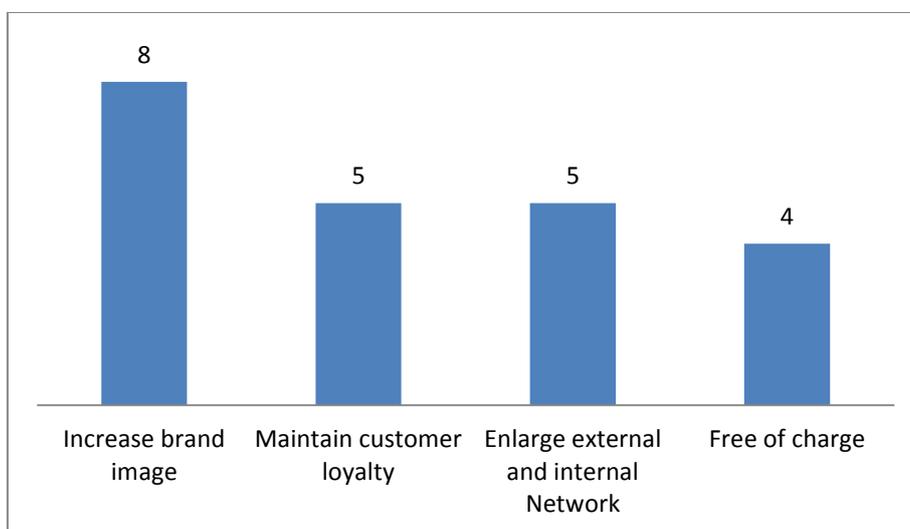


Figure 15: Benefits from Social Media

People and thus potential customers of companies around the world are present in Social media platforms. According to the majority of eight respondents of the questionnaire, SMEs profit the most from higher client acknowledgement of the brand. Five participants claim that enduring presence on social media platforms maintains customer loyalty on a long-term view. The same amount of experts has the opinion that social media enhances the enlargement of internal and external networks. The minority of four respondents admires social media for its cost-free character.

**8.What is the best result of the optimization process?**

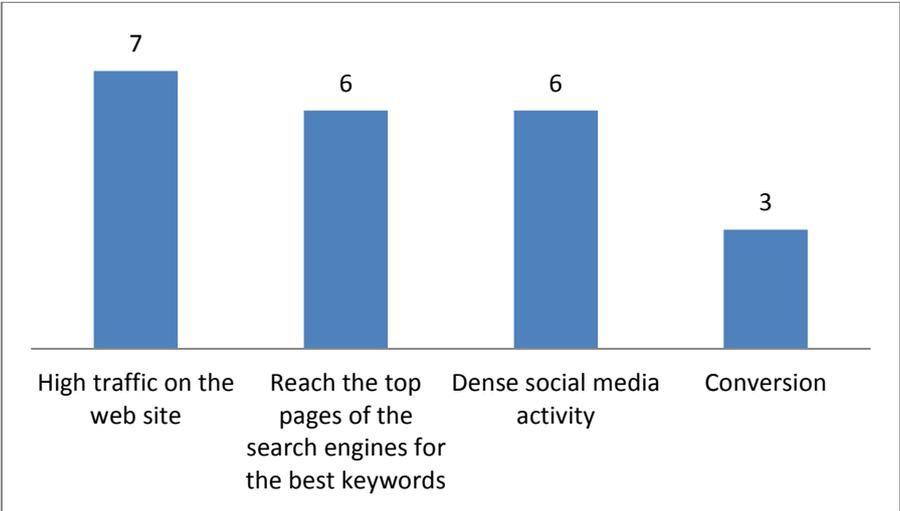


Figure 16: Results of Optimization

Optimization of online marketing tools – if it is applied appropriately - results in benefits for the company. According to seven experts this can be measured by a high traffic on the company’s website. Six respondents see the success in the appearance of the company in the top pages of search engines due to certain keywords. Six others remark the successful optimization with high activity of social media followers, fans and supporters. The minority of three participants identify conversion as most crucial sign for adequate optimization work.

**9. Why do online marketing efforts need to be continuous? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)**

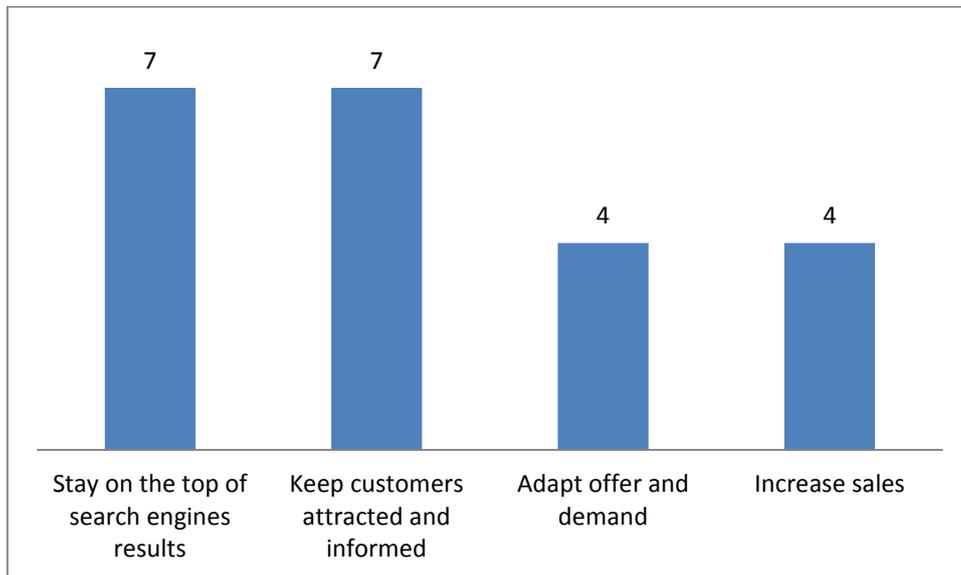


Figure 17: Need for constancy of marketing efforts

All kind of marketing strategies need to be constantly applied, monitored and evaluated. This is necessary to remain on the top of search engine results and to maintain customer attraction (each answer due to seven respondents). Other reasons are the adaption of offer and demand and the overall increase of sales (four supporting answers each).

**10. No figures. What tools do you use to measure the benefits of online marketing strategies?**

The online marketing experts contacted are using in majority Google Webmaster Tools and Google Ad-Words (27,12%) following by Google Analytics (22,03%), other free online tools (15,25%) and only 8,47% paid license software.

**11. How do you highlight the return on investment of online marketing strategies? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)**

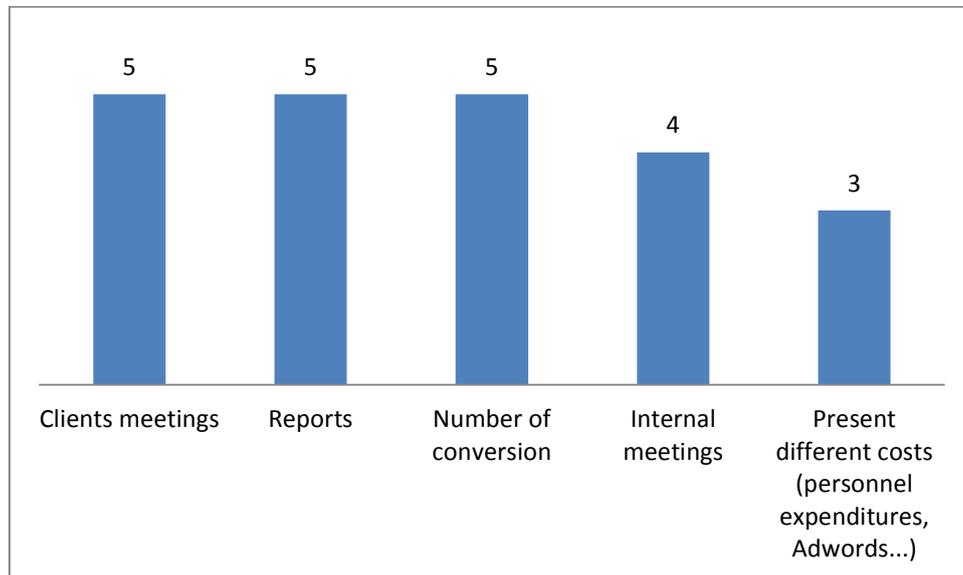


Figure 18: Highlighting of return on investment

While each fifteen of the participating experts prefer to use client meetings, reports or the number of conversion to highlight ROI successes, four respondents support internal meetings and three consider the presentation of expenditures as most relevant.

**12. How regularly do you let your clients informed about their performance? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)**

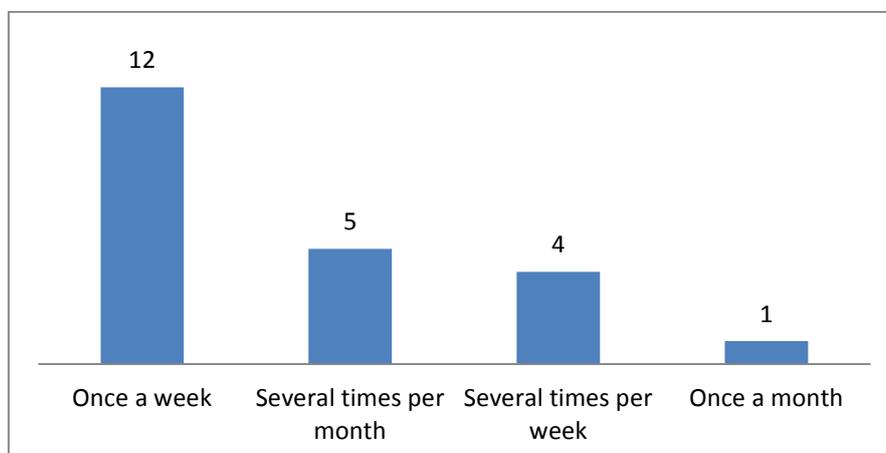


Figure 19: Frequency of providing clients with information

As a company with online marketing activities it is crucial to stay in contact with clients because of several reasons (next question). Most of the respondents (twelve) consider it necessary to inform the clients once a week, whereas five participants would contact their clients several times per month and four even several times per week. Only one respondent would just provide them once a month with information materials and update.

**13. Why is it important to keep in touch with clients? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)**

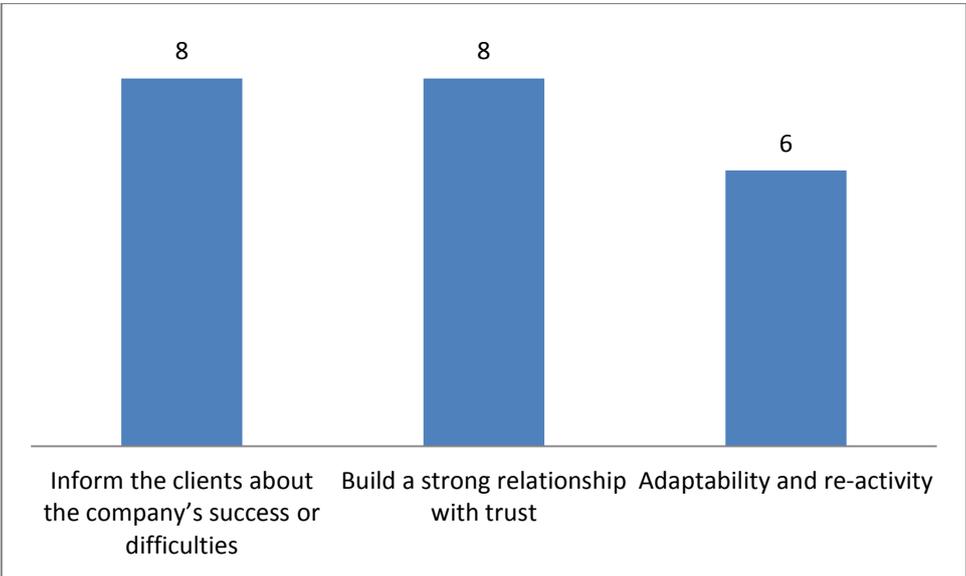


Figure 20: Relevance of contacting clients

Eight participants see the due need to inform the clients via online marketing because of topical success or drawbacks. Another eight of the asked employees intend to build a strong relation to the customers by informing them periodically about current ongoing. Six respondents inform clients due to adaptability and re-activity.

**14. Why should SMEs outsource their online marketing efforts to specialized companies? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)**

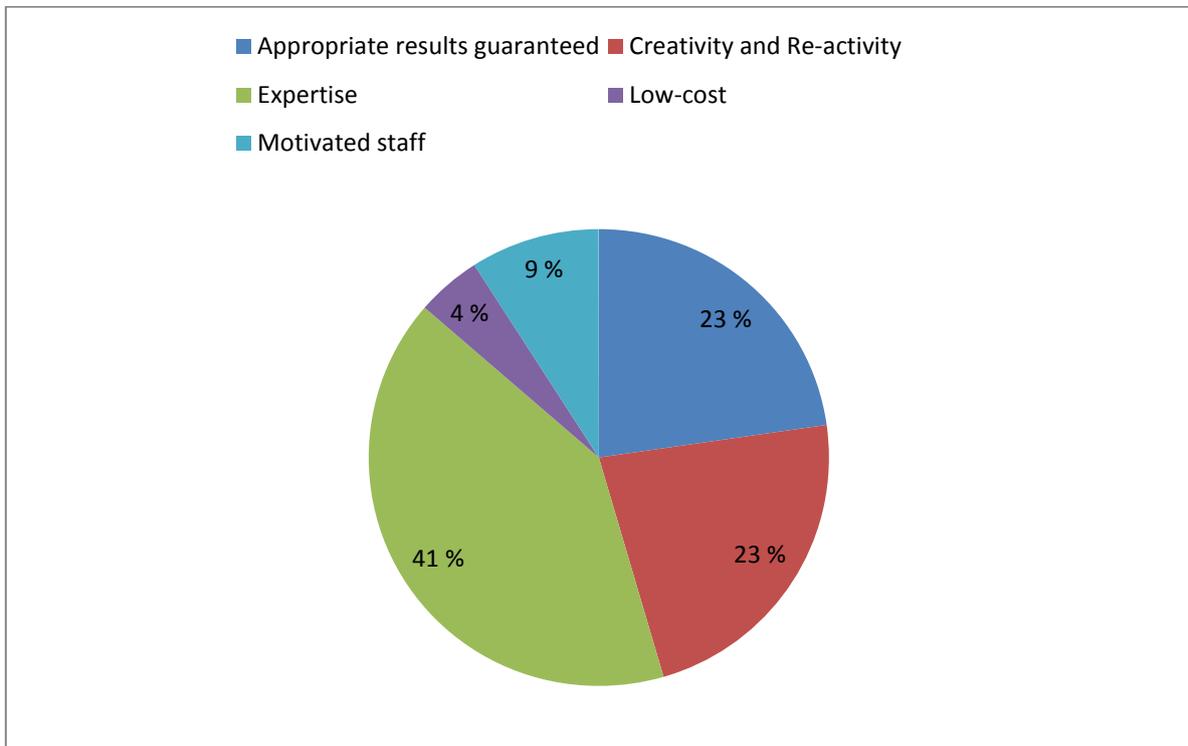


Figure 21: Relevance of Outsourcing marketing efforts

Many companies tend to outsource more and more business departments to external companies. This has several advantages. 41% of all respondents see the advantage in the high expertise level of external companies that are specialized on certain subjects. 23% explain it with the level of creativity and re-activity in comparison to the internal marketing department. Another 23% have the opinion that appropriate marketing strategy results are almost assured when functional departments are outsourced. A small group of 9% of the participants believes in the high motivation of the external staff, whereas 4 % of the respondents consider the low-cost characteristic of outsourcing a big advantage.

# 7. Conclusion

## 7.1 Summary of the thesis

The primary goal of this paper was to show how online marketing strategies can profit to small and medium enterprises through appropriate literature, online sources and thoughts of experts on the field. Hence it has been possible to link both theoretical and practical approaches. The first parts are all about the component of online marketing and its possible return on investment. One possibility for a company to deal with such strategies is to outsource them. Consequently, I decided to present one of these companies: Lead Creation, where I use to work for six months. This part was the opportunity to see if the available literature on the subject was relevant compare to the reality that companies face every day. Indeed, there were no big fracture between theory and what is found in the case study. To lean on the case study, a questionnaire has been spread to online marketing experts who are more focused on the return on investment and outsourcing of online marketing.

Over the last years, online marketing has been growing more than any other form of marketing. Besides, more and more businesses whatever their sizes are going online in order to be successful. What is more, online marketing is always in development as there are new tools, web sites and social media platforms available. This means that the science of online marketing is not fixed and requires a strong understanding and adaptability to be handled.

The world of marketing has been altered by online marketing strategies as not only large group can benefit of them. In fact, an online marketing campaign can be run with a small budget. The main expense is the time consuming or human resources meaning that anyone can technically build an effective online presence.

Online marketing is a tool that in addition to be cost effective, can permit to reach a target everywhere in the world. The consumers are invited to share their feedbacks, spread the information and participate to the brand image development of the

company. For this last reason, the success of online marketing strategies is also based on the fidelity and activity of the consumers on social networks.

In spite of the success of online marketing, the traditional ways such as radio and TV remain. It is inappropriate to say that online marketing is replacing any other form of marketing. There are many people who do not trust internet and who are not familiar with it.

There is no right way to perform online marketing strategies. There are so much tools available and possibilities to be successful that it is not possible to apply one process. For instance, the Google algorithm is always changing meaning that online marketing is a continuous work. In fact, it is possible to be first on the search engine results and loose everything two weeks later.

Online marketing has permitted the explosion of ideas and the discovery of ordinary people who started from scratch and are now multi-millionaires. That is how Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook) became a rich entrepreneur while he was still a student in Harvard. Besides, his idea is so successful that few days ago Facebook enter in the stock exchange.

## 7.2 Answers

Here are the questions raised at the beginning of the thesis:

- Is online marketing effective for small and medium businesses?
- How to determinate the return on investment of online marketing for small and medium businesses?
- Is it relevant for SMEs to outsource such strategies?

Internet has been the precursor of online marketing. The incredible number of story about start-up becoming successful thanks to an amazing understanding of online marketing should be a motivation to any small business. Indeed, online marketing

strategies let small businesses reaching customers overseas. For instance, small and medium businesses traditionally spend their marketing efforts on the yellow pages, ads on local newspaper and word of the mouth. Internet has no boundaries and is a tool that allows a business to be visible everywhere in the world. In addition, a website is accessible 24/7. Online word of the mouth is nowadays much more effective and faster as people spread what they like into social networks platforms. This means that one person can advertise a brand to hundreds of people within few seconds.

Moreover online marketing experts interrogated agreed that these strategies are costless due to an amazing number of free tools such as Google Webmaster Tools or Google Analytics. They also encourage the small and medium businesses to jump into Google Ad words as it will bring the right people on the web site, generate leads and it is relatively cheap if it is well handled. Only five respondents disagreed this statement because they find it too complicated for people who never worked on it before. Additionally, online marketing strategies are really focused on the targeted customers. As a matter of fact, the same persons agreed that the first thing to do for a company which starts in online marketing is to define carefully its niche.

Small and medium businesses, in general do not own a large capital meaning that any expenses is carefully made. The return on investment is then very important. Even if online marketing is costless, it is not free and it takes a lot of time. According to online marketing experts, the results of the optimization start when a web site gets more traffic, gets higher in the search engines and when the social networks are very active. From there, it is important to define goals depending on the expectation of the business. One of the most defined goals is the conversion goal. In fact, it is possible to follow if the visitors of the web site perform a purchase. There are many ways to distinguish a successful online marketing campaign but it is once again a long work that needs to be done on a regular bases. Furthermore each business will face different results and there is not just one way to do.

As the online marketing is a new science that keep evolving and changing every day, some businesses propose to assume the online marketing strategies for other

businesses. For the online marketing experts interrogated, the strengths of these companies are their expertise and the relation they establish with their clients. Besides, when a company decides to outsource its online marketing efforts it is mainly because they do not have time and the knowledge to do it. The offer is very large and the competition is strong. It is important for a small and medium enterprise to choose the one which corresponds the best to its needs. It can cost a lot of money and all the companies do not guarantee results. Moreover, some businesses propose to work on the search engines optimization, others on the social media optimization or web development. But there are also companies which offer a complete package including the steps previously mentioned as well as personal strategies. The advantage of such companies is their expertise on the field as there are only focused on what they are doing. It is possible to get very good results from the outsourcing of online marketing strategies.

### **7.3 Reliability, limitations and validity**

The materials used through this thesis are mainly articles from online marketing researchers. It was nevertheless, necessary to use credible online sources as well as the advice of online marketing experts. In fact, many topics are quite new and the literature was missing.

The topic of the thesis would have required the use of publications that are not yet available and the tools and techniques presented are subject to evolve in the next months and years as the online environment changes constantly.

The primary data was collected with a questionnaire in accordance with the studied sources. The collected data supported the theory and answered the research questions. However, only twenty two online marketing experts answered to the questionnaire, which limits the applicability of the results.

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## Appendix

The questionnaire addressed to online marketing experts:

In which field are you expert in?

- Search Engine Optimization
- Social Media Optimization
- Copywriter
- Web Designer or Developer
- Others:

Why online marketing is a cost effective strategy for SMEs? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

- Only personnel expenditures
- Availability of many free tools
- Focused on target customers
- Popularity on social networks is not about money
- Others:

What is the first thing to consider while starting online marketing strategies? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

- Define a niche
- Search Engine Optimization
- Social Media Optimization
- Online Advertising
- Copyrighting efforts
- Web site development

- Others:

What are the most effective keywords? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

- Most commonly searched
- Long-tail Keywords
- The ones used to find a similar business
- Low competition
- Others:

Would you advice to SMEs to use Google Adwords to advertise their business?

- Yes
- No

Explain your choice for the previous question: (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

- Bring the right people on the web site
- Inexpensive
- Complicated
- Generate leads
- Others:

How can SMEs from social media platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter)? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

- Increase brand image
- Enlarge external and internal Network

- Maintain customer loyalty
- Free of charge
- Others:

What is the best result of the optimization process?

- Reach the top pages of the search engines for the best keywords
- Conversion
- Dense social media activity
- High traffic on the web site
- Others:

Why do online marketing efforts need to be continuous? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

- Stay on the top of search engines results
- Keep customers attracted and informed
- Increase sales
- Adapt offer and demand
- Others:

What tools do you use to measure the benefits of online marketing strategies?

- Google Analytic
- Google Webmaster Tools
- Google Ad-words
- Free online tools

- Paid software

Others:

How do you highlight the return on investment of online marketing strategies? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

- Reports
- Internal meetings
- Clients meetings
- Number of conversion
- Present different costs (personnel expenditures, Adwords...)
- Others:

How regularly do you let your clients informed about their performance? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

- Several times per week
- Once a week
- Several times per month
- Once a month
- Others:

Why is it important to keep in touch with clients? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

- Adaptability and re-activity
- Build a strong relationship with trust
- Inform the clients about the company's success or difficulties
- Others:

Why should SMEs outsource their online marketing efforts to specialized companies? (Choose the most relevant answer for you)

- Low-cost
- Expertise
- Creativity and Re-activity
- Motivated staff
- Appropriate results guaranteed
- Others: