

Implementing digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation in global B2B companies

Master Thesis

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Abstract

Digital marketing has long been the norm and new channels, formats, processes, and tools are constantly emerging. Nowadays customers demand more and more content to enable them to make better-informed purchase decisions. As a result, digitalization has led to increased transparency and distribution of content. This makes digital marketing campaigns more complex but with the help of marketing automation marketers can work more efficiently, saving time and resources. However, there is no research so far that investigates those aspects in a B2B environment. Hence, the aim of this thesis is to answer the research question *“How do global B2B companies implement digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation?”*. The theoretical part of this master thesis covers various aspects of B2B marketing, digital marketing campaigns, content marketing, and marketing automation. The insights from the literature review helped to create a conceptual model of the implementation process of digital content marketing campaigns, which also serves as a starting point for empirical research. To answer the question qualitative expert interviews were conducted. The empirical results and the emerging theoretical model show that global B2B companies can gain a competitive advantage by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of their digital content marketing campaigns when leveraging marketing automation in the implementation process.

Keywords: content marketing, marketing automation, digital B2B marketing, digital content marketing campaigns

Zusammenfassung

Digitales Marketing ist längst zum Standard geworden und immer noch entstehen ständig neue Kanäle, Formate, Verfahren und Instrumente. Heutzutage verlangen die KundInnen immer mehr Inhalte, damit sie besser informierte Kaufentscheidungen treffen können. Infolgedessen hat die Digitalisierung zu einer erhöhten Transparenz und Verbreitung von Inhalten geführt. Das macht digitale Marketingkampagnen komplexer, aber mit Hilfe von Marketing Automation können MarketerInnen effizienter arbeiten und Zeit und Ressourcen sparen. Allerdings gibt es bisher keine Forschung, die diese Aspekte in einem B2B-Umfeld untersucht. Ziel dieser Arbeit ist daher die Beantwortung der Forschungsfrage *"Wie setzen globale B2B-Unternehmen digitale Content-Marketing-Kampagnen mit Marketing Automation um?"*. Der theoretische Teil dieser Masterarbeit befasst sich mit verschiedenen Aspekten des B2B-Marketings, digitalen Marketingkampagnen, Content Marketing und Marketing Automation. Die Erkenntnisse aus der Literaturrecherche halfen bei der Erstellung eines konzeptionellen Modells des Implementierungsprozesses von digitalen Content-Marketing-Kampagnen, das auch als Ausgangspunkt für die empirische Forschung dient. Zur Beantwortung der Fragestellung wurden qualitative Experteninterviews durchgeführt. Die empirischen Ergebnisse und das daraus entstandene theoretische Modell zeigen, dass globale B2B-Unternehmen durch die Verbesserung der Effizienz und Effektivität ihrer digitalen Content-Marketing-Kampagnen, mithilfe von Marketing Automation während des Implementierungsprozesses, Wettbewerbsvorteile erzielen können.

Stichworte: Content Marketing, Marketing Automation, digitales B2B Marketing, digitale Content Marketing Kampagnen

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Introduction

Digitalization and digital transformation draw the attention of businesses and research to topics like digital marketing, marketing automation, and content marketing. However, the level of knowledge and research on digital marketing in business-to-business (B2B) ecosystems is still at an embryonic stage (Pandey et al., 2020, p. 1201).

Today, modern B2B marketing is about supporting sales through the use of digital marketing tools, which automatically handle repetitive activities. It is essential to continually refer to the available customer data and information to make sure that only pertinent information is communicated to potential customers through their preferred digital channel. (Seebacher, 2021, p. 31). Previous research has investigated the field of digital marketing campaigns as well as marketing automation, but there is no study or academic paper that combines both while specifically taking a closer look at content marketing from a B2B company perspective. According to Stone (2021), it is also important to take a deeper look at B2B marketing automation to better understand how it works and how it can connect different marketing areas (for example advertising and direct marketing). Traditional B2B marketing is currently encountering the obstacle of comprehending and adapting to the latest technological and digital advancements and their capability to lead buyers across the entire customer experience (Seebacher, 2021, pp. 31-32).

Marketing automation helps to increase the efficiency of digital marketing by identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer needs in an automated way (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p. 20). Thus, marketing automation can strengthen the customer relationship and increase the customer's lifetime value. According to Holliman and Rowley (2014, p. 285), digital content marketing in B2B is about creating and sharing content that is relevant for

customers at the right time and the right place, according to wherever they are in their customer journey or buying process, to increase engagement and conversion. The goals in marketing have not changed ever since digital marketing has evolved. Goals such as quantitative goals, which among others include sales and growth targets, and qualitative goals, including awareness, image, trust, and quality (Weis, 2012, p. 33) are equally valid whether in digital marketing or traditional offline marketing. With the evolution of digital marketing more and more channels, formats, and tools are emerging, which makes effectively addressing the target group even more important. The new digital era has also caused buying processes to change. Adamson et al (2012, p. 62) refer to a study, in which more than 1,400 B2B customers participated, showing that more than half of them already finalized their purchasing decision before getting in touch with a sales representative by looking for information about solutions, pricing and reviews online. This is a great example of why content marketing is now more important than ever, justifying this thesis and research. The most important terms in this thesis are marketing automation, digital marketing campaigns, and content marketing, as these terms are researched quite well in a B2C context but require more attention when it comes to B2B ecosystems.

The objective of this research is to explore how global B2B companies implement digital content marketing campaigns using marketing automation and to build a theory on this topic that shows the process of a successful implementation. Thus, the aim of this research is to contribute to the understanding of how B2B organizations can leverage marketing automation to implement digital marketing campaigns addressing their target group and customer segments effectively and efficiently with the right content. Global marketing managers in B2B organizations need to strengthen the value proposition of their company and products or services through thought leadership and expose themselves as experts in

their field of business through content marketing. To achieve a competitive advantage and to support the decision-making process of their customers, B2B companies need to increase customer value and share knowledge related to their field of business, their product, or the customer's interests instead of selling their products or services with product-related information solely. Businesses will benefit from this research by receiving an overview of crucial factors influencing the implementation of digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation focusing on B2B environments. Existing publications leave room for interpretation on how to use marketing automation to implement digital content marketing campaigns in B2B environments. Therefore, building a theory based on best practices and insights from subject matter experts will enrich existing literature and will provide a basis for further research.

This work is divided into four major subsections. The first major part is the theoretical elaboration of the topic including literature research. In this part, the specification of B2B environments, digital marketing campaigns, content marketing, and marketing automation are discussed in more detail. The terms are defined, the areas of application are explained, the advantages and challenges for companies are shown, and the reference to the research question is established. The second major part of this paper describes the empirical research and includes the qualitative expert interview approach, the method, the sample, the analysis, and the introduction of the experts. The third major part includes the research results, and the connection between theory and practice is made to create a theoretical model and present the implementation process of digital content marketing campaigns in B2B using marketing automation, respectively. Finally, the last part consists of a critical appraisal of the work and an outlook for further research areas.

Chapter 1: B2B Marketing Ecosystem

Many publications in the field of marketing focus on business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing as it is something everyone is in touch with on a regular basis. B2B marketing often does not receive as much attention because it may not be as transparent and sometimes it is more difficult to understand what processes are taking place behind the curtain in B2B. But if facts and figures are taken into account, it is clear that B2B business accounts for the majority of the economic output and it has evolved beyond traditional tactics like direct mail and trade shows. In today's complex and interconnected business world companies are embracing a holistic marketing approach that involves building and nurturing a network of relationships with other businesses, customers, and partners. Globalization and a constantly interconnected customer audience have increased the need for companies to improve their B2B marketing activities and adapt to standards and activities already known from B2C ecosystems. In this chapter, the specifications of the B2B marketing ecosystem, different types of B2B companies, the B2B buying persona and buying center, as well as B2B strategies in digital marketing will be explored.

The specifications of B2B

B2B marketing is dealing with markets where products and services are procured as inputs to create other products and services, including B2B retailing where products are bought and resold without significant modifications. This marketing approach encompasses all the marketing and sales activities that target firms, organizations, and even government entities. Therefore, the difference between B2B and consumer marketing does not stem from the nature of products and services sold, but from the nature of the customers targeted (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2015, pp. 129-130).

The B2B environment often consists of large and sophisticated equipment and highly specialized companies, where buying circles and negotiations are long. While price is an important factor, quality, reliability of delivery times, innovation capacity, and other aspects are equally significant. B2B is considered more professional and rational than B2C, but this is not always the case. B2B and B2C are just two of several properties that define a specific marketing situation. Other factors, such as the product, the target audience, and the competition, can also affect the marketing strategy. The B2B-B2C dichotomy oversimplifies marketing, which is a complex, dynamic, and risky field. Therefore, B2B marketing is a complex, ambiguous, and dynamic field that requires a unique approach for each situation. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, marketers must analyse the situation, understand the customer's needs, and develop a customized marketing plan that addresses those needs. By doing so, they can create successful marketing campaigns that resonate with their audience and achieve their business objectives (Gummesson, 2014, p. 621).

The areas of B2C and B2B marketing are merging more and more. Recent studies indicate that the purchasing behaviour in the industrial sector is progressively resembling that of the end-customer sector. This trend is attributed to the growing use of digital channels for acquiring information and the enhanced transparency and comparability of various offers. Additionally, numerous studies have revealed that a large proportion of potential buyers have already engaged with a prospective supplier through various digital information channels or platforms before initiating the first contact with them. This, in turn, requires companies to be present at all these touchpoints, and to correspond concepts and strategies appropriately and adequately for successful and sustainable B2B marketing (Seebacher, 2021, p. 50).

In addition to that, today's business environments, and that includes B2B marketing ecosystems, are characterized by VUCA, an acronym that stands for volatility, uncertainty,

complexity, and ambiguity. Today's world is in a constant state of change, and it is becoming increasingly unforeseeable. Predicting future events or their outcomes is becoming more difficult with time, and previous forecasts and experiences are losing their relevance as predictors of the future. The complexity of our modern world is at an all-time high, making it nearly impossible to plan investments, development, and growth. Decisions are no longer straightforward and involve a complex web of actions and reactions, making it challenging to choose the best path. Today's world has many shades of grey, and it is imperative for modern organizations and managers to be able to navigate through contradictions and paradoxes that challenge their values. To make decisions in this era, one must possess courage, awareness, and a willingness to make mistakes (VUCA - Leaders with Vision, Understanding, Clarity, Agility!, n.d.).

Different types of B2B companies

To understand the B2B audiences it is helpful to categorize each company into one of the four business types by Backhaus. Depending on the business type, the complexity of offers and requirements varies, and with that also the need for information and content to educate the target audience.

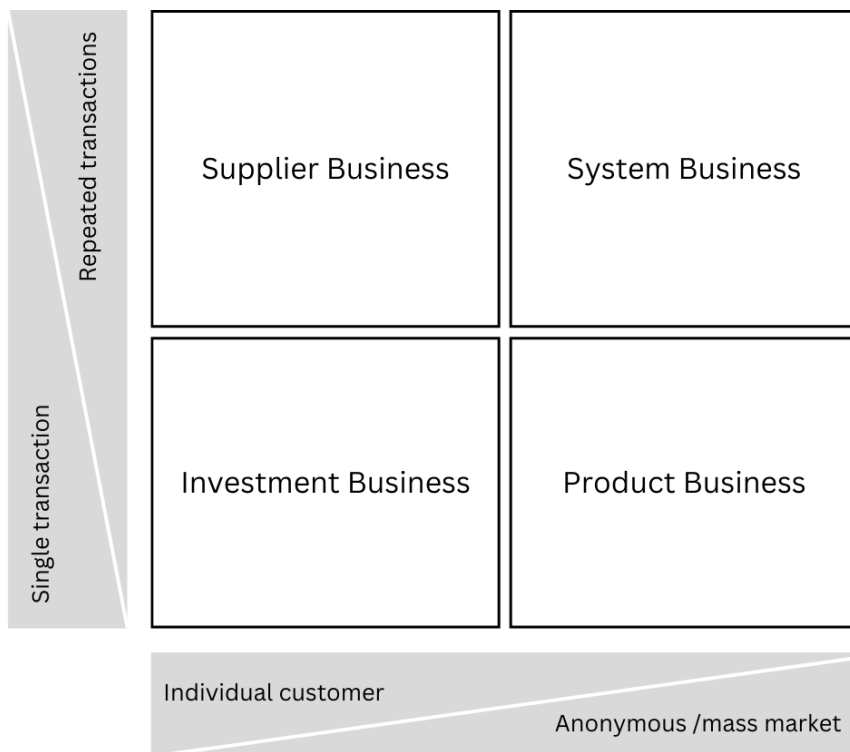


Figure 1: Business Types (own illustration based on Backhaus & Voeth, 2014, p. 217)

In the supplier business, the individuality of the service is high, typically the service is provided individually for each customer. One practical example is Bosch as a supplier to the automotive industry. In contrast, the system business tends to be characterized by a lower degree of individuality in solutions. The offering is already developed before it is marketed, although it may still be customized. The customer becomes dependent on the provider to a certain extent, as replacing the supplier is associated with switching costs. In investment business the level of customization is high, although these are typically not long-term business relationships; instead, it is often a one-time transaction. Examples of investment business are the purchase of a power plant or a production facility. Finally, the product business is similar to relationships in B2C markets. The integration of the customer is small, the products are standardized, and the business relationship is rather short since neither the supplier nor the customer put themselves into dependence on each other. The purchase of standardized semi-

finished or finished products such as screws, paints, or tires are examples of such a product business (Kreutzer et al., 2020, pp. 22-23). Therefore, the need for information is highest in supplier business and lowest in product business. However, the content distribution may be easier in product business and harder in supplier business due to the level of required personalization and the number of people for whom the content is relevant.

B2B buying personas

In order to increase the relevance of products, services, or a company's brand it is crucial to know who the customers are. Experts emphasize the importance of understanding customer needs, which can help to identify the relevance of content to different audiences (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p. 254). In contrast to B2C more often than not the number of stakeholders involved in a purchase decision, the complexity of offerings, and the buying process in general is different in B2B. Usually, there are several stakeholders and multiple departments involved such as operations, finance, sales, and procurement before a B2B purchase decision is made. B2B audiences are expecting detailed and rich information, provided in different forms of content to support their decision process (Hall, 2017, p. 2).

The conglomerate of individuals involved in the B2B buying process is called buying center. Each individual who is part of the buying center has a dedicated role and influence on the purchase decision. There are four main roles inside each buying center, namely the decision-maker, the influencer, the gatekeeper, the user, and finally the buyer (Webster Jr. & Wind, 1972, p. 17). The decision-maker has the power to choose a supplier because of his or her hierarchical position in the company or the competencies assigned to him or her. Usually, this role is assigned to a member of the upper management level, for example, the board of directors or the managing director. The decision-maker is often not involved in the decision-

making process down to the last detail; nevertheless, he or she has "the last word". The influencer is, for example, the assistant to the decision-maker or belongs to the technical staff. His or her influence is often informal and occurs, for example, through the formulation of requirements such as industry standards. The gatekeeper influences and controls the flow of information within the buying center and thus determines the availability of information. Buyers have the formal competence and authority to conclude the purchase. They usually appear in the later course of the buying process. In particular, they have an influence on the choice of suppliers, and they usually belong to the purchasing department of a company. In the case of large investments, however, the function of this department can also be limited to the management of the purchasing process, while the final decision is made at a higher level, for example, the decision maker. The user is the person who will actually use the product or service day to day and formulates their specific requirements for the product or service to be purchased. They also often suggest the purchase themselves. Ideally, the user takes a prominent role in the buying center and essentially determines the purpose-related use of the service to be purchased. Then the user even becomes active as the initiator of the purchasing process. However, many studies show that the user perspective often does not flow into the decision-making process at all or only at a late stage (Kreutzer et al., 2020, pp. 25-26).

When working with digital tools and marketing technology, companies can also leverage customer profiling, which enables them to know their customers better. Profiling data can be split into two distinct dimensions which are explicit data, like demographic information, and implicit data, which consists of behavioural information. Customer profiling helps companies to extract customer characteristics like the content they like, their preferred social networks or search engines, and their behaviour on the website such as frequently

visited pages or used functions. These interactions can be combined with the explicit data customers provide by filling in their name, email address, industry, etc. in a form to access a piece of content. The better the profiling and the existing database, the better companies can target the right audience and efficiently invest their marketing efforts. Marketing analytic tools can be integrated with the customer relationship management (CRM) tool to leverage the best results. This also helps to nurture leads with the right message, offer, or content once they show interest in a brand or its products and services. The goal of continuously collecting customer information, and processing is to truly know the customer and target them successfully (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p. 475).

B2B digital marketing strategies

The goals in marketing can be fundamentally divided into quantitative goals and qualitative goals. Quantitative goals include sales targets, growth targets, market share targets, and cost targets. Examples of qualitative goals include increasing awareness, image, corporate identity, trust and quality, and social responsibility. Goals should always be operational, and care should be taken to ensure that operational goals are consistent with other corporate goals, both vertically and horizontally. Especially with qualitative goals, it can sometimes be difficult to operationalize them, but this is also possible with appropriate methods and technology, for example, monitoring of image campaigns through marketing automation (Weis, 2012, p. 33).

Digital marketing strategies are consistent with traditional business and marketing strategies. An effective digital marketing strategy should align with business and marketing strategy, contain clear objectives, target the right customers, communicate a peremptory value proposition, use a mix of online and offline tools, support the customers along their

journey, and manage the overall digital customer lifecycle. The strategy should be integrated with other channels as part of multichannel marketing. The online contribution of leads and sales should be based on the number of relevant individuals using the channels (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 13). A strategy for digital marketing involves a well-defined plan that uses various electronic and digital channels to support and complement other communication and distribution channels. Its key components should comprise a target audience, an effective market positioning, a unique online value proposition, digital media channels to reach new customers, and tactics for engaging with the current customer base. The goal is to create greater value for all parties involved compared to other channels (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p. 42). The digital marketing strategy encompasses various aspects that go beyond enhancing website experiences for mobile and desktop users. Digital marketers need to delve into broader issues such as marketing automation tools for customer relationship development, overall customer experience across multiple channels, maximizing results from partnering and advertising with online intermediaries, and harnessing social media marketing through user-generated content and paid ads. The strategy development process may require the redesign of business processes to integrate with partners such as suppliers and distributors. With the increasing adoption of the internet and digitally enhanced trading environments, there are even more opportunities for marketers to use technology to improve their offers. However, they must also be vigilant about protecting their competitive positioning (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 142).

To develop a digital marketing plan, marketers can refer to PR Smith's SOSTAC planning system. SOSTAC is an abbreviation that stands for Situation analysis, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Actions, and Control. Before starting to outline a strategy or plan marketing activities a situation analysis should be conducted. This process includes analysing the customers,

competitors, and intermediaries of a company. In the next planning phase, the objectives for digital marketing should be defined, creating a clear vision and identifying specific goals for the future. The strategy presents a plan on how to achieve the previously defined objectives and includes elements like segmentation, targeting, and the marketing mix. The digital marketing strategy is meant to give an overview of the key elements in the marketing mix a company plans to focus on, namely product, promotion, price, place, people, process, and physical evidence. Tactics, the next element of the planning system, takes a closer look at the marketing mix and determines the tactical plan regarding specific elements of the marketing mix. Eventually, actions and specific activities need to be taken in order to achieve the defined objectives. Finally, the outcomes need to be assessed through controlling mechanisms to evaluate if the strategy, tactics, and actions led to the desired result (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, pp. 147-148)

Chapter 2: Digital Marketing Campaigns

Digitalization continues to advance and has arrived in almost all areas of life and business. Digital marketing has long been the norm, and precisely because it is not just traditional marketing in digitalized form, but because new channels, formats, processes, and tools are constantly emerging, it is more important than ever before. Digitalization makes marketing campaigns more complex but also more efficient and essential to reach customers in an increasingly digital world. The following chapter provides an overview of the definition, components, and phases of digital marketing campaigns.

Definition of digital marketing campaigns

The term digital marketing refers to the utilization of digital media, platforms, and technology to communicate and engage with both customers and businesses. It encompasses an array of digital marketing strategies, such as search marketing, online advertising, and affiliate marketing, that aim to enhance sales and customer engagement. The focus of digital marketing is on understanding customers and adding value to products through online activities that prioritize the customer experience (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p. 13).

Another definition of digital marketing by Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019, pp. 9-10) characterizes digital marketing as managing a diverse range of online business assets, such as websites, mobile applications, and social media pages. Additionally, it encompasses various online communication techniques, including social media marketing, search engine marketing, email marketing, online advertising, and collaboration with other websites. The principal objective of digital marketing is to attract new customers, provide services to existing ones, and cultivate enduring customer relationships. Nonetheless, for digital marketing to be successful, traditional marketing channels like print, TV, direct mail, and human sales and support must be integrated as part of multichannel marketing communications.

According to Chaffey and Smith (2017, pp. 20-21), digital marketing aims to efficiently identify, anticipate, and satisfy customer needs through various means such as analysing customer data, engaging with customers through a dynamic dialogue, and providing prompt responses and added value services. The goal is to deepen the relationship with customers and efficiently satisfy their needs in an automated or partially automated manner.

Campaigns can generally be divided into two different types: awareness and performance. Awareness campaigns aim to improve brand/product awareness, brand image,

and willingness to buy. They optimize metrics such as reach, frequency, and visibility. Performance campaigns, on the other hand, optimize for measurable key performance indicators (KPIs) like website traffic, contact requests, or registrations (Pabst & Mittelmeier, 2022, p. 65). Digital campaigns have the advantage of being measurable and can be continuously optimized.

Based on these references, digital marketing campaigns can be defined as the use of technology and digital media to distribute marketing messages and content in any form to potential and existing customers to either achieve the goal of increasing awareness or convert new customers. Digital marketing campaigns are not about publishing one piece of content or sending emails once in a while, instead, a digital marketing campaign should follow the overarching marketing strategy and disseminate a defined message, across different channels and formats. This implies that a digital marketing campaign can involve a company's website, its social media channel, email marketing, online advertising, and search engine optimization to carry the message and leverage different formats such as blogs, whitepapers, e-books, social media posts, videos or even podcasts to spread the message.

Phases of digital marketing campaigns

To plan, implement and execute a digital marketing campaign a strategy has to be defined first above all. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, a digital marketing strategy is influenced by external aspects like the market structure, the strategy of competitors, and emerging opportunities and threats. Internally a digital marketing strategy derives from the overarching business objectives and strategy, and of course, the multichannel marketing strategy (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 139).

According to Ivanova and Gawenda (2021), the planning process for an online campaign can be broken down into five distinct phases. Firstly, during the situation analysis phase, the campaign briefing specifications are assessed, and a competitive analysis is conducted. The second phase involves strategic planning where critical campaign elements like the target audience, goals and KPIs, time frame, budget, and measures are identified and checked for feasibility. This is followed by tactical planning that focuses on media selection, material preparation, and detailed planning. The fourth phase is the implementation of the campaign. The fifth phase involves operational planning and monitoring of campaign efficiency post-launch (Ivanova & Gawenda, 2021, p.247).

In their study, Grifoni et al (2012) provide a theoretical framework that gives insights into the process of planning an online viral marketing campaign. This framework can be used as a reference to get an idea of what the implementation process of digital content marketing campaigns could look like, even though it was created in a different context there are still components that are relevant for this master thesis as well. In their paper, Grifoni et al. (2012) list four phases. Phase one consists of an analysis of the company, business context and already implemented campaigns. In phase two, the objects and targets of the marketing campaign are defined. The next phase includes the messaging and the selection of tools that are going to be used for the implementation. In phase four, the final phase, the online marketing campaign is being implemented (Grifoni et al., 2012, p. 24). Besides email marketing and newsletters, the authors name content marketing as a popular example of an online marketing campaign (Grifoni et al., 2012, p. 27).

Digital marketing campaign management

In order to successfully operate the different channels, content formats, and activities to achieve digital marketing objectives, marketers need to efficiently manage their digital marketing campaigns. The management process includes defining and monitoring goals, analysing campaign performance, segmenting, and targeting specific audiences, creating effective messaging and offers, allocating budgets, selecting appropriate digital media channels, and integrating these efforts into a comprehensive media plan (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, pp. 354-355).

The campaign-specific communications objectives start with the volume of unique visitors a campaign reaches and go on to the quality of the content, which can be evaluated through the conversion rate. Cost-per-click is another important KPI, especially for any paid media channel. Eventually, all the metrics already mentioned have an impact on the return on investment (ROI) of a digital campaign. Furthermore, if the objective is to attract new customers, the number of leads that were generated is one of the most important KPIs for digital marketing campaigns (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 362). Customer insights cover research into the buying persona on their demographic and socio-economic data, their media consumption, and their search behaviour but also information on competitor's campaign activity and performance. This information is useful to create campaign briefs for internal teams or external agencies before further planning a digital marketing campaign (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, pp. 370-371). The next element in digital marketing campaign management is segmentation and targeting which is about defining and selecting the target audience that should be addressed by the campaign. This can be supported by marketing automation systems, by analysing existing customer data and categorizing it to fit the campaign objectives (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 371). Developing the right message

and an attractive offer is crucial to generate leads and positioning the brand. This is also where content marketing comes into play because it fuels all digital marketing channels. The function of content within a digital marketing campaign is to engage the audience and generate demand (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, pp. 374-375). Since the topic of content marketing is examined in more detail in the following chapter, it will not be further discussed at this point. Going back to digital marketing campaign management planning, the fifth element to consider is budgeting and selecting the digital media mix. When planning the budget, it is not only important to consider the amount of money spent on paid media but also the media it is spent for as well as the digital assets that need to be created, for example, digital banners for ads, email templates, and videos (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, pp. 377-383). Ultimately, every digital marketing campaign benefits from an integrated marketing approach. This means that digital content should be accessible across multiple digital platforms - taking owned, earned, and paid media into account (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 385). When all five elements of digital marketing campaign management are considered, effectively planned, and efficiently executed, which can be supported by marketing automation, the results will be promising.

Digital media landscape

Digital media and technologies offer a range of possibilities for businesses. They can be used as an advertising medium by displaying ads on publisher sites or social networks to create brand awareness and generate demand for products or services. Targeted search advertising can serve as a direct-response medium by driving customers to a company's website when they show an intention to make a purchase. Digital media can also serve multiple other purposes, such as facilitating sales transactions, generating leads, and

functioning as a distribution channel for digital products. Moreover, they can also serve as an efficient customer service mechanism where customers can self-service and access frequently asked questions, reducing costs for the company. Lastly, digital media can also function as a relationship-building medium, where businesses can interact with their customers to understand their needs and promote relevant products and offers (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, pp. 13-14).

The digital media landscape can be divided into paid media, earned media, and owned media. Paid media is characterized by search, display ads, or affiliate marketing where companies pay for visitors, reach, or conversions. Earned media constitutes of publicity, brand awareness, and word of mouth (WOM) mainly generated by external partners like publishers, bloggers, and customer advocates but also unpaid media coverage. Owned media includes the company's own website, blogs, apps, and social media accounts (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p. 34).

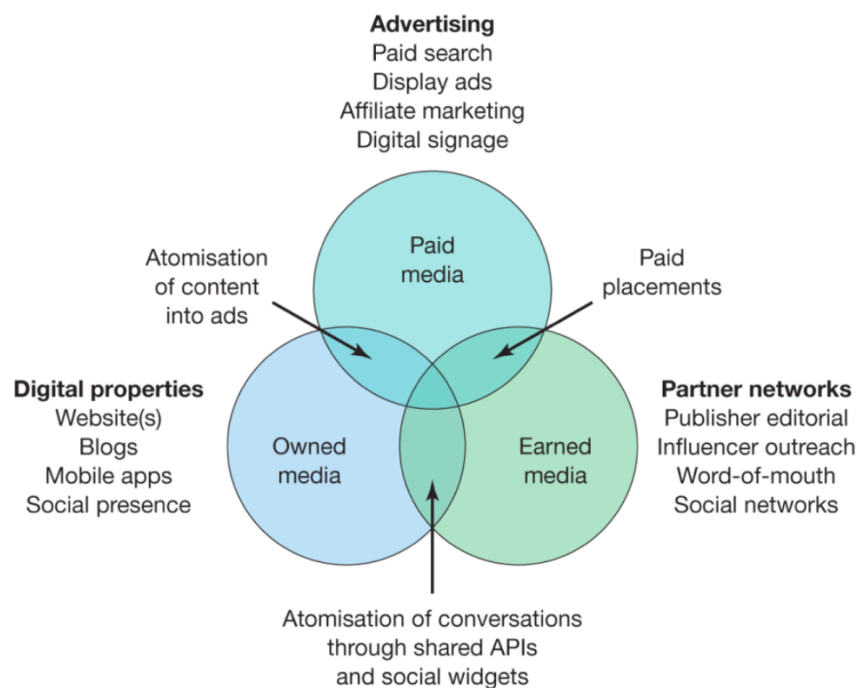


Figure 2: Paid, earned, and owned media (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 11)

Figure 2 shows the overlaps between different media types. For example, if content published by the company is used for paid advertising, owned, and paid media overlap. Also, if paid advertisements are placed in earned media channels such as partner networks there is another overlap between paid and earned media. The third option is earned and owned media overlapping, in this case, it is about conversations through backlinks and social media widgets (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 11).

The different media types also play a role when looking at the customer journey. The customer journey is the accumulation of touchpoints, either online or offline, a customer or potential buyer is confronted with during a buying process. In digital marketing, the customer journey can include a range of different digital platforms, websites or landing pages, and media (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 11). Generally, the customer journey can be divided into five phases: aware, appeal, ask, act, and advocate. During the awareness phase, customers are exposed to numerous brands through previous experiences, marketing messages, or referrals. This marks the beginning of their journey. As customers recall and recognize brands, they process their experiences and narrow down their options to a few memorable brands, which happens during the appeal phase. These brands are typically shortlisted and occupy top positions. Then, potential customers actively seek information about these appealing brands through acquaintances, media, or directly from the brands themselves, which is the ask phase. This phase involves increased online research and exposure to digital touchpoints. If customers are convinced by the information they receive, they enter the act phase and make a purchase. After buying a product or service, customers interact more intensely with the company during the post-sales phase. Finally, customers become loyal advocates of a brand during the advocate phase, recommending it to others.

However, the customer journey's five A's do not always follow a linear order, and customers may jump between phases using digital touchpoints (Kotler et al., 2017, pp. 79-84).

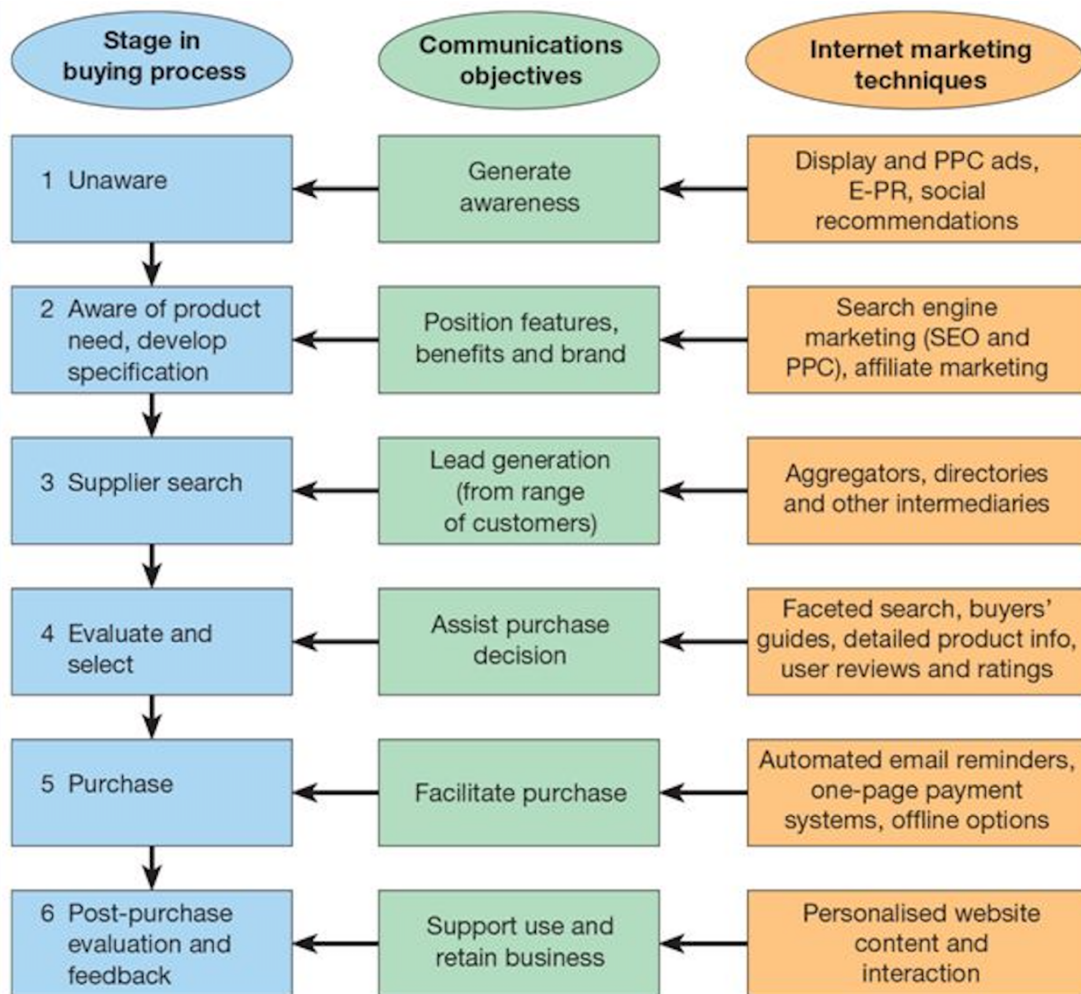


Figure 3: Digital media's impact on the buying process (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 68)

Figure 3 by Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019, p. 68) shows an extended view of the customer journey and a summary of how digital media can impact the buying process. In this model, the customer journey starts even before the awareness phase, when the potential buyer is not yet aware of his problem nor the company, brand, or product/service that can solve it. At this phase, digital marketing techniques like paid media, for example, display ads and paid search, are an effective tool to generate awareness. During the awareness phase, in

which a potential customer already identified his problem, a company should position itself or its product and services through search engine optimized (SEO) content on its website or affiliate marketing. In the next phase, when the potential customer is searching for a supplier, earned media plays an important role as aggregators, because content is collected and prepared for the target group. However, during the supplier search, it is of utmost importance to have a well-structured directory of highly valuable content on the company website, to generate leads, for example through form submissions, and also nurture emails to continuously provide relevant and helpful content targeting the buying persona. To assist a potential buyer in his evaluation and selection phase, companies can offer freely accessible content like product information, and blogs, but also reviews and ratings by existing customers, for example, by sharing customer voices in brochures or directly on the website. Once the customer has decided to purchase a product or service, the purchase process should be supported and facilitated by the vendor. In B2B this can be provided by automated email reminders and booking systems to schedule a meeting with a sales representative. After the purchase, in the post-purchase evaluation and feedback phase, the customer should receive personalized content which is relevant to the use of the product or application of the service and will increase customer loyalty. It is crucial to offer support and to not stop providing content to the existing customer, to ensure customer satisfaction and stimulate cross- or up-selling (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 11).

Chapter 3: Content Marketing

Marketing and digital marketing in particular are based on content. Without content, there would be no websites, brochures, magazines, emails, or social media channels. Content marketing has become critical for businesses to build brand awareness and attract new customers. Relevant and informative content can help businesses to position themselves as thought leaders in their industry and thereby achieve competitive advantage. Digitalization and transparency of information have led to a higher than ever demand for content, especially digital content. The following chapter elaborates on the definition of content marketing, its key components, and its relevance for marketing activities executed by global B2B companies.

Definition of content marketing

According to Saxena (2010, pp. 98-100), the term content marketing can be considered an umbrella term that includes various marketing formats through which content is created and shared with the goal to engage existing and potential customers. For the purpose of this master thesis, the term content marketing is looked at specifically in a digital context. Rowley (2008, p. 522) defines digital content marketing as a management process based on the distribution of digital content through electronic channels to identify and satisfy customer needs. To efficiently distribute different types of content, in different forms and different places or access platforms, a profound content strategy is needed which includes the planning and management of content to meet business goals, engage customers and prospects and adapt content to diverse forms of web presence (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p. 338).

In recent years, content marketing has gained popularity as a less intrusive form of marketing that relies on a blend of entertainment, education, and inspiration to engage the

audience. A crucial aspect of content marketing is determining the target audience, in order to create content that is relevant, interesting, and useful to them. Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be utilized to monitor the audience's needs and preferences in an automated way and generate dynamic content that is more likely to be consumed, resulting in improved performance and a higher conversion rate from visitors to leads to customers (Kotler et al., 2021, p. 119).

Content marketing is a component of corporate communications that assists in establishing brand recognition, extending reach, and generating leads. The process of content marketing entails analysing, conceptualizing, producing, distributing, and evaluating content. During the analysis stage, goals and target audiences are identified, and topics and keywords are researched. The conceptualization phase entails generating ideas and identifying topics, classifying content, placing it in the customer journey, prioritizing it, and creating an editorial plan. After an editorial briefing, the production phase commences, during which content is created, reviewed, and published, landing pages are developed, and tracking is set up. The content is now circulated through the company's channels and external media channels to attract visitors. Content distribution ensures that the content is read, shared, and discussed. The evaluation stage involves monitoring and optimizing content, as well as managing leads and conducting a final performance review (Pabst & Mittelmeier, 2022, p. 72).

Content can be categorized in many ways. First, it can be categorized according to the media and whether it is offline or online content. Offline content can also be considered to be more traditional, especially if it is used for print, TV, or mass media. Online content forms the basis for digital communication and can come in countless lengths and formats (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, p. 30). If one differentiates according to purpose, one usually speaks of outbound or inbound content or push and pull (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p.35). The marketing

goals of a company play an important role here. Depending on whether a company wants to improve its image or attract new customers, it is going to focus more on inbound or outbound content marketing. Another possible categorization of content is by the target group. If individuals who are part of a B2B buying center are addressed, the content is likely to be educational, whereas B2C content often focuses on an entertaining aspect. Educational content aims to build trust and position the company as an industry leader. Infographics, industry research, eBooks, case studies, and whitepapers are examples of educational content. Entertaining content, in contrast, aims at providing content that enables the target audience to relate to a company more and have fun while consuming the content. Entertaining content can be videos, contests, or giveaways. Another content type is promotional content, which focuses on products and services and should attract new customers and convince them to purchase (Scholar Journeys, 2022). However, content should ideally be all three, educational, entertaining, and promotional, or at least the published content should be balanced in this regard. The highest priority is to deliver real value to the customers regardless of the type of business and encourage the target audience to engage with the published content. Moreover, content can be categorized by its accessibility. Content can either be freely available or gated if access is given only in exchange for either customer data or monetary value (Zielinski, 2021).

In contrast to traditional marketing methods (outbound) where companies reach out to customers, inbound marketing attracts customers to the business. This is achieved through the creation of valuable content that is educational, innovative, and informative, which entices customers to engage with the business voluntarily. The creation of such content is the main characteristic of inbound marketing (Lehnert et al., 2020, p. 3).

Traditional forms of media are typically push-oriented, where the message is pushed out to the audience. In contrast, in digital media, the customer is frequently the one who takes the first step and seeks out information or an experience from a brand through visiting a website or other online presence. This is known as a pull mechanism and having strong search engine visibility is crucial in attracting customers in this way. Inbound marketing is an effective approach because it minimizes the waste of time and monetary resources associated with traditional advertising. Content and search marketing are effective approaches to reaching potential customers with specific needs since they actively search for information and make selections on their own (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p. 35).

According to Seebacher (2021, p. 248), an increasing number of B2B enterprises are embracing inbound techniques in their marketing and sales efforts. The main reason for that is a tougher competition as well as a change in purchasing behaviour, which shifts communication to digital channels starting with researching a company or a product, leading to digital presentations and quoting and eventually to orders via digital channels (Seebacher, 2021, p. 248). Inbound marketing usually leverages gated content like whitepapers or eBooks which are available exclusively on the company website (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, p. 430) and which users can access in return for registration information by filling out a form. Companies often decide case-by-case about the value and quality of a piece of content and how easily available it should be. Whitepapers and eBooks require a lot of research and conceptual effort and present good overviews of complex topics and issues; therefore, they are usually gated. However, as companies try to balance the value offered and the data charged for it, there are also many freely available content pieces such as one-pagers, infographics, or short videos. Product brochures and even user manuals or online manuals are highly relevant for many prospective buyers because they give a good impression of the

product usage of technical or software products and are almost always available to anyone for free. Another popular content type is case studies, which report the individual experience or success story of a customer. Case studies can either mention the name of the customer and show in detail how the company's product or solution has helped them to achieve their goals, or be completely anonymized, depending on the industry and buyer persona (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, pp. 417-418).

In this work, content marketing is defined as the active publication and distribution of content by a company with the ultimate goal of improving its image and increasing conversions. This implies that a company actively and consciously produces content and publishes it, intending to provide the right target groups with the right content at the right moment.

Now that the definition of content marketing is clear, the question is what are the characteristics of great content? Obviously, it always depends on the company, its customers and buying personas, the industry, and the channel. But in general, it can be said that great content is compelling, timely, digestible, relevant, original, and emotive (Hall, 2017, p. 142). Great content is captivating and engaging to the intended audience. It should elicit a response from them and encourage them to explore the content more thoroughly. The content should be tailored to the audience and resonate with them. Also, great content is characterized by being presented to the audience when they need it most. Retargeting and redirected links can help ensure that the content is delivered to the right person at the right time. Furthermore, great content is easy to read and understand. It should be designed to fit the audience's reading level, language, and buying stage. This means that the content should be appropriate for the audience's skill level, education level, and interests. Most importantly, great content should be relevant to the audience's needs and interests. It should be

informative and provide valuable insights into the customer's business, and industry, or offer new perspectives and ideas rather than repeating what's already available. Finally, great content elicits an emotional response from the audience, such as a sense of urgency, desire, or inspiration. It should evoke strong feelings that encourage the audience to take action, whether that is making a purchase, sharing the content, or engaging with the brand (Hall, 2017, p. 142).

Relevance and benefits of content marketing in B2B

As digital technologies have gained widespread adoption, the line between online and offline experiences has become increasingly blurred. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that not all organizations have fully embraced digital channels, and the significance of these channels varies across industry sectors. As such, each organization possesses a distinct position within the digital and non-digital spheres, which necessitates a comprehensive analysis of its marketing environment and tailored planning of digital marketing strategies (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 49).

Despite the fact that content marketing has been around for more than a century, it is still a field of constant development. Although many organizations are utilizing content marketing to some extent, most of them do not have a proper plan and many have reported low effectiveness (Pulizzi, 2014, p. 27). The Content Marketing Institute asked 1,104 B2B marketing professionals about the importance of content marketing in 2022 and the answer was very clear with 71 percent of the participants estimating content marketing to be more important than before (Content Marketing Institute, 2022, p. 3). There are many reasons on which the increasing significance of content marketing may be based. Kakkar (2017) for example states that content marketing helps businesses generate more revenue and attract

new customers by establishing valuable relationships and improving a brand's image, which increases competitive advantage. Furthermore, content marketing is flexible and fosters creativity, it is suitable for all industries, and appeals to individuals with a genuine interest in a brand or company which results in enhanced customer experience (Kakkar, 2017). According to a study from Statista (2022), almost three-quarters of B2B companies would like to publish content more frequently, but one of the things preventing them from doing so is a lack of time and technical resources.

Implementing content marketing in B2B

When implementing content marketing in B2B companies the focus should be on improving the organization of marketing and communication, building expertise, and clarifying the optimal formats and content for target groups, as well as leveraging the corporate website as a central content hub and using tools to organize and plan content (Wesselmann, 2020, p. 164). However, according to Seebacher (2021, p. 406), content marketing will undergo more significant changes in the next five years than it has in the last two decades.

B2B content marketing allows companies to build a community of loyal customers, in which good quality and relevant information can strengthen the connection and loyalty to a brand. This goes hand in hand with building trust, as a company that regularly publishes good content can position itself as a thought leader and can be seen as an authority and trusted supplier by its customers which influences potential purchase decisions. There are several benefits of great content such as improved SEO and better ranking on search engines, increased inbound traffic on the company's website, increased brand awareness as people

will cite and share content published by a company, and better-educated customers who feel empowered to make better decisions for their business (Hall, 2017, pp. 140-141).

Launching great content through different channels via a digital marketing campaign can even trigger viral effects. The centre of a performance or lead generation campaign for example is the offer that is provided to potential customers to initiate a dialog via registration. Unlike personal services such as consulting or service, a content offer is available at any time, and the benefit follows immediately after the download, rather than a few hours or days later if necessary. This is one reason why content offers such as eBook downloads, whitepapers or videos have become particularly popular in lead generation campaigns. Both sides - supplier and potential customer - reach their goals as quickly and effectively as possible with directly available content (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, p. 413).

There are five major elements of a content marketing strategy that need to be considered when deciding to focus on content marketing in strategic decisions. First, the goal for content engagement metrics needs to be identified and set because only when the objective is clear and measurable the results can be evaluated. Second, deciding on which content media to leverage is crucial for a consistent form of content distribution. Content distribution is the third element to consider as it involves the paid and organic promotion of content, for example through ads or SEO and social media. The fourth element is content interaction and participation. This implies that content should not just be consumed statically, but rather it should encourage customers to interact. Last but not least is element five, the content management platform. A content management platform should serve as a place where content can be managed by different people inside the company and provided to users outside the company. Such a content marketing hub or repository enables content creation, content seeding, and sharing, and the connection of content marketing to search marketing

to all take place at one gathered point and the right people, processes, and tools to be working in that environment at the same time (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, pp. 36-37).

Chapter 4: Marketing Automation

Digital content marketing campaigns are crucial in today's B2B marketing, but how can all the processes related be managed in an efficient way? By leveraging technology and data, marketing automation enables businesses to deliver personalized and targeted content to customers while also automating repetitive tasks and processes. In this chapter, the definition and relevance of marketing automation are explained, examples of how marketing automation can be used, and the context for B2B companies is given.

Definition of marketing automation

One of the most important features of digital transformation is the automation of processes (Schuster, 2020, p. 19). Automation is a way to increase the efficiency of digital marketing. It takes the use of models and optimization to new heights by reducing the need for human intervention. Although human involvement may still be required to assess and adjust the process, there are four areas where automation can be nearly complete: pay-per-click advertising, optimizing landing pages, delivering web services, and automating marketing messages (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, pp. 540-541).

Marketing automation encompasses more than just software or a marketing concept. It is a framework that is integral to a company's go-to-market strategy. The framework allows for personalized marketing activities to be automated within the context of campaigns, which is a departure from the traditional marketing approach. Rather than using the same activities for an entire target group or individual segments, marketing automation is non-linear and

non-synchronized, enabling individualized activities to be delivered to individual contacts at the most opportune time. This results in campaigns running differently for each customer (Seebacher, 2021, p. 250).

Campaign automation handles all the steps involved in designing, implementing, and enhancing social marketing efforts, including generating ideas, organizing, creating ads, launching campaigns, monitoring progress, making improvements, and analysing results (Chaffey & Smith, 2017, p. 406).

In the course of this work, marketing automation is considered a concept that can and should be applied in all areas of marketing, from software-supported emailing to fully automated lead nurturing and targeted content distribution. It should be deeply rooted in the company and considered as part of the overall strategy in order to exploit its full potential.

Relevance of marketing automation

Marketing automation can help with a number of challenges that companies often face. Such challenges include a lack of processes, a non-existent will to change, a lack of know-how, or a fear of making mistakes. No matter which channels are used, clearly defined processes are often lacking, and documentation is also inadequate. The affected teams shy away from the complex change process, and it is difficult to redefine processes in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness (Pabst & Mittelmeier, 2022, p. 129).

The most significant benefit of marketing automation is realized during the customer acquisition phase. Marketing automation manages a range of standard marketing activities, including email campaigns, invitations to events and webinars, scheduling appointments, and disseminating content such as white papers, case studies, or blog articles (Seebacher, 2021, pp. 251-252). During the customer acquisition phase, there is a logical sequence of all steps

and tools required to convert a website visitor into a registered lead with the help of marketing automation. When leveraging content marketing to attract new customers, a potential customer sees an attractive offer on a website, such as the offer of a free whitepaper download, and clicks on the associated interaction area, the call-to-action (CTA) button. This takes the website visitor to the specially designed landing page, which offers as few distractions as possible. Here, short texts once again summarize the advantages of the content offer, and a form is displayed in which the interested website visitor can enter the desired contact data. By clicking on a button near the form, he sends it off. The next step is to give the newly registered lead access to the content offering. The best way to do this is to use professionally designed and personalized thank-you pages (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, pp. 413-414).

Marketing automation provides greater flexibility and personalization in the design of branding activities within a campaign. In contrast to previous campaigns that were linear and largely static for individual target group segments, campaigns now can run dynamically and individually based on prior interactions. However, the increased flexibility and altered planning horizon also require marketing managers to engage in more extensive and occasionally more complex planning. Effective brand communication and content marketing are the primary factors determining the success of marketing automation. In terms of operations, marketing automation software is the most crucial tool among all marketing instruments (Seebacher, 2021, p. 258).

Marketing automation technology has revolutionized the way businesses interact with their clients. There are several key areas where automation can be beneficial in ensuring that a business's marketing activities are as efficient and productive as possible and support sales in an effective way. Some of these key areas are:

- Planning of marketing activities
- Lead qualifying and nurturing
- Email marketing
- Creation of reports
- Social media posting and analysis (Liaonenka, 2021)

Sales teams rely on qualified leads to succeed, and marketing automation technology can be a valuable aid. To determine lead quality or status, metrics such as website behaviour, email engagement, and survey responses can be analysed. Implementing an automated system to measure these metrics can significantly enhance the efficiency of the lead qualification process. Nurturing leads is just as crucial, and targeted automated emails or messages can be sent based on specific criteria or actions. This proactive approach fosters engagement with potential clients and represents an excellent opportunity for upselling and cross-selling. Automated email marketing and reminders can keep customers engaged and informed. Additionally, automation tools enable the rapid and effortless generation of reports on significant activities and KPIs (Liaonenka, 2021).

Marketing automation tools can also be leveraged for A/B-testing. A/B-testing is the process of the evaluation of two or more options of any kind of external communication. If a company is not sure which option to choose, it can save time and resources to A/B-test before deciding for one option which might end up being the one that does not work so well. For example, subject lines of emails can be A/B-tested to find out which one leads to a higher open rate, or social media banners can be A/B-tested to see which one achieves a higher interaction from the target audience, the same applies to paid ads. Marketing automation tools often have A/B-testing integrated with their platform to enable marketers to choose the best option (Hwang, 2019, p. 389). Another benefit of marketing automation is the seamless integration

of multiple application programming interfaces (APIs). APIs can be used to enable digital interactions within digital ecosystems by automatically sending and receiving requests and responses from websites or other platforms. This means that data from one platform can be incorporated and enriched with data from another source. Moreover, APIs can be configured to fit the design and format of the main platform they are integrated into (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019, p. 50).

Another major technology that should be considered by today's marketers in the context of marketing automation is Artificial Intelligence (AI). With AI, marketers can personalize the customer relationship at every touchpoint (Venkatesan & Lecinski, 2021, p. 10). Not only can it be used for personalization, but also for repetitive, low-value marketing tasks that can easily be automated and therefore improve efficiencies when done at scale (Venkatesan & Lecinski, 2021, p. 16). However, many marketers might shy away from implementing AI and using it in combination or as an extension of their existing technology due to a feeling of unpreparedness or uncertainty (Venkatesan & Lecinski, 2021, p. 11).

Marketing automation in the context of B2B

"The Marketing Automation Framework thus contributes to a professionalization and systematization of B2B marketing." (Seebacher, 2021, p. 262)

Technologies B2B Organizations Use to Manage Content

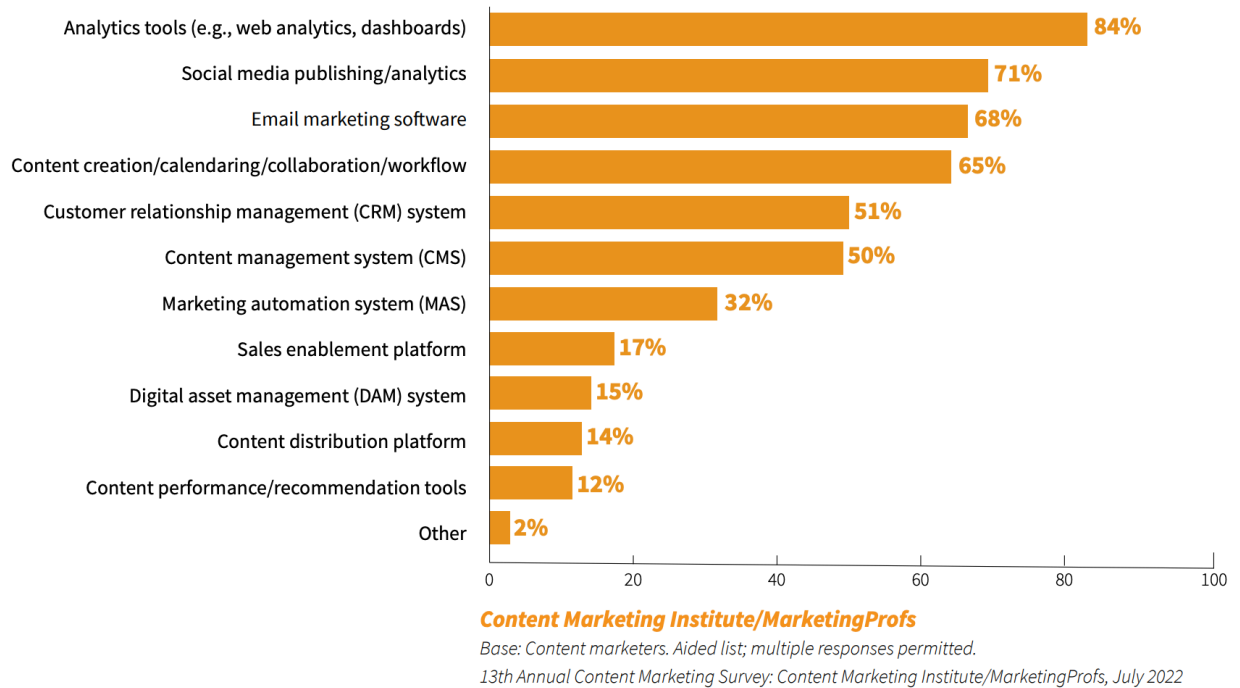


Figure 4: Technologies B2B Organizations Use to Manage Content (Content Marketing Institute, 2022, p. 25)

The findings of a study with 1,104 participants executed by the Content Marketing Institute in July 2022 show the technologies used by B2B organizations to manage content. According to this study, 32 percent of the participants' organizations use marketing automation systems to manage their content as shown in Figure 1 (Content Marketing Institute, 2022, p. 25). Other technologies such as analytic tools (84 percent), social media publishing (71 percent), email marketing software (68 percent), or customer relationship systems (51 percent) are used more often than marketing automation which is interesting because these other technologies focus primarily on the distribution and performance analysis of content, which marketing automation could also be leveraged for. Furthermore, the findings of the study also revealed that nearly two-thirds of the participants admitted that they either have the right technology in place but are not using it in the most efficient way or that they did not even acquire the right technology yet (Content Marketing Institute, 2022, p.

26). The results of this study show once more that in the digital age, manually maintaining tasks can no longer be effectively managed without integrated software. Especially when it comes to personalization and customization the expectations from the customer side are high and they want to be recognized on every communication channel, whether via email, social media, or on the website (for example when they fill out a form). To meet the high expectations and respond to customer requests in a fast and still individual way, appropriate software support is needed. The providers of these software packages are also aware of this and are successively integrating more and more marketing functions into the software. Today, such software no longer just includes all the necessary sub-functionalities of online marketing, but also software modules for team collaboration, time tracking, project management, and an editorial calendar for content management, blog, and social media (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, p. 285).

When working with marketing automation tools which are integrating data from different channels it is of utmost importance to consider compliance in regard to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The GDPR has been in effect throughout the EU since May 2018. This has a direct impact on inbound marketing and the handling of the personal data of customers or prospects. When communicating digitally, only contacts who have given consent may be contacted directly. Website visitors and prospects will only give you consent if you offer them content that helps answer their questions, increases their knowledge, or supports them in making a decision (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, p. 572). The principles of the GDPR include transparency, purpose limitation, storage duration limitation, lawfulness, accuracy and integrity, and confidentiality. These principles define the framework for handling personal data, for example, data that make an individual natural person identifiable, such as name, e-mail address, home address, credit card numbers, and ID numbers. The

handling of such data must be transparent to the person, for example, the person must be informed if and what data is collected from them and how it is processed or for what purpose. Every natural person has the right to refuse data processing at any time, but also to correct or delete collected data. Companies are obliged not to store data longer than necessary and to keep the amount of collected data as small as possible (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, p. 573).

In daily practice, marketing automation tools are used in a virtuoso manner for a wide variety of campaigns, processes, and workflows, for marketing and sales approaches to entire contact segments, and for personally addressing individual leads and customers. With any content marketing campaign, you should create value with your contacts and specifically help them along the path of the buying decision process (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, p. 407).

Marketing automation can be used for different tasks when planning, implementing, and analysing digital content marketing campaigns. When planning a campaign, identifying the buyer persona you want to target comes first, this can easily be done by analysing the website visitors, or social media followers. The next step is to tailor the content and all campaign assets (for example, landing pages, and emails) to that persona's experience and information needs. To do this, possible keywords the buyer persona will use for search during all phases of the buying process, need to be identified (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, p. 409).

Once the relevant keyword set is defined, the new campaign can be created directly in the marketing automation software. Usually, this is a simple step because software solutions have dedicated campaign management areas in which new campaigns can be created quickly and easily. The next step is about creating necessary campaign assets such as landing pages, forms, emails, or social posts and fill them with content. The campaign assets can be assigned to the new campaign which helps to organize all processes, implement related workflows, or

create reports. The campaign management area of the marketing automation software helps to keep track of all ongoing activities, especially as the number and complexity of campaigns increase (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, pp. 410-411).

Before actually launching an inbound marketing campaign, the individual campaign assets should be tested. This can be done by sending a confirmation test email and also testing the flow of the entire campaign through the marketing automation software. After everything is tested and possible errors are fixed the campaign can be set live by visibly embedding the content offer and CTA on the website, arming the landing pages and thank-you pages, activating the workflows, and starting to promote the content campaign via blogposts and social posts. In addition, potentially interested contacts can be actively addressed via email about the new content offering to encourage them to convert on the website and validate a presumed interest in the topics of the content offerings (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, p. 415).

After the campaign is live, the performance needs to be tracked and single assets or workflows can be adjusted to optimize the results. Monitoring can be done for individual elements, such as emails or landing pages, or even the SEO performance of the website and the pages where the CTA can be found. Marketing analytics provides insights into the numbers of traffic, clicks, downloads, and many more which helps to evaluate if the campaign needs to be optimized (Schlömer & Schlömer, 2020, p. 416).

Chapter 5: Conceptual model and research question

The theoretical part of this master thesis covers various aspects of B2B marketing, starting with an overview of the B2B ecosystem, including specifications, types of B2B companies, and B2B buying personas. B2B marketing and consumer marketing differ based on their target customers rather than the type of product or service being sold. However, with the rise of digital information procurement and increased transparency in offers, B2B and B2C marketing are starting to converge. B2B marketing often involves lengthy buying cycles and negotiations, with a focus on quality, reliability, and innovation. Thus, having clear goals in marketing is crucial, whether they are quantitative or qualitative. The SOSTAC planning system can be utilized to create a B2B digital marketing strategy that is in line with overall business and marketing strategies and has specific objectives for the right target audience. As the modern business environment is characterized by VUCA, marketers need to use technology to enhance their offers while being watchful about maintaining their competitive position.

The second chapter covers digital marketing campaigns including the definition of digital marketing, the phases of digital marketing campaigns, the digital media landscape, and digital marketing campaign management. The initial stage of planning and executing a digital marketing campaign involves the formulation of a comprehensive digital marketing strategy that considers both external and internal factors and follows an integrated marketing approach that encompasses owned, earned, and paid media. This is followed by a situation analysis, strategic, tactical, and operational planning, and ultimately, campaign implementation. The management process involves establishing and tracking goals, optimizing budgets, segments, targets, messaging, and integrating the campaign into the overall media plan. KPIs such as unique visitors, conversion rates, cost-per-click, and return

on investment are important for evaluating the success of a campaign. The digital customer journey comprises multiple touchpoints such as digital platforms, websites, landing pages, and media. This process is often non-linear, and customers may navigate between phases using digital touchpoints. Consequently, providing relevant, engaging, and useful content at each touchpoint is essential.

The literature review also covers content marketing in detail, including its definition, relevance and benefits in B2B, and implementation strategies. The content marketing process involves a series of activities, including content analysis, conceptualization, production, distribution, and evaluation. Content can be categorized based on factors such as media type, purpose, target audience, and accessibility. Inbound marketing, which involves creating valuable content to attract customers to a business, is a popular approach for B2B companies. In order to create effective content, companies must carefully balance the educational, entertaining, and promotional value of their content. When developing a content marketing strategy, organizations should consider the goals of their content marketing efforts, the type of content media to leverage, content distribution, and the content management platform. Utilizing a content hub to manage content can provide a comprehensive overview of all the different content management tasks and facilitate better alignment across internal teams.

Lastly, the theoretical part of this thesis discusses marketing automation, its definition, relevance, and implementation in the context of B2B marketing. Marketing automation is a concept that should be integrated into a company's overall strategy and applied across all areas of marketing. The primary advantage of marketing automation is its ability to enhance the flexibility and personalization of digital content marketing campaigns, while simultaneously saving time and resources. Some of the key areas where marketing automation can be advantageous include the planning of marketing activities, lead

qualification and nurturing, email marketing, report generation, and social media activities. In addition, marketing automation tools can be utilized for A/B-testing and seamless integration with multiple APIs, resulting in improved connections between different data sources and better reporting.

The findings of the literature research can now be used to create a theoretical concept that will serve as the basis for the empirical research within the scope of this work. The theoretical concept is a representation of the implementation process of digital content marketing campaigns with the use of marketing automation in B2B companies.

As can be seen in Figure 4, it is assumed that the digital content marketing management process consists of six main components.

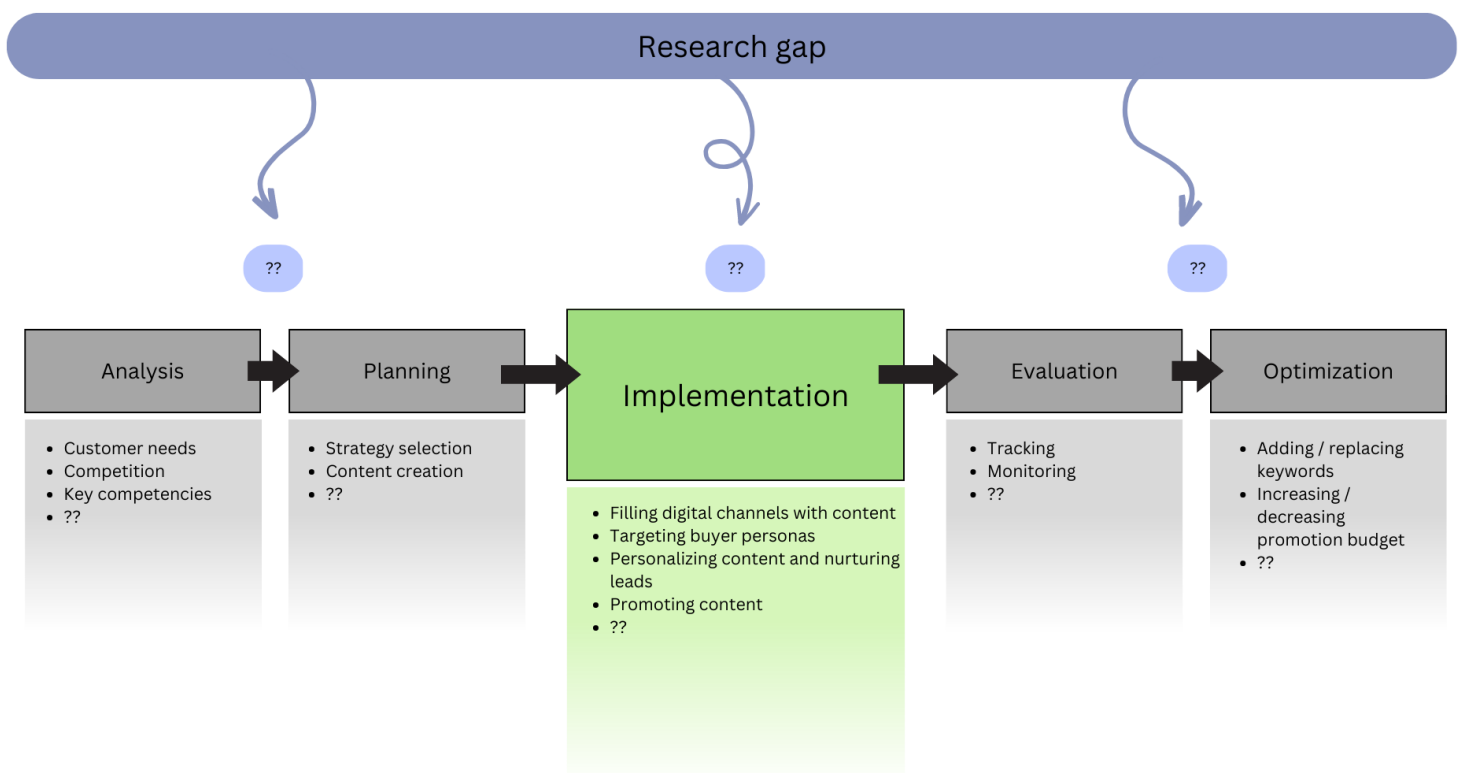


Figure 5: Conceptual model of implementing digital content marketing campaigns with the use of marketing automation in B2B (own illustration)

The first component is the analysis of customer needs, an external competitive analysis as well as an internal analysis of a company's key competencies. To conduct such an analysis, the company must first know exactly who the target group and the ideal buying persona they want to address with the campaign is. The most important aspects to know about the target personas are their problems and pain points, what they are struggling with, and which solutions and content they might need to solve a problem whether it may be a product or service-specific problem, an industry problem, or even a strategic decision about the future of their company. The second component is planning, a strategy needs to be selected first before the content can be planned and created. When it comes to the implementation, which is the focus component in this thesis, the included aspects that can be derived from theory are the process of filling digital channels with content, targeting buyer personas, personalizing content, and nurturing leads, as well as promoting content. In theory, those are some of the processes that must be done for a digital content marketing campaign to be launched effectively. The following component is the evaluation of the campaign by tracking and monitoring the results. The fifth component is the optimization of the campaign. Here marketers can add or replace keywords and increase or decrease the promotion budget. Finally, the sixth component includes the processes that can be done with the help of marketing automation. As those processes are unknown in this context, the possible extensions of the other components, form the research gap.

Despite an increased number of academic research and significant practitioner interest in the concept of digital content marketing, which can be defined as the creation and circulation of valuable and relevant content to either existing customers or new prospects on digital platforms with the intention of building trust and provoke engagement (Hollebeek &

Macky, 2019, pp. 27-28), there is a lack of research on the implementation process of digital content marketing campaigns in global B2B companies with marketing automation.

The initial situation can only partly be represented as a conceptual model which implies that qualitative theory-building must be conducted to create a theoretical model of the process. The following research question can be derived from the gaps in the conceptual model as seen in Figure 4:

“How do global B2B companies implement digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation?”

Chapter 6: Methodology

As the theoretical literature research shows, there are already some scientific and practical works on the topics of content marketing, digital marketing campaigns, and marketing automation. The links and areas of application to B2B markets are also known. However, through the literature research, it has once again become clear that there are no works to date that address the implementation process of digital content marketing campaigns using marketing automation in global B2B companies. In order to shed light on the process in particular and learn more about it, qualitative research is needed. A quantitative approach is not suitable here, since it is very difficult to explain the "HOW" of the process implementation. Qualitative research should lead to being able to form a picture of the process and identify the interrelationships and dependencies, as well as best practices and challenges. The following research design provides an overview of the empirical study of this thesis, the used method and survey tool, the data sources, and data collection as well as analysis.

Empirical study design

The study is carried out by conducting semi-structured expert interviews. This is a qualitative approach that involves data and insights collection by asking prepared questions based on specific themes of a research field with the overall goal of theory building (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 246). The empirical research of this paper is also based on the grounded theory framework of Glaser and Strauss (1967). This means that during the research process and the collection of qualitative data, the existing findings are repeatedly analysed and compared with the literature before the research is continued. For example, in the specific case of this thesis, this means that each interview is influenced by the process and findings from the previous interview(s). That is, the focus in topics and structure of questions asked during the interviews will be adapted after each interview and after gaining new insights, evaluating the key statements, and grounding in the existing literature. This method is appropriate because the topic of B2B companies implementing digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation is still underexplored and therefore the outcome of this study, namely a theory that is robust, accurate, and generalizable (Eisenhardt, 2021, p. 152) will contribute to academic research as well as to managerial education.

As the foundation for the emergent theory of this study consists of rich qualitative data, the theory is likely to be accurate and testable (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, pp. 25-26) because the arguments that support the emergent theory are sharpened at an appropriate level of abstraction and grounded in internal validity and logical coherence (Eisenhardt, 2021, p. 151). Searching for connections and commonalities across multiple companies instead of a single company has the advantage that there are fewer items that serve as the basis for theory building which again makes the emerging theory more solid and better applicable to a broader context (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 30).

Qualitative expert interviews

The effectiveness of interviews that rely on discussions with individuals largely depends on the quality of the interviewees, specifically, how well they are able to meet the expectations placed upon them during the interview. Expert interviewees are expected to possess a clear understanding of the required information and to provide comprehensive and detailed responses. They are also expected to adapt their communication style to match the interviewer's direction. The quality of the interview is particularly crucial when the aim is to obtain information about a specialized topic or process, as these types of interviews are known as expert interviews. In this context, experts are defined as individuals who possess specialized knowledge about a particular phenomenon that is of interest to the interviewer. Another approach to expert interviews is to view them as conversations with individuals who occupy an expert role within the subject area under investigation. In this approach, which is prevalent in the literature and the current study, experts are distinguished from other actors within the setting based on their unique knowledge and skills (Bogner et al., 2009, pp. 117-118). For the empirical study conducted for this master thesis the interviewees can be defined as experts from the field as they are experts in their role in their organization, and they have a proven record of education and professional experience in the research field.

In summary, semi-structured expert interviews are conducted for this research to build a theory that is accurate, robust, and generalizable to represent the implementation process of digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation in global B2B companies as a conceptualized framework. Thereby, a partly inductive approach (Eisenhardt et al., 2016, p. 1114) is pursued as theory building is the main objective of this study. However, the interview questions are derived from interpreting the literature research and therefore

deductive. Future research could start with testing the emerged theory with purely deductive methods.

Survey Tool

For conducting the empirical research, qualitative and semi-structured interviews are executed. This approach allows several data sources to be leveraged such as the company history but also interviews with experts from the companies. The following thematic blocks serve as an orientation for the first semi-structured interview.

To conduct the semi-structured interviews the following topics are discussed in open questions:

- Content Marketing
- Marketing Automation
- Implementation of digital content marketing campaigns

The full interview guide based on these topics can be retrieved from Appendix 1.

These broad questions will be adjusted after each interview considering the gained insights and applying the grounded theory-building approach. Adjusting and tweaking the questions to gain novel insights will continue until no new aspects emerge and theoretical saturation is reached. (Holton, 2010, p. 32)

Interviews are conducted via video call where possible to facilitate audio recording, if permitted, and to allow for conversations with people abroad. This is also intended to create a neutral setting. After each interview, the audio recording is transcribed, and the content is coded with the help of software.

Sampling

As this study follows an inductive approach the sampling for this study will be done according to the principle of theoretical sampling. In contrast to random sampling, theoretical sampling is not at all arbitrary but instead, participants are carefully selected based on the likelihood of the focal phenomenon to occur in the companies they work for and how their expertise and experience are relevant to support theory-building (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 6).

There are several factors that influence the decision of whether a case is chosen or not. Eventually, the selection of cases is depending on the fit with selection criteria, data availability, timely resources, and, of course, case design and theoretical saturation (Eisenhardt, 2021, p. 153). The companies participating in this research must a) be globally active which means they are operating in countries all around the world, b) operate in the B2B sector, and c) have a size of at least 10,000 employees to ensure that the marketing department is highly developed and functioning as one of the most important parts of the company. In addition, it is a prerequisite that the companies already practice digital content marketing and marketing automation, and that this is part of their corporate marketing strategy. The company's usage level of marketing automation is used as a pole which implies *polar types* theoretical sampling. The decisive factor for sampling according to the *polar types* principle is the selection of extreme properties, which serve as poles, as this allows large contrasts to be created and patterns to be identified more clearly in the data (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27). Thus, companies with a high degree of utilization on the one hand and companies with a low degree of using marketing automation on the other are to be used as samples. The first step is to identify the companies that are to be considered in more detail as samples and to compile a case history. For this purpose, publicly available data sources

such as the website, social media, and press coverage are used. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the persons responsible for marketing in the companies in order to learn more about the internal processes in connection with digital content marketing campaigns and marketing automation.

Data sources - experts

Four B2B marketing executives, who are involved in content marketing and using marketing automation in their work, were selected to conduct semi-structured qualitative expert interviews. These subjects were selected because they are experts experienced in digital content marketing campaigns. Another selection criteria was the representation of big enterprises that are operating on a global level. The respondents were contacted by LinkedIn direct messages and, if available, by email. The briefing of the empirical study was sent to 30 marketing experts from industries such as machine manufacturing, automotive, steel industry, industrial automation, and more.

Company	Job Title	Company headcount	Industry	Regions of business	Content marketing approach	Marketing automation tools in use
1	Marketing and Communications Manager	40,000	Machine manufacturing	150 countries	Educational, informational	Salesforce & Marketing Cloud Account Engagement
2	Head of Marketing and corporate strategy	50,000	Steel Industry	50 countries	Educational, informational, entertaining	Several
3	Group corporate communications – Online marketing	30,000	Machine Manufacturing	40 countries	Educational, Promotional	Marketo
4	Director Global Marketing & Communication	11,000	Technology, Automotive	30 countries	Educational, informational	Own tool

Table 1: Overview of the experts and companies

Table 1 shows a summary of the company characteristics of the companies for which the participating experts work. In the following, the experts are introduced, and their areas of expertise are described in more detail.

Company 1, Expert 1

Company 1 is a global machine manufacturer and technology company that provides productivity, profitability, and sustainability applications for the manufacturing, mining, and infrastructure industries. They are a global leader in manufacturing machines and various offerings for construction and infrastructure including digital applications, and sustainable technologies. Moreover, they offer products for improving efficiency and automation in component manufacturing. At Company 1 the use of marketing automation is at a very early stage, it is currently used for single tasks by a small group of people.

Expert 1 has nearly 20 years of experience in the fields of marketing and communications for B2B companies. The person has a diploma in business administration with a focus on marketing and HR management and has further education in the field of digital marketing. As a marketing manager, they are responsible for all kinds of marketing topics like website, product launches, and social media as well as public relations, regionally, but also globally. In addition, the participant is supporting sales, for example by creating price and cost calculations for the machines.

Company 2, Expert 2

Company 2 is a leading global steel and technology group with combined materials and processing capabilities. The globally active group of companies has sites in more than 50 countries on all five continents. Company 2 is a prominent provider of high-quality product

and system solutions, serving as a top partner to various industries and they are also the leading provider of railroad infrastructure systems, tool steel, and special sections. Company 2's level of marketing automation is a bit more advanced than in Company 1 but still rather at an early stage.

Expert 2 has a master's degree in business administration economics with a focus on marketing and HR and also another master's degree in economic psychology. The participant has over 25 years of experience in marketing and corporate strategy in B2B as well as B2C. As the head of marketing and corporate strategy in a global steel and technology group, the participant is responsible for leading the creation and execution of marketing campaigns, driving the company's marketing and growth strategy, ensuring the company's messaging and branding are consistent and impactful, and providing insights to the executive team to inform business decisions.

Company 3, Expert 3

Company 3 is a globally recognized provider of equipment, machinery, and complete industrial plants to clients in the pulp and paper, metalworking and steel, and hydropower industries. Other major business areas are automation and the service business. At Company 3 marketing automation is leveraged at an advanced level for many tasks and processes and by many people. The marketing automation system at Company 3 is integrated with other digital marketing tools and used in a holistic approach.

Expert 3 is an online marketing manager of Company 3 with an educational background in journalism and public relations. After working for 11 years in two different advertising and marketing agencies, Expert 3 gained experience in the different fields of marketing, communication, and design. Starting with content creation, Expert 3 moved on to media

planning, specializing in online marketing, and learning through hands-on experience. Seven years ago, Expert 3 joined Company 3 and spearheaded a website refresh and modern online marketing tools installation, including email newsletter tools and campaign platforms. In recent years, Expert 3 has been focused on the further development of the company's marketing technology landscape, connecting tools for photo editing, website management, and marketing automation for the reporting of marketing performance.

Company 4, Expert 4

Company 4 is a major player in the mobility technology industry, offering solutions, especially to the automotive industry. As a global technology provider, the company offers a wide range of methodologies and technologies for vehicle development and testing. The utilization of marketing automation is also very advanced at Company 4 as they use it for many different application options.

Expert 4 is a highly accomplished business professional with a background in Business Administration and additional education in systemic consultancy and coaching. With over 20 years of experience in B2B marketing, Expert 4 has worked in a variety of industries, including IT and technology companies. For the past eight years, Expert 4 has been with Company 4, where they started as corporate marketing manager and were eventually promoted to global director. In this role, Expert 4 is responsible for overseeing all marketing and communication activities across all of Company 4's legal entities, ensuring that everything is centralized, monitored, and planned from the headquarter and then distributed to the affiliates in the dedicated countries and markets that are relevant for Company 4.

Data collection

The semi-structured interviews were conducted online via MS Teams and recorded using the dictation function on the interviewer's smartphone. The recordings were transcribed with the help of the *Amberscript* transcription software. Afterwards, the transcripts were checked again and errors in the text were corrected. The full transcripts can be retrieved from Appendix 2-5. Participants consented to the recording and anonymized processing of the data prior to the interview and signed a privacy policy agreement. The interview questions and focus areas were based on the literature research conducted prior to the interviews. The purpose of qualitative interviews was to reveal how these companies leverage marketing automation for digital content marketing campaigns, and if there are striking commonalities in how digital content marketing campaigns are implemented. The interview guide consisted of 12 questions, which are related to the topics of content marketing, marketing automation, and digital content marketing campaigns. Each interview lasted between 30 – 45 minutes. At the start of the interviews, every participant was asked about their educational background and professional experience to validate the quality of the expert status of each interviewee and to break the ice. After that, the questions concerning the field of research were asked. The interviews followed the guide in Appendix 1, except for the interview with Expert 2. This interview was structured differently, although the same questions were asked, order was different than in the other interviews. This was done to find out if the initial order of questions allows the experts to answer the questions in the best possible way in terms of logic. In fact, the original sequence of questions has a better logic and led to more detailed answers.

Analysis Method

To analyse the antecedents of the reviewed companies as well as the qualitative data gained through the semi-structured interviews the analysis method of closed and open coding will be leveraged. Closed coding was used only for the main codes, as these are based on the literature review and the interview guide derived from it. In contrast to closed coding, there are no pre-defined codes that can be drawn from literature in open coding, this means that the subcodes will be generated directly from the qualitative data collected from the cases and the interviews. The goal of this process is to retrieve core categories and related concepts from the codes which will then be theoretically sampled to eventually reach theoretical saturation in concepts to build theory (Holton, 2010, p. 21). The coding process and the creation of a hierarchical code system or code tree, a graphic that illustrates the abstraction levels from the in-vivo-codes to concepts to constructs, will be supported by a software, namely MAXQDA. This software allows researchers to apply a variety of analytical methods, such as grounded theory, qualitative content analysis, group discussions, discourse analysis, case, and field studies by offering a wide range of tools that enable in-depth, systematic analysis of qualitative data, regardless of the method of analysis chosen (MAXQDA, n.d.). The empirical data is continuously coded and compared to other data and codes alongside memoing (Eisenhardt et al., 2016, p. 1114) until theoretical saturation is reached, and the researcher can conduct theory building. Memos are used to capture the idea of emerging theory and to summarize the codes at a higher level of abstraction (Holton, 2010, p. 21). After theoretical saturation is reached, the memos are theoretically sorted, creating the theoretical outline or conceptual framework for the complete formulation of a well-founded emerging theory (Holton, 2010, p. 35).

Chapter 7: Empirical study findings

The research question was derived from the literature review and the existing research gap, and then the research method and approach were explained. In the following section, the results of the qualitative interviews with experts and the code tree resulting from the analysis of the results is presented. Subsequently, an attempt will be made to present the results of the empirical research as a theoretical model with which the research question can be answered. Finally, a critical discussion of the results follows.

Code Tree

Overall, the data can be classified into four main categories and 18 subcategories which again can be grouped into six intermediate categories (*Tasks, Processes, Strategy, Operations, Monitoring, and Analysis*) as can be seen in Figure 6. The main categories or codes, namely *Function, Plan, Implementation, and Evaluation*, have been partly derived from theory. The other sub-codes stem from the insights derived from the qualitative expert interviews and were identified inductively. Hereafter, the main codes and the associated subcodes are explained in more detail.

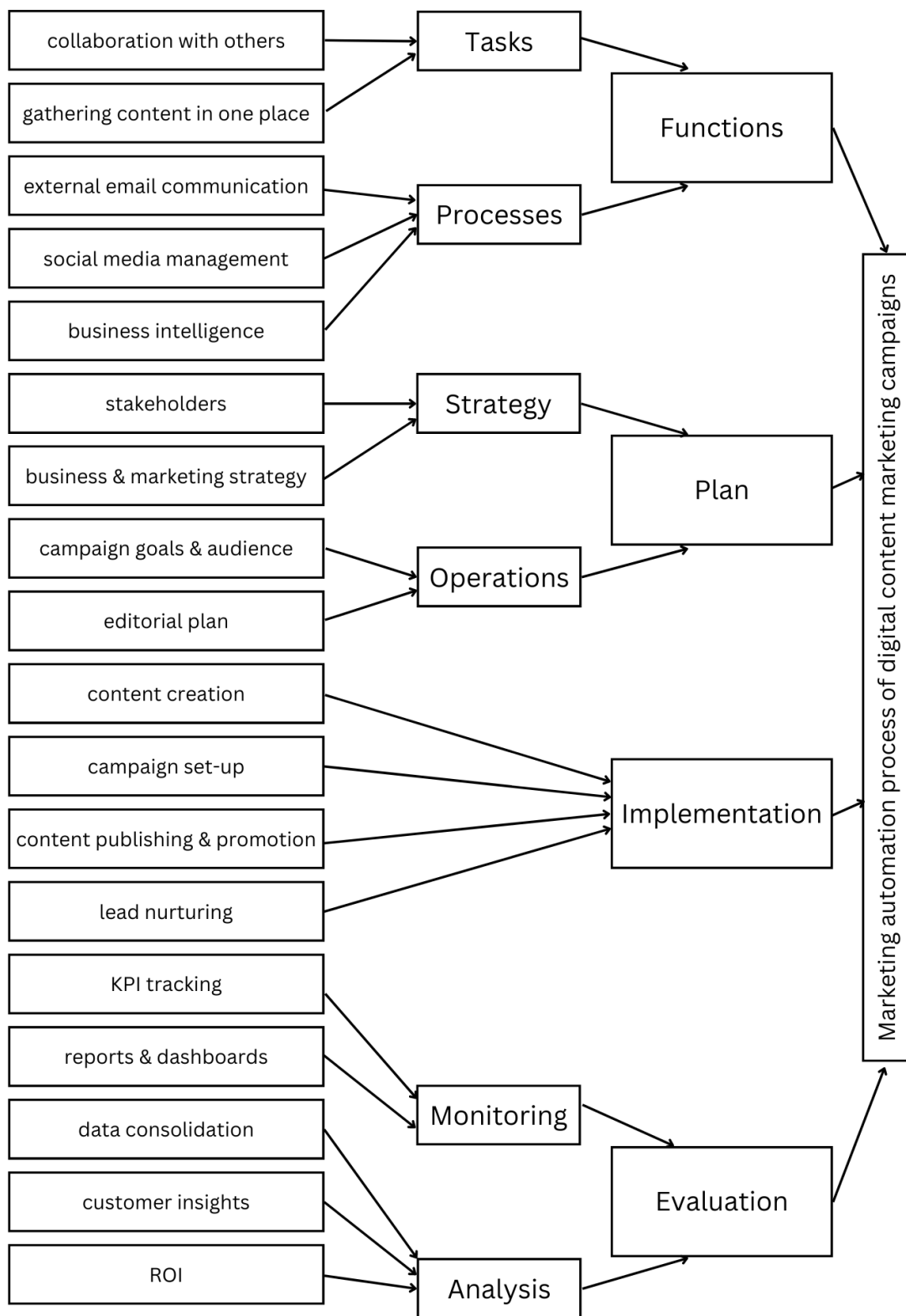


Figure 6: Code Tree (own illustration)

Functions

The main code *Functions* in the marketing automation process of digital content marketing campaigns consists of the two subcodes *Tasks* and *Processes*, which again can be divided into five more subcodes. The main code describes the functions marketing automation has and which single tasks or whole processes it can support or execute in an automated way. The tasks include collaboration with others and gathering content in one place. Communication with others and teamwork can be supported by marketing automation in a way that makes internal communication quicker and easier. Experts 1, 2, and 3 stated that with the use of marketing automation, they are enabled to improve internal communication and work more efficiently. One reason for improved efficiency in collaborating with others might be that marketing automation can take on the task of gathering all the content in one place. According to Expert 1, a marketing automation platform in which all the marketing material and activities can be managed and which everyone can access will not only improve internal communication, but also the quality of content and avoid creating duplicates. Having a single source of truth and one hub where the content can be accessed, created, planned, and published helps to get a clearer focus on the topics and enables better alignment across teams according to Expert 2. Expert 4 mentions another benefit of marketing automation in regard to the collaboration with others which is that it can be used to send automated notifications to employees to raise internal awareness about ongoing campaigns. However, Expert 4 highlights that in their case the use of marketing automation did not lead to less, but to more workload because multiple manual steps are required before launching a campaign. As they implement more automation, the work becomes more complex for individuals but also for teams.

Processes that can be supported or executed by marketing automation include external email communication, social media management, and business intelligence. Social media posts can be planned and scheduled with automation tools, which has enabled Expert 1 and his team to publish posts even during their time off. The same applies to external email communication, where invitations to events or emails for direct marketing can be sent in an automated process as Expert 3 is already doing. Email automation is rather easy, as only the list of recipients and the content need to be placed into the marketing automation tool, so many companies start with email automation when implementing marketing automation into their organization. This was the case for Expert 4 who initially focused on email automation but then evolved more and more to personalization based on individual preferences, achieved through lead scoring and management tools in their CRM database. Background processes such as reporting of digital content marketing campaigns and automated metadata processing is a helpful function of marketing automation according to Expert 3. They go on to illustrate that at a highly advanced level, marketing automation would not only be triggering automated emails but also organic and paid social media campaigns, paid banner campaigns, and video campaigns. This would combine business intelligence and social media management processes which saves time and resources for B2B marketers.

Plan

The main code *Plan* includes the subcodes *Strategy* and *Operations*. This implies that during the planning phase of a digital content marketing campaign not only strategic aspects like the stakeholders or the overarching business and marketing strategy need to be considered, but also operational aspects like campaign-specific goals and target audience or a tangible editorial plan. In the planning phase, the most important cornerstones are defined

before content creation can even begin. At Company 1 the process starts with an internal meeting with stakeholders. At Company 4 the process starts with an ideation phase, followed by creating a concept and then validating the concept by circling back with the stakeholders *"[...] we start always with an idea. Then we have to validate this idea. Then we think, [...] we need to bring this idea into concept. This concept is that although there's a lot of stakeholders, we go further back and say, okay, is that the right concept?"* (Expert 4, Appendix 5, A-38). In conclusion, the stakeholders, such as investors, employees, or the public, always need to be kept in mind when planning a digital content marketing campaign, even though they are not part of the target group, they are still interested in the company and its outward-looking activities.

Of course, every campaign-specific strategy should also serve the overall marketing and business strategy. Therefore, the key strategy needs to be considered when thinking about how a single campaign can help to achieve business goals. Expert 2 illustrated this very well in their answer: *"For each business unit, we have defined a marketing strategy. Then we derive from the marketing strategy on an annual basis, a marketing plan, including projects and campaigns."* (Expert 2, Appendix 3, A-16).

Once the long-term goals and strategy are considered and a campaign-specific strategy is defined, the operations are to be planned. Here it is important to define the campaign goals and the target audience as clearly as possible. This builds the basis for the following activities in the implementation and evaluation phases. Expert 3 illustrated that the marketing automation process of digital content marketing campaigns at Company 3 starts at the target audience, which is filtered in the CRM according to previous activities and then moved to the marketing automation program where all predefined processes are set. Depending on the target group the content, the formats, and channels need to be chosen. This will be defined

in the editorial plan. *“And when we come to the single campaigns, the first step is defining the targets which the campaign should meet. Defining the channels. Defining the content and the key message and the content cornerstones.”* (Expert 2, Appendix 3, A-17). After that, they start copywriting, graphic design, and video shooting which already fall into the category of *Content creation*.

Implementation

The *Implementation* is another main code in the code tree and includes the subcodes *Content creation, Campaign set-up, Content publishing, and content promotion, and finally lead nurturing*. After the strategy, the goals, the target audience, and an editorial plan are defined, the content creation process starts. According to Expert 4 content creation is crucial as without content there is no campaign, and they suggest investing in an own department or even an external agency that specializes solely in the creation of content. The creation of content includes writing text, but also creating banners, images, and graphics for different formats and channels, and of course, creating ads to promote the content once it is published. Expert 3 notes that creating different content versions could greatly improve data and insight gathering. The created content then needs to be inserted into the marketing automation system. This can be a challenge, as Expert 2 says because to prepare content in advance, they need to consider the entire digital content marketing campaign from start to finish which makes the process more complex for the person designing the campaign in the marketing automation tool. However, once they began to semi-automate the process, the quality and relevance of the produced content has improved for Company 2. To facilitate the process of content creation Expert 4 suggests that companies need to consider future developments in communication, such as the use of marketing AI technology in content creation and how it

can be integrated into the automation process in the future. In regard to publishing content, Expert 2 said that they are not yet able to publish content in various channels from one centralized hub because although they do have different automation processes for different channels in place, those processes are not yet connected.

After the content is pasted into the marketing automation platform, Expert 3 describes that editors manually check and optimize content before automation starts running, such as sending out email invitations and reminders for an event. If it is a webinar, the recording needs to be published on the website manually before the thank you email goes out, with a call-to-action to watch the recording or download presentations. After that, the lead nurturing process begins, triggered by the status of leads (their status is updated each time they interact). Company 4 has a similar process as lead management and email automation are already in place. Connected to the CRM database Company 4 send automated emails based on the lead scoring (=status of the lead). Regarding content promotion Expert 4 says that in their latest campaign, they tried out many forms of promotion such as organic SEO and newsletters, or paid Google ads and search ads. Expert 3 also mentions promoting content in an unpaid way first, before starting to promote it in paid media.

Evaluation

The main code of *Evaluation* includes monitoring and analysing activities such as KPI tracking, the creation of dashboards and reports, data consolidation, customer insights, and the ROI.

To find out whether a digital content marketing campaign is successful, marketing automation can help by creating dashboards and reports from the results of KPI tracking. For Expert 1 the ability to track and report everything is a major benefit of marketing automation

because this feature enables Expert 1's team to monitor customer engagement and determine who is interested in the products or services they offer. In conclusion, marketing automation has and will significantly impact the quality and relevance of content produced by Company 1 by providing one consolidating platform, enabling, and simplifying internal information transfer, tracking, and reporting. Expert 2 explained that they have defined KPIs which include, for example, response rates, interaction rates, and website traffic. At Company 2 they mainly use Google Analytics to measure the success of their digital campaigns of which each includes a call-to-action and they set targets for the number of interactions they expect to receive. Interactions are measured via requests in the contact form or download of information materials. Besides marketing automation, Expert 4 is using other tools as well to track and monitor their digital content marketing campaigns. They are integrating their marketing automation system with their CRM and by this can leverage the monitoring data for personalized sales approaches. Expert 3 states that they use marketing automation to measure their campaigns directly or to get figures connected to their campaigns. In cases where direct measurement is not possible, they use tracking parameters to connect different tools. Expert 3 mentioned that they use classical KPIs to measure their campaigns, such as impressions, clicks, click-through rates, engagement rates, and opening rates for emails. Expert 1's personal goal is to focus on analysis, reporting, and tracking to understand the return on investment. They believe that with the new tools and systems, they can emphasize this aspect and get more out of it.

Consolidating and analysing data can provide detailed customer insights, which in turn enable companies to improve personalization and offer content that is actually relevant to the target audience based on their preferences and activities. This is already done by Company 3 and 4. *“Um, the main benefits have been so far [...] that we did a lot more of A*

and B testing, so tested different contents to different target audiences and also customized it more." (Expert 3, Appendix 4, A-27). Expert 3 highlights that they conducted A/B testing through their marketing automation system and by that learned which content was most relevant for which audience, allowing for more specific and relevant content to be sent in the future. However, Expert 4 says, ultimately it is up to the marketer to continuously improve and optimize their content. Global B2B companies can benefit from data consolidation as it provides them with a better overview and other benefits similar to the ones of gathering content in one place. Company 3 is currently working on integrating all the reporting data from different tools into one dashboard, to make them comparable, to have a quick overview, and to avoid manual efforts in data collection, and to interpret the data. A dashboard that consolidates data from different sources is a great start for future content marketing activity because the results from past campaigns can be leveraged to make better decisions regarding the target audience, the content, and the channels. Expert 4 has the same goal and emphasized the need for a business intelligence analysis tool to consolidate all the data from various tracking tools. They plan to continuously extend this tool as they believe that, to this day, no marketing automation solution on the market can offer a platform that fully integrates all of the channels and monitoring to be combined in one. Expert 4 stated that in a perfect world, everything would be connected, and they would have dashboards that show analytics for every channel they use. They will be able to analyse the output to see which topics people are interested in and build their content strategy based on their preferences.

Opinions on content marketing

All four of the experts agree that content marketing is crucial for global B2B companies in order to promote and sell products and services. For example, Expert 1 highlights that in

their company, content marketing is of high importance as they deal with complex machines that require detailed explanations. Therefore, they use educational content for their marketing strategy, but they also use promotional content to promote new developments to stay ahead of their competitors.

One aspect the experts emphasize is to align the content with the corporate marketing strategy and to adapt it to the channel and format. Expert 2 emphasizes that although content marketing is crucial for their company, it is also complex as it needs to align with overall corporate and marketing strategies while balancing entertainment and information. Company 2 on the one hand publishes content about general topics relevant for investor relations and on the other hand, publishes content to educate and entertain their customers and prospects. They use a mix of technical consultancy and educational content, which is developed for single customers. On social media, they use a one-third mix of entertaining, informative, and brand-building content.

Moreover, the experts also have a similar opinion about tailoring content to specific stakeholders and to vary between formats and content purposes. For reference, Expert 4 believes that content is crucial for marketing and that differentiation through storytelling becomes increasingly important as the communication landscape continues to expand. Content must be tailored to specific stakeholders and take various forms, including offline activities such as events. The type of content used depends on the topic being discussed and the audience it is being communicated to. Expert 4's company publishes all types of content, and they also use media channels to communicate with different stakeholders and adapt content for different markets. However, the challenge with publishing a lot of content is the content creation because as the expert says, *"You need a own department who is doing nothing else and think this is something that also [...] the companies have not understood the*

importance and the amount of content that is needed that you have to create it's impossible."

(Expert 4, Appendix 5, A-36).

The results of the interviews show that it is crucial to use content marketing to achieve overarching marketing and business goals, especially when launching a new product. Expert 3 emphasizes that content marketing has helped them reach their marketing goals, as they were able to optimize and make their existing content visible. The main contents produced by Company 3 are promotional, educational, and a mix of both, intending to provide high-quality B2B content for their target audience by adapting content to the medium where it will be published, reusing content, and promoting it effectively.

Opinions on marketing automation

On the topic of marketing automation, all four experts agree that it is essential for improving efficiency and effectiveness in their marketing activities. Expert 3 explained that they use automation to make content marketing campaigns more efficient and customized, allowing them to gather more details about target audiences and send fewer but highly relevant messages. Marketing automation also enables the company to learn from previous data and improve future marketing activities. that for them marketing automation has two main dimensions: external communication with customers and internal automation for tasks like processing metadata and reporting. Although each of the experts is at a different level in using marketing automation for their digital content marketing campaigns, they all see a benefit in using it for email automation, lead management, and content marketing campaigns. For example, Expert 4 is already using marketing automation alongside other tools to track and monitor digital content marketing campaigns, and the system is integrated with their CRM for personalized sales approaches, whereas Expert 1 currently uses marketing

automation only for email campaigns and lead management, but they plan to use their marketing automation tool for smaller campaigns in the future. They also recognize the learning curve associated with implementing and using marketing automation tools effectively. In that regard Expert 4 says *“You have a lot of challenges that you need to, to overcome, and this makes it not easy for everybody. Yeah. It took us months to implement.”* (Expert 4, Appendix 5, A-36). Expert 2 explains that their company is in the early stages of implementing marketing automation. They are currently automating single tasks rather than a holistic approach that integrates all channels. However, with an increase in channels, they can no longer handle everything manually. While marketing automation has increased efficiency, they still have not leveraged its full potential.

Challenges marketers face with marketing automation

The experts all face similar challenges when implementing digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation which revolve around technical difficulties along with the attitudes and skillset of marketers.

Expert 3’s response regarding challenges is very detailed as they acknowledged that for them there are three main challenges. The first challenge is the legal aspect, particularly data protection and GDPR, which requires extra consent for tracking and customization needs. This poses a difficulty in staying compliant while performing custom-tailored marketing. The second challenge is the technical point of view. Since different tools need different interfaces and APIs, out-of-the-box solutions may not always deliver the expected results, which requires manual customization. Also, to make the KPIs comparable, they need to connect or make the automation tools comparable. The third challenge is the change of attitude of marketing colleagues. They need to learn new tools and workflows, which requires additional

training and support. It should be the responsibility of global IT, corporate communications, and marketing department heads to support their colleagues in understanding and using these new tools and connections effectively. The answer from Expert 4 agrees with this since for them one of the major challenges is that marketers need to change their discipline and understand data. However, this is not easy for everyone, and it took their company months to implement. It's also important to oversee the complete technical landscape and understand how each system interacts with the others. This requires merging IT and marketing competencies and having people with a deep understanding of the digital ecosystem in the team. According to Expert 4, marketing needs to be adaptive in a digital environment, and if it's not, companies risk losing track and target. The complexity of the marketing automation system in particular is a challenge especially for those team members who are not even familiar with the CRM that is already in place says Expert 1, again reconfirming the hurdles already mentioned.

Another challenge seems to be the content itself, like Expert 2 states that preparing the content in advance, as they need to consider the entire digital content marketing campaign from start to finish and plan loops with reminder activities, makes the process more complex for the person designing the campaign in the marketing automation tool.

A glimpse into the future of digital content marketing campaigns

When looking into the future of content marketing, marketing automation and digital content marketing campaigns, the experts had very interesting views and a few things in common. For example, the experts agree that the future of content marketing and marketing automation is to streamline the entire process and to integrate all channels and monitoring activities into one database for content marketing campaigns. For reference, Expert 2 shared

that their company has future plans to fully integrate all channels and have one database for content, which will help create a complete content process in one tool and integrate monitoring on the campaigns. Expert 1 also mentions that their personal goal is to focus on analysis, reporting, and tracking to understand the return on investment. Experts 3 and 4 have even broader visions for the future. Expert 3's vision for the future of content marketing and marketing automation is to streamline the entire process by using a centralized dashboard to collect and interpret data from different tools. This dashboard will provide a quick overview of past campaigns, including the target audience and marketing channels used. From there, Expert 3 says the marketing technology will drive the entire process, including content creation, translation, and optimization with the help of AI. Their vision goes further on to create a more efficient and effective process that reduces the manual efforts needed to interpret and use data, while also utilizing AI to provide more personalized and optimized campaigns. Expert 4 too, has a similar vision to reduce manual efforts and to utilize AI as they are investigating the ways of how digital content can be provided and how AI can be incorporated into the experience. Furthermore, Expert 4 sees the future of digital content marketing in everything being connected and having dashboards that show analytics for every channel they use. They would be able to analyse the output to see which topics people are interested in and build their content strategy based on their preferences.

Additionally, the experts aim to individualize content with the help of marketing automation to achieve higher efficiency and a better ROI. For example, Expert 2 mentioned that for one of their business units, they plan to individualize the content with the help of marketing automation in the fields of newsletters and direct marketing. However, for them, the idea of individualizing website content is still in its early stages and it is unclear if this will happen in the near future. In contrast to that, Expert 4 stated that they are currently in the process of

releasing a new website, which will be based on the data they have collected from their CRM system. When people log in to their website, they will automatically receive content that is dedicated to them based on their preferences. They plan to use the website as the main platform for campaigns and retargeting activities but also leverage the full potential of social media.

Emerging theoretical model and discussion

The codes resulting from the empirical research, i.e. the findings from the expert interviews, were used to supplement and complete the conceptual model from chapter 5. The basic framework of the conceptual model is unchanged, but new insights regarding the influence of marketing automation on the implementation process of digital content marketing campaigns emerge from the empirical research. Each element in the process can be supported, simplified, or even executed by marketing automation. The theoretical findings coupled with the empirical insights form a theoretical model for implementing digital content marketing campaigns in global B2B companies as can be seen in Figure 7 below. What follows is an explanation and discussion of the theoretical model and its components.

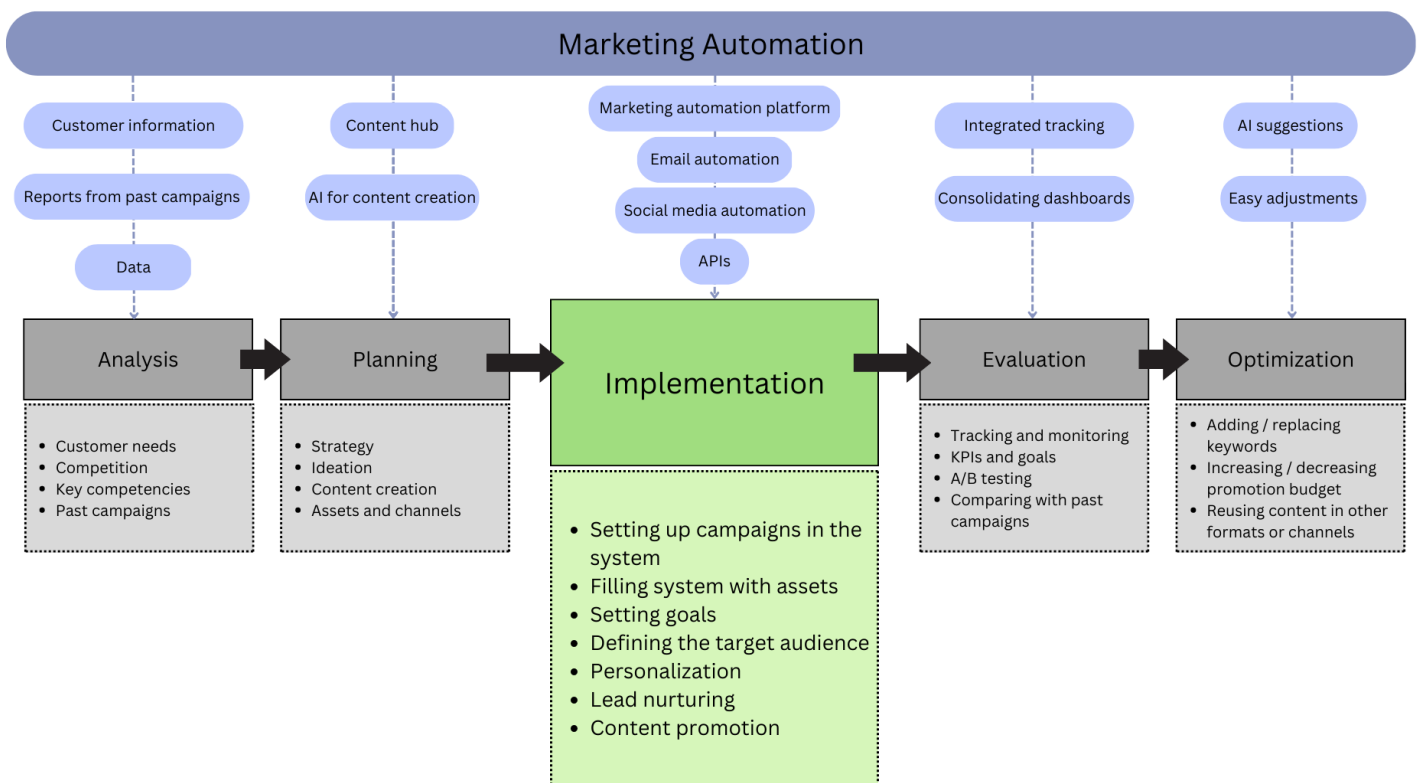


Figure 7: Theoretical model for implementing digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation (own illustration)

Analysis

The digital content marketing campaign management process starts with an analysis of customer needs, in regard to what content they are looking for and how a company can satisfy those needs. The content marketing activities especially executed by competitors should also be analysed to receive an overview of what is currently happening in the market and to identify trends or best practices. An internal analysis of key competencies might be helpful to find out whether a company has enough resources to effectively launch a content marketing campaign or if some tasks can be supported by software or an external agency. The campaigns a company has launched in the past and the insights derived from them can be a good basis for the next campaigns. To improve analysis marketing automation can be of great help by enabling marketers to quickly access customer information, reports from past campaigns, or basically any data that can be collected from automated digital activities. As there might be a big amount of data, marketers are confronted with, marketing automation tools can help to process the data and create easily comprehensible dashboards.

Planning

During the planning phase, the overall marketing strategy needs to be considered and broken down into a campaign-specific strategy. The strategy builds on the analysis results and is the basis for all further activities. For example, the strategy can specify whether the digital content marketing campaign is intended to improve a company's image or specifically target new customers. As soon as the strategy has been defined, the ideation phase begins, in which ideas are collected as to which content is appropriate for the chosen strategy and which topics, formats, and channels should be used. Then the content creation starts, this phase is the most important component of any digital content marketing campaign because without content there is no campaign. Depending on the created content the right assets to carry the

content and the right channels to publish the content are planned. A content hub provided by marketing automation tools helps marketers, content creators, and anyone else involved in the process to get an overview of the content planned, created, and published. This has a direct impact on collaboration and the flow of information between contributors. Ways of communication can be shortened and there is a common single source of truth, which leads to fewer communication problems such as misunderstandings or missed information transfer. As it can be very time-consuming to create good content, marketers can take advantage of AI tools that generate content for them. Some marketing automation platforms might even have an AI tool implemented in their system which facilitates the process even further.

Implementation

Now when it comes to the implementation of digital content marketing campaigns, which is the focus of this thesis, there are many ways marketing automation can support making the process easier and smarter. First, the new campaign needs to be set up in a marketing automation platform. On the one hand, the system needs to be filled with the content and assets already created, and on the other hand, the predefined goals, the time frame of the campaign, the target audience, and the channels need to be set. Depending on the marketing automation platform this can be done manually or by using predefined filters which make the set-up even faster. Once the most important settings are saved, emails and social media posts can already be scheduled. Depending on the data that is available, personalization can be used to provide greater value to the target audience. This can be done in the form of personalized email greetings, or also in the form of differently played-out content depending on the individual's preference. The emails can also be sent out automatically based on the interaction of a prospect, for example, they only receive an email

once they filled in a form, or they receive follow-up emails once they open or click the previous email. The activities performed will again be saved in the marketing automation tool or even enrich the CRM and can be used for better evaluation and personal follow-ups. The implementation process can benefit from installing APIs in the marketing automation platform. Often social media have their own API that can be used for seamless integration and improved value for the marketers. Other tools that can be installed, are AI tools to create content, translation tools, CRMs, content management systems (the back office of a website), and many more. Finally, content promotion is also part of the implementation process. Organic content published on social media or on the website should be promoted to achieve ambitious goals or even exceed them. With APIs in place, the promotion budget, time frame, and target personas for paid media can be set within a marketing automation tool and the impact can directly be seen in the campaign overview next to the organic outcome.

Evaluation

The evaluation serves to find out whether the campaign is successful, i.e. whether the planned goals can be achieved, and also to determine how the different content pieces, the different formats, and channels perform. This can be done by tracking and monitoring the interaction rates, the click-through-rates, the number of new followers or subscribers, or by the impressions. The outcomes just mentioned are KPIs that can either be derived from the goals of a campaign in the planning phase or can be compared with the KPIs of previous campaigns. In addition, companies can also use benchmark KPIs to find out whether their campaign is performing well. Another option to find out what is working well and what is not is to use automated A/B-testing. Marketing automation tools sometimes offer the possibility to A/B-test content, messaging, or graphics. This helps the marketers to understand which version of such is more appealing to the target audience, and therefore choose the preferred

one to achieve better results from the campaign. To receive the best insights, it is advisable to consolidate as much data as possible, which again marketing automation can help with. The more a marketing automation tool is enriched with data from different sources, the more comprehensive the dashboards become and the better the results reflect reality. Using tracking links created with the marketing automation tool in channels that can not be integrated via an API is a way to still integrate data from these sources.

Optimization

The final component of the digital content marketing campaign process is the optimization of the campaign. After the evaluation and seeing which content, format, channels, or targeting does not work so well, the campaign can be optimized to achieve better results. The campaign can be optimized in regard to organic media by adding or replacing keywords for SEO or by re-using content in other formats and channels. Another option is to leverage AI to receive suggestions on which keywords to use or how to optimize the content to make it more appealing. Regarding paid media, the budget for promotion can either be increased for ads that are performing well or decreased for ads that do not result in the desired outcome. With a fully integrated marketing automation system in place, campaigns can easily be optimized in just a few clicks, saving time and resources.

Marketing automation as part of the process

As already mentioned in the text above, marketing automation can be used throughout the entire process of managing digital content marketing campaigns and especially for the phases of data collection and analysis, and implementation. There are several options available for marketers to enhance their current processes and to make their campaigns more effective with the use of marketing automation. Since marketing automation can influence the process in different ways and to different depths, it is also placed on a higher level in the

theoretical model. From literature research and also from empirical research, it is clear that marketing automation should also take on a superordinate role in the entire marketing organization and should not just be seen as an individual part. To leverage its full potential, it should be the base for every process and integrate all activities and data to make digital content marketing more efficient and effective.

Chapter 8: Concluding remarks

As already stated in the introduction, the aim of this work is to explore how global B2B companies implement digital content marketing campaigns using marketing automation and in further succession to answer the research question “How do global B2B companies implement digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation?”. To answer this question, the insights from the theoretical literature review and the results from the empirical study were taken to create a theoretical model which shows the process of implementing digital content marketing campaigns. Generally, it can be said that global B2B companies are already using marketing automation for at least some tasks and processes behind the implementation process. The interviewed experts mainly apply marketing automation for repetitive and low-value tasks to save time and improve efficiency. However, there are many more components in digital content marketing campaigns in which marketing automation can be applied, although this might require additional effort and a change process regarding the way marketers are used to work. There is a high demand in providing personalized content that meets the needs and preferences of the target audience, which can no longer be offered manually. Global B2B companies can gain a competitive advantage if they manage to implement marketing automation as their general approach in marketing, not only for digital

content marketing campaigns, but to improve efficiency and save financial and human resources.

Contribution to academic research

In conclusion, the qualitative study in this thesis makes relevant academic contributions to the field of digital content marketing in B2B companies. The research sheds light on the implementation process of digital content marketing campaigns and the use of marketing automation in B2B, making it clearer and easier to understand for marketers. Although campaign implementation processes look similar in the four companies reviewed, the level of marketing automation and where it is used differ, highlighting the need for further research to understand the optimal implementation of marketing automation. One of the main findings of this study is that marketing automation is still very complex for marketers, mainly due to the presence of multiple tools that take care of single tasks. Technical understanding and a unified solution to combine all of the processes are needed to make the implementation of marketing automation more efficient and effective. Content marketing is becoming more important than ever, and companies are struggling to keep up with the ever-increasing demand for content. The study shows that B2B companies should focus on creating educational content, followed by promotional and entertaining content, to position themselves as experts in their field and cultivate trust within their target market. The study results also highlight the importance of AI in the future of digital content marketing in B2B. AI has the potential to automate repetitive tasks, optimize campaigns, and provide valuable insights that can help businesses make better decisions.

Managerial implications

The adoption of marketing automation for implementing digital content marketing campaigns can provide companies with a significant competitive advantage. By streamlining marketing processes and freeing up resources, businesses can focus on creating valuable content for their customers. Furthermore, the ROI of marketing efforts becomes more visible, allowing for better decision-making. When it comes to digital content marketing for B2B companies, it is crucial to focus on educational content. By providing valuable insights and educational materials, businesses can position themselves as experts in their field and build trust with their existing and potential customers. Promotional content should also be included, but it should be balanced with educational content to avoid coming across as too sales-focused. Entertaining content can also be effective in engaging the audience, but it should be used sparingly and only when appropriate. As technology continues to evolve, the role of marketers has also changed. Marketers must now have a deep understanding of modern technology and be able to analyse and interpret large amounts of data. To best work with marketing automation, marketers require support from the IT department and corporate-level executives to ensure they can leverage the full capabilities of these tools. Collaboration between marketing and sales is critical to the success of marketing automation. One of the main challenges is to convince both teams of the benefits of working digitally aligned. CRM and marketing automation tools can provide valuable insights that can benefit both teams, leading to increased revenue and customer satisfaction. It is essential for companies to remain open to new technologies and features that can enhance their marketing efforts. As technology continues to evolve, marketing automation will become even more critical to businesses success. By investing in marketing automation now, companies can stay ahead of the competition and ensure their marketing efforts remain

effective in the digital age. Finally, none of the experts were satisfied with their current status quo in using marketing automation to implement their digital content marketing campaigns, and they all feel like they would need to do much more to be able to exploit their full potential. This shows that global B2B companies might not yet be as advanced in using marketing automation as B2C companies. However, this also shows that it is not too late to implement marketing automation and derive an advantage from it. Once most companies have implemented marketing automation to increase their efficiency in launching digital marketing campaigns, and improve the relevance of their content to the customer, it may be difficult to catch up.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Empirical studies are an important component of a master's thesis as they enable researchers to gather data and create emerging theories to draw meaningful conclusions. However, it is important to note that every study has its limitations, which can impact the findings and limit the generalizability of the results. The limitations of this study will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

Firstly, the time frame for the study was limited due to the course of the master's program. The short time frame may have restricted the ability to conduct a more in-depth investigation, which could have led to a limited amount of data being collected. This could have impacted the scope of the study and the ability to draw meaningful conclusions. Secondly, the level of marketing automation across the companies under review was relatively low. As the study was investigating the level of automation in various companies, the low level of automation could have influenced the study's results. The findings may not

be generalized to companies that have a higher level of automation or have already implemented a digital transformation strategy. Thirdly, all the reviewed companies are operating in the industrial field of B2B, more specifically, in the machine manufacturing industry, steel industry, and automotive industry. This limited the study's scope to a specific industry, and the findings may not be generalized to other industries. For instance, companies operating in the service industry may have different levels of automation than those in the manufacturing industry. Fourthly, although the companies were all globally active, they all have their headquarters located in Europe. Therefore, the study's findings may not be generalized to companies based in other continents. Cultural differences, regional regulations, and economic conditions may have an impact on the level of automation in other regions. Finally, the companies under investigation were all big companies with over 10,000 employees. Smaller or middle-sized companies may have shown a higher level of automation due to being more flexible and having shorter decision-making processes. Therefore, the study's findings may not be generalized to smaller companies.

In conclusion, while the empirical research conducted is essential for this master thesis, it has limitations that can affect the study's scope, generalizability, and accuracy of the results.

Based on the previously explained limitations of this study, there are several potential areas of future research that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of digital content marketing campaigns with the use of marketing automation. Firstly, future researchers could investigate companies of different sizes to determine whether there is a relationship between company size and the level of marketing automation implementation. This research could explore whether smaller companies are more flexible in their implementation of marketing automation, or whether larger companies

have more resources to devote to this process. Moreover, future research could look at different industries to determine whether there are differences in the use of marketing automation across industries. For example, service industries may have different marketing automation needs than manufacturing industries, and a comparative study could highlight these differences. In addition to that, future researchers could conduct a direct comparison between B2B and B2C companies to determine whether the use of marketing automation is more effective in one context over the other. This research could explore whether there are different strategies or tools that work best for each type of company. Furthermore, the previous study had a limited time frame, which could have affected the depth of insights that were gathered. Future researchers could accompany companies along their marketing automation journey over a longer period to get deeper insights into the process of using marketing automation for the implementation of digital content marketing campaigns. This research could explore how companies evolve in their use of marketing automation over time and how they overcome the challenges which were listed in the qualitative expert interviews. Finally, future researchers could investigate companies in different regions, cultural settings, and economic systems to determine how these factors impact the use of marketing automation in digital content marketing campaigns. This research could explore whether there are differences in the adoption of marketing automation across different cultural contexts, and how the economic environment affects the level of marketing automation implementation. Overall, future research in these areas could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation process and help companies to implement more efficient digital content marketing campaigns.

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Appendix 1: Guide for qualitative expert interviews

Thank you for taking the time and participating in my study. Before we start, I would like to let you know that I'm going to record this conversation to transcribe and analyse it later. Are there any questions from your side before we start? → Data protection statement

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself – what is your academic background and your professional experience?
2. What is your role in the company?

Now let's start with the questions about marketing automation and digital content marketing in B2B:

3. What do you think about content marketing?
 - a. Has content marketing helped you to achieve your marketing goals?
4. What kind of content do you (does your company) publish?
5. What do you understand by marketing automation?
6. Are you currently using marketing automation to implement digital content marketing campaigns?
 - a. Why or why not?
7. Think of your latest campaign – how far are digital marketing campaigns automated?
8. Think of your most recent campaign again - please describe the process of implementing a digital content marketing campaign using marketing automation?
9. How has the use of marketing automation impacted the quality and relevance of the content you produce for your target audience?

10. How has marketing automation impacted the level of personalization you are able to offer your target audience in your digital content marketing campaigns?
11. Have you encountered any challenges or obstacles in implementing digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation? If so, what were they and how did you address them?
12. How has the use of marketing automation affected your team's productivity and workload in executing digital content marketing campaigns?
13. How have you measured the success of your digital content marketing campaigns using marketing automation?
 - a. What metrics have you used to evaluate the effectiveness of your campaigns?
14. Can you discuss any future plans or goals you have regarding digital content marketing campaigns or marketing automation in your B2B company?

We are not at the end of the interview – is there anything else you want to add?

Thank you so much for your time – I highly appreciate your support with my study!

Appendix 2: Transcription of interview with Expert 1

E1 = Expert 1, interviewee

LR = Laura Riegler, interviewer

00:00:00

[inaudible]

00:00:09

LR: Perfect. So before we start, are there any any questions from your side? Anything that's still open that that you're unsure about?

00:00:21

E1: No, no just...just regarding topics you said it is about content marketing and marketing automation are the key topics around it, the questions? [interviewer nods] Okay.

00:00:29

LR: Exactly. Okay, great. Then let's start. And I would, I would like to start with asking you to tell me a little bit about yourself, your academic educational background and your professional experience.

00:00:45

E1: Okay. Yeah, basically I have, yeah, started some years ago in Graz, um, business administration and there I focused basically on, on marketing and HR management. And since I graduated then in 2004, I started actually working in marketing and communication topics, um, in a, in a company called [company 1]. It is an industry, uh, yeah, company. And uh, basically, uh, B2B, of course. And yeah, that's basically the background on how we relate to marketing and communication topics. Uh, yeah, actually I'm now 19 years in this area. Um, so I think I have quite a lot of experience and development ongoing also in terms of marketing communications. I mean if I remember back what we have started and how, how we created, uh, developed promotion of products and services in the past and compared to how we do it today. So I think it is a big difference. I think particular because of the digitalization and the automation and so on.

00:02:01

LR: And what is your role in the company today?

00:02:05

E1: Today it is a marketing communications manager, so I'm responsible for all kind of marketing topics like website, product launches, uh, social media. I would say the whole scope more or less, um, also some public relation topics, regional, but also globally. Um yeah. And I also have some kind of a sales support, um, sales support function when it comes to systems, um, or maintaining sales systems, but also doing some price and cost calculation for our machines.

00:02:48

LR: Cool. Great. So let's start with the questions on content marketing and marketing automation. My first question is what do you think of content marketing in general?

00:03:02

E1: Uh, in general, I mean, content marketing for me relates more or less to all activities that you do in order to, to promote or sell your products and uh, and your services more or less. Um, and I think especially in our company, it is quite relevant because um, of course we do some kind of, of uh, image image, uh, promotion and branding in general as well. But this is more or less on the level of the, the [company 1] group. But we are, the divisions are more quite focusing on the content marketing. I would say, uh, when we do promotions because it is important, our machines are not that easy to explain. So from our point of view, it is important that you yeah, explain and let's say, um, try to, to get an understanding of, of, for the customers. Okay. What our machines are actually doing. So it is not, not that easy to, to say okay, can B2C product it is really a bit more behind and for what applications the machine are really usable.

00:04:13

LR: And has content marketing helped you to achieve your overarching marketing strategy goals or business goals?

00:04:23

E1: Absolutely. I think it is a big part of our marketing strategy, but also our, I would say sales strategy. So especially on product launches and I actually had one yesterday just recently of new machines and new equipment, uh, play an quite important role in our marketing activities in general.

00:04:46

LR: Great. What kind of content do you or does your company publish?

00:04:53

E1: Um.

00:04:55

E1: I think.

00:04:56

E1: Um, I would say quite the most common and easy ones. I would say we in terms of content and as I said, our machines, they need to be explained a bit more. Um, quite useful materials or tools are in our case, still like the PowerPoint presentations and specifications which are yeah, you know, I mean you create it directly in this office, office or office programs or you do it then in the Adobe InDesign when you make it ready for for customers. So specifications, presentations, we use brochures, product leaflets, of course, um, um, pictures and, and 3D graphics and of course what we did today or yesterday as well again, uh, creating animations of the machines because there you really can can show the new features and, and benefits of the machines, even though you have not produced it in the, in the workshop yet. So um, that's been quite an important tool for us. Um, but I think that's anyhow given for other companies as well.

00:06:05

LR: And do you publish blogs and white papers for example as well?

00:06:11

E1: No, blogs is not what we do, but I think that's really an issue because we don't have the

capacities that someone really takes care about that. Um, maybe it would be a good tool for the future. Um, of course what we, what we use is documentation, um, documents from the, from the technical documentation that we are, um, creating. And this is also a tool, what we further on use for, for the training of, of the personnel that are or for the customers that are using our machines and the operators. Um, so this is also, I think some kind of, of content marketing because it is, it is, it is a tool before the machine, before you sell the machine and you give it over to the customer, the customer comes to our company and they get some kind of a training. And this is, yeah, more or less based on, on, on valuable content that the customer would need to understand the machine.

00:07:13

LR: So the focus of your content marketing lies on educational content.

00:07:20

E1: Yeah, yeah. Educational content, but also of course, some kind of promoting, um, new developments and new features that we are doing in order to stay ahead of the competitors. I would say so.

00:07:36

LR: Great.

00:07:36

LR: And what do you understand by marketing automation? What does that mean to you?

00:07:43

E1: Uh, marketing automation in our case and how we use it is in most cases some kind of, um, email automation campaign, campaigning leads, management. Um, I would say these are the main, the main topics that, that we relate to. Um, we have a good tool that we, our system, um, actually it is, it is called Pardot or it was called Pardot in the past and now it is, I think it is called account engagement. And this is a system that is connected with our CRM system, CRM system is Salesforce in our case. And this, this, um, um, Pardot or this, this marketing marketing automation system has been developed, think 3 or 4 years ago, uh, particularly for all the marketing guys in our case that are working in sales areas which are having the direct contact with the customer. I mean, in my role I'm um, marketing manager for the division, which is more focusing on the, on the product marketing, not that much contact with the customer at all. Um, yeah. And this has been rolled out some years ago. I haven't used that that much, but we just, I think that's what we had the last couple of weeks, we had three training sessions as we in the division now also should and can use this marketing automation tool. That's why it is really good timing that we are talking about that. Um, and yeah, so, um. I still need to think a little bit about how I can use that. But I think for, yeah, some kind of campaigns or smaller campaigns that we're doing in the future for the for the machines, I think it is a good tool that I would like to, to try.

00:09:30

LR: Yeah, that sounds interesting. And are you currently using marketing automation to implement digital content marketing campaigns?

00:09:41

E1: Not yet. Not yet in my case. I mean, we are using it in the company. I know that some guys in think in sales area Australia, they already used it in for our company or relating

company. And I also think in the US they used it already. So um, and I think that's the reason why they further extend the possibilities from the sales areas also to the division marketers. But as, as I said in the division, we are just in the beginning and we are more or less planning and trying to understand the tool and what we really can gain out of it and why.

00:10:21

LR: Why are you not yet using it? Are there any specific reasons?

00:10:27

E1: I think the reason for the company was like that. It was really more supposed, as I understood it, that the marketing automation tool is something that should be used by people who are having the direct contact with the customer, and these are the sales area marketing people in our case. Um, we in the division, we don't have that much, um, customer contact at all. That's why we are working with our marketing guys in the sales area together. And, and yeah, it is, I would say it is just because of the split of the responsibilities that the sales areas have and the guys in the division. That's why we are just starting to use it at a later stage.

00:11:12

LR: Okay. I understand. Um, and if you, if you think of your latest campaign, how far has that campaign been automated? Are there some tasks, maybe some single tasks that have been automated or processes or what was it like?

00:11:34

E1: Yeah, I would say the automation degree was probably quite low. I think what we could automate so far was, you know, all the planning in terms of of social media postings and this kind of stuff. But I think it was not related to any marketing automation system. I think it is because of the social media tools, more or less. Uh, I think we have this. This is called the Felco for social media. I mean, it is also some kind of the social media platform tool in my, from my understanding is also some kind of a marketing automation tool because you can plan over all different social media channels, um, all the divisions, all the sales areas. So we have a good overview of who is doing what. And um, I think in this degree because particular as it is just a simple case I'm doing, we have the internal launch this week and we do the external launch next Wednesday and I have actually everything planned and put into the system. And even though I'm on vacation next week, we can just simply run, uh, the, the product launch. And I think that's just a very big benefit out of that. And that's how we used it for the, for the actual campaign or for the actual product launch.

00:12:59

LR: Okay. So you're using the social media tools to manage the social media channels and your your postings there?

00:13:08

E1: Exactly. Yeah, exactly.

00:13:09

LR: And when you think of your most recent campaign, what like please describe the process of implementing the digital content marketing campaign with or without marketing automation. What was the process?

00:13:27

E1: Do you mean to develop the whole campaign or...?

00:13:31

LR: Yeah. From like from the start to to the launch and then even even further when monitoring, for example.

00:13:40

E1: Okay. Okay. Yeah. I think we have a quite good process because I would say this this marketing promotion or this this marketing campaigning is very much connected in our company with the new product development of the new machines. So we have in we call it process where you have different gates. So from G1 to G5, G1 is when the, the idea is basically created, Um, and you make like some kind of a business impact analysis. Okay. Why you, you are developing this new product and so on. And the good thing for us in marketing in, in our company and which I really like is that we are getting quite, very early involved in the whole, um, I would say product development process because already at this stage you can bring up some questions. Okay, why are we doing that? What is the focus for the customer and so on. And there is just sorry, said G one, two, three, five, actually it is G zero to G five and we are for marketing getting into the process already in G1, which means, okay, the business case is improved and we are starting with the, you know, developing of engineering and so on. But we are already included here, know what is going on. Also, you know, from the time frame, okay, it will take, I don't know, maybe one year or 2 or 3 years and you can really prepare on, on when you are launching at G4 or G5 respectively the new product to the market. And yeah, it is like coming back to the process, like when we know at G1 we are going to do it, we bring up some kind of, we create some kind of briefing document with some general questions, okay, why are we doing that? Which customers, which target groups? Um, um, I think not much on the content at this stage, but just some understanding. Okay. What we are doing and what, what will be the impact for the customer at the end? And I think from G2, G3, G4, this is more or less the process when you are thinking about, okay, what will be - you go more in detail, okay - what will be the message? What will be maybe the slogan or how do you call the campaign? How do you call the product? How do you translate the new features into the benefits of the customer? And actually, at the end of the day, what is the value for the customer? And I think this is a quite a good, uh, good, good example or a good process for us. Sometimes we do it by ourself. We categorize, for example, if it is just an upgrade of a machine, then it is an allowance and otherwise it is A, B or C launch. So on. Um, and depending on, on really the, the scope of the launch or the, the importance of the launch, we sometimes get agencies which are supporting us in the messaging and this kind of of stuff and yeah. And then more or less until G4 G5 we are trying to get all the internal communications and the external communications put together so that we can roll it out respectively. Then to the, to the customers. Um, important. In our case, the product launch is developed by the divisions, like in my case, myself and rolled out by the division, but supported by the sales areas which are in the regions and then, um, get it, get it out to the customer.

00:17:20

LR: And what does the process look like of rolling the, the product launch out? So what are the steps here?

00:17:30

E1: Um, the steps are actually the first is, is the internal, um, we call it internal meeting or webinar with our internal stakeholders. So that means we are trying to get everyone on board so that they know what is coming up. Because the worst thing is that you make a launch and some guys in the, in the, in your company or sales guys even don't know that you have a new product and customers come back and say okay tell me about that, this or that. So from that point of view, of course this internal thing has to be happened first and think we do it quite well and the people appreciate. So we do that basically 1 or 2 weeks before we go externally, but of course we try to the date, uh, for the internal launch, have everything prepared more or less so that they just then push the button in two weeks. Okay, the press release goes out, the social media postings go out external then. And I think that's, that's the way how it works. And I think when we relate it to marketing automation possibilities, I think that's exactly where this new system will, uh, will get included in the future because we are this, uh, Pardot or account engagement tool. I think it would be, it will be possible in the future to create all the marketing materials and all the activities in the system in there. So not only we as division marketers have access to it, also the sales area guys have access to it. And the good thing that should be we have one platform, everybody can access it. And for example, different different sales people can get the documents and make the translation out of that. And so we are always quite good, linked and connected with with the materials that are available and things.

00:19:26

LR: And how has the use of, of marketing automation impacted the quality or the relevance of the content that you produce? Maybe if you haven't used marketing automation your own yet, maybe you have heard from your colleagues or maybe you just tell me what you imagine to be the benefits for the quality and relevance of your content when you use marketing automation in the future.

00:19:54

E1: Yeah, I think the the quality improvement is definitely that you have one platform with, with, you know, one version of files or documents, animations or whatever. So everybody, you don't need to send around anything anymore like we did it in the past. Um, um, I think the one advantage is, of course the, the quick communication that we can handle with, with the guys in the sales areas. Um, definitely it is, it is an advantage that you say, um, uh, that you can, can track and, and report everything out of the system, um, and to see what the people are doing. So, um. I think also good that it is connected with the CRM system so that we also know who is actually interested when for example, if you send out emails and so on that you know, okay, who from the customers is really interested in or gives an answer on response or whatever. And as I think one of the really key benefits for me, what I would suppose is that the information transfer between sales areas and divisions in our case is much easier because quite easily we have um, due to the same platform or the same marketing automation tool, we have the same knowledge level without talking too much or talking a lot between the people because quite often, to be honest, in the past it was like we prepared the material for the launch, we send it to the sales areas just, you know, as email or whatever, and they use the material and wrote it out for their sales area. But we never knew. Okay. How what was the response? To whom did they send it? Was was it actually arrived to the customer or whatever. So I think, um, the real benefit I think is the, the

internal communications between the divisions and and the sales areas within [company 1]. But of course also getting the possibility of tracking and reporting.

00:22:07

LR: And in regards to personalization, has marketing automation helped you already with that or is it something also that you can imagine in the future?

00:22:20

E1: Absolutely. I think as it is connected with the CRM system and also with all the different lead management options that the system has, I think we have all the contacts and um, um, I think it is really. Really a good option to personalize or make individual promotions for different customers.

00:22:47

LR: And have you encountered any challenges or obstacles in implementing digital marketing campaigns with marketing automation?

00:22:59

E1: Um.

00:23:00

E1: Not yet, because I haven't used it as much, to be honest. Um, I tried. I mean, we had this, this tool, 2 or 3 training sessions, and I think, um, need to understand a little bit more on how this kind of things needs to be set up.

00:23:18

E1: Um.

00:23:19

E1: I mean, it is. Like, like every other system is a system and you need to, to work with it and, and try to understand it. And I think then you, you probably see the benefits that you can gain in order to make the, the customer relate or improve the customer relation.

00:23:36

LR: So maybe you would say that a challenge could be the complexity of the marketing automation system.

00:23:43

E1: Yeah, absolutely. That's that's, that's a, that's the good point I think because, um, the complexity already starts in Salesforce if you don't work that much in the system. And yeah, so you have Salesforce, which is a complex system and then you get the other one, um, the, the account engagement tool. So it is, um, yeah, I mean we in the division, we don't, we have not worked that much in our company or with this, with this programs in the past. So I think we need to get a bit more familiarized and yeah. And then see the real value of the system.

00:24:27

LR: And how can marketing automation affect your team's productivity and which influence can it have on the workload?

00:24:38

E1: I think, as I said, the communication and the information transfer, I think this is one of the important things that the system for sure will provide.

00:24:49

E1: Um. And probably I mean, if the system is is easy to handle. I also see a lot of, of time, um, time gaining or not so much wasting of time because you have everything in the system there.

00:25:12

LR: And um. Have you measured the success of your digital content marketing campaigns using marketing automation?

00:25:21

E1: Not not me personally, but I have seen some tracking from sales areas who already did it. And I think this was already 2 or 3 years ago, got some kind of presentation, was quite impressive. How much, let's say, how much customer information and the customer communication. And yeah, the system could provide out of it. So it was really it looked very promising. Yeah.

00:25:51

LR: And what metrics have you used to evaluate the digital content marketing campaigns?

00:25:59

E1: Some, I don't know.

00:26:01

LR: Which KPIs did you look at?

00:26:05

E1: Oh! Okay. I think there was what I seen was about when you're sending out emails, okay, how much emails have been responded, how much emails have been opened? And this kind of of KPIs. Of course, so many answers to dictate how many answers or how many emails deliver or how often you resend the email and so on. And this, this kind of it was, I think, the focus during that time. It was like an email campaign. So that was the, the, the output from that. Okay.

00:26:37

LR: All right. That brings me actually to my last question already. Can you discuss any future plans or goals you have regarding digital content marketing campaigns or marketing automation in your company?

00:26:53

E1: Ah I think the real plan. Yeah I would say plan is is to implement a new system to test it on real campaigns. And I think the the target is really not just using the marketing automation tool and its benefits in the sales area. We also should use it in division in the future. And I think the um you got the plus out of that is that has been discussed already during this trainings that everything that we create the sales areas really will use in the future. And I think probably I should have the next product launches in in in in around September October and I'm actually planning to use the tool, the new tool or the new

system for that and align it with the sales areas. And I think that's absolutely the future that we we work and develop our product launches.

00:27:54

LR: And do you have any, any plans or goals for digital content marketing?

00:28:02

E1: Um, I think what one of my goals personally would be to, um, get more out of, of analysis and reporting and tracking out of this stuff. I think we haven't done that in the, in the, in the past that much. But with the new tools and systems, we think we have to emphasize that and try to get really more out of that so that at the end of the day understand, um, the money that you invest. Okay, How much really comes back in a in a certain way. So I think that's, that's one of the, the good options and what I would like to focus a bit more on in future.

00:28:43

LR: Great. So we're now at the end of the interview. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

00:28:53

E1: Not really. I think I'm fine.

00:28:56

LR: Okay, great, then. Thank you very much. I highly appreciate your participation and your valuable insights.

00:29:04

E1: Okay, great. Thank you too. And good luck for your master thesis.

00:29:09

LR: Thank you!

Appendix 3: Transcription of interview with Expert 2

E2 = Expert 2, interviewee

LR = Laura Riegler, the interviewer

00:00:00

LR: So recording's started. Great. So let's start. Please tell me a little bit about yourself, your academic background and your professional experience. Just to get a little bit of background information on your person.

00:00:22

E2: Okay. My educational background is business administration, economics. And in the master studies, I focused on marketing and HR. As a second study, I have a master's degree in economic psychology. So this is the um educational background and from the business experience perspective, um I have experience, I worked for 25 years now or more than 25 years now in the fields of marketing. I started with B2C business, um, from a big Austrian dealers company, uh, focusing on sports and fashion, um, stuff. Uh, the second professional experience or relevant experience is from the recycling industry. I have been working for more than eight years, um, in the recycling industry, all again in the fields of marketing and corporate strategy. And for [company 2] which is a steel and technology group operating on a global level. I work for one of the four divisions of [company 2] and in the division [division name], I'm responsible for marketing and corporate strategy.

00:02:03

LR: Okay, great. Sounds amazing.

00:02:06

E2: And again, I'm working for now eight years for for [company 2].

00:02:13

LR: So would you say that you're more comfortable in the B2B marketing field?

00:02:14

E2: Yes.

00:02:14

LR: Okay. That's great. Amazing. So now let's start with the questions on on marketing automation and digital content marketing. What kind of content do you or what kind of content does your company publish?

00:02:39

E2: Um, we have two main pillars. On the one hand overall topics relevant for investor relations and the public in the surroundings of our factories because steel production and related products have a lot of emissions in terms of noise emissions, um, and also steel production is very CO2 intensive. So we are in a frequent exchange with the close public around our facilities and for sure, uh, with uh, with investors because we are a stock listed company and these are two pillars and the main other pillar is for sure, uh, communication

with our customers and potential customers. And therefore the, the main content is product related and solutions related.

00:03:49

LR: Okay. And would you say that it is more like educational content that you offer your customers, like telling them what your solutions can do, what your products can do, what their benefits are? Or is it more like reports also, or is it more like entertaining content? What what is the direction you're going there?

00:04:16

E2: It depends on the channel. Uh, that depends really on the channel and and on the instrument. On the one hand, as you said, we have a lot of educational content. Uh, it is a mixture of, uh, technical consultancy because our, um, products, most of our products have a high demand, uh, or are very complex to use. So there is a strong focus on technical consultancy. And as a company we are a niche player in many high demanding segments and therefore, uh, the technical consultancy is based on developing solutions or specific customized solutions for single customers. So we have less customers, but big volumes um, to handle. And mostly the product is specific, designed and developed for one single, uh, customer.

00:05:18

LR: Okay. I understand.

00:05:19

E2: So it is on the one hand technical consultancy and educational content. And the third thing you mentioned, the entertainment part is mostly used on our social media channels. So for our divisions, we operate around 24 social media channels, and there we have a one third mix, one third entertaining, one third into information. And the the third, third are general topics related to the brand. So brand building content.

00:05:59

LR: And what, what do you understand by marketing automation?

00:06:07

E2: Uh, by marketing automation, we understand the using of automation tools like provided by, by Microsoft or by, by SAP.

00:06:21

LR: Okay.

00:06:22

E2: And to be honest, in marketing automation, we are, uh, in the, in our first steps in development phases, in trial phases. But we have a strong demand because we are not able anymore to, um, operate all our channels and marketing tools on a hand based way. I don't know if I can say it like that.

00:06:55

LR: Yeah, sure. Okay. And if you think of your latest marketing campaign, how far are digital content marketing campaigns automated in your company? So you said you're at the very beginning of implementing marketing automation. How far are you already with leveraging marketing automation for digital marketing campaigns?

00:07:21

E2: Digital marketing campaigns to say it like that. I think we have partly automatized the processes for publishing, for reviewing. We have single things in place also for monitoring, but they are not integrated so far. So we have a different automation process for the different channels and we are not like we have a big content hub. And from the out of this content hub, we can um, publish the content in the various channels. This would, this would be the next step now.

00:08:05

LR: Okay, So if I understand correctly, you're now automating single tasks rather than having a holistic marketing automation approach which integrates all of the different formats and channels and of course media. So you're right now just automating single tasks that can easily be automated to reduce the workload for the employees.

00:08:34

E2: Correct. Correct.

00:08:36

LR: And are you –

00:08:43

E2: And another step is to integrate all the CRM information. Maybe this is also interesting for you. We are planning to integrate all the CRM information which we have in our CRM database to further customize the communication with our existing customers.

00:09:05

LR: Mhm. And could you could you tell me why you haven't started to fully automate the implementation of digital marketing campaigns yet? So I know, I know that you're planning to do and you're in the beginning and you would like to establish that further. But is there a reason why you just started or why you're just in the beginning phase?

00:09:36

E2: Yes, it is because of the customer structure and the market mechanics. Um, we have less customers, so, uh, personal sales still have, uh, it is very important for us and a pillar in the whole marketing instruments mix. And therefore because you know every single customer personally and the buying cycle. So automation, uh, was not that important. But uh, as. So we are far behind, uh, for in comparison to B2C business where you have to, in my opinion, where you have to communicate with thousands and millions of customers at the same time. And customizing has to be done via tools, via technical tools. We have, for example, for our biggest business unit in our division, uh, it is about I think 300 to 400 customers and they can be handled in the past via personal contact. And now because of the of the increase in channels, we are not able to do that anymore by hand.

00:11:04

LR: Understood. And could you please tell me about the process of implementing digital marketing campaigns or especially digital content marketing campaigns? What does the process in your company look like? So from beginning to end?

00:11:24

E2: For each business unit, we have defined a marketing strategy. Then we derive from the

marketing strategy on an annual basis, a marketing plan, including projects and campaigns. And when we come to the single campaigns, the first step is defining the targets which the campaign should meet. Defining the channels. Defining the content and the key message and the content cornerstones. And this is all a manual process. And then the creation of the content cornerstone starts, copywriting, graphic design, video shootings, etcetera, etcetera. When we have the content ready for the campaign, we have a clear editorial plan. When will when things will be published according to the to the editorial plan, and then the content pieces are implemented in the different tools. And the publishing itself is is automated via terminated. It is really automated. In the single tools. And also the reporting.

00:12:52

LR: Okay. Yeah, that that was my next question. If you monitor the campaigns and if you maybe leverage marketing automation for that as well. Okay, so what do you think of content marketing in general?

00:13:22

E2: Yeah. Uh, I think.

00:13:29

LR: Can you still hear me and see me? I think I lost the connection. Hello?

[internet connection was interrupted, and the interviewee had to rejoin the meeting]

Part 2:

00:00:00

LR: All right, here we go. So what was the last thing that you heard before you broke off?

00:00:13

E2: Uh, the last thing was our discussion on our process. Yeah.

00:00:23

LR: Okay. All right. So my next question would be what you think about content marketing in general.

00:00:34

E2: Um this is very important for us. And then a very complex thing because we really have um try to have the content in line with our overall corporate strategy and the and the marketing strategy and um the complexity behind this to have a mixture of entertaining content and information and taking into consideration how long people are willing to listen up to us on the different channels. As I said before, our products are very complex in some cases, and so it needs a lot of explanation to understand the advantages, the benefits, etcetera, in the mind of the technicians. And so the main challenge is how to reduce complexity also in content work.

00:01:40

LR: Okay. And has has content marketing helped you to achieve your marketing goals or your overall business goals?

00:01:51

E2: Yes, because in the past. So we shifted the focus from the from giving information and information based marketing communication to more, uh, an advertising approach,

meaning, um, short headlines highlighting the main benefits, uh, shifting away a little bit from giving very detailed information also on digital channels. This was in the past, um, a process which was also accepted by, by our customers. But we clearly see that the time, um, which customers are willing to invest in, in receiving information and understanding, uh, is shortened and over the time and it is still, uh, at the time, uh, it is still decreasing. People are willing to, uh, to receive information.

00:03:06

LR: And how has the use of, of marketing automation impacted the, the quality or also the relevance of the content you produce for your target audience?

00:03:22

E2: Mh it helps us to set a clearer focus on topics to align the different, um, published elements in a better way. So within a campaign before we started to semi-automate automate the process, It happened, for example, that the umbrella campaign was started after the sales campaign, and the single instruments have not been so well aligned as as we have it today. But we have still a long way to go to really professionalize or further professionalize the process.

00:04:20

LR: And have you. Sorry.

00:04:25

E2: We make progress on a daily basis. [laughs]

00:04:29

LR: That's that's important.

00:04:31

E2: It is not like we are that that we are like a one step ahead. Or many steps ahead. We we make progress, but we are not there where we want to be.

00:04:46

LR: And have you encountered any challenges or obstacles in implementing digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation.

00:04:59

E2: Yeah, there are many challenging challenges. On the one hand, it is the content itself, how to reduce the content and bring it to the point what we want to say and not to give this detailed deep informations in the first phase of the campaign. This is the one thing the content itself also to receive valuable content where the audience is interested in. So this is still in process to train also the internal people. What is really interesting for people and what are the differences in the different channels we use? What could we how should content be prepared and published channel wise? So we are still improving the presence on the different on the various channels and optimizing the content for the channels. What was again, a challenge is to prepare the content in advance because when we design the total campaign, then in the past it was it was simple to say, okay, start with one, two, three. And four, five, six I think about, uh, in, in the later period of time on these content cornerstones. And now we really have to think about, uh, from step one to the last step. In total. Um, and the loops with, for example, reminder activities, etcetera, they have to be taken into

consideration from the start on. And this is the difference. And this is also a challenge because it becomes more complex for the person who is really designing the campaign.

00:07:06

LR: I would like to to ask you about the channels that you're using because you repetitively said that you're aligning your content and tweaking it for the different channels. So which channels are you are you using? What are the main channels?

00:07:23

E2: That depends from business unit to business unit. But what all all business units have in common is we use mainly our website. We use use newsletter tools. We use social media channels. Normally we focus on on LinkedIn, but we have also Instagram, Facebook in place for some of the business units. And we use social advertising, we use SEO campaigns and we use display campaigns. And depending on the business unit, we also do affiliate marketing and we use digital channels of partners of, of media etcetera. And what is still not fully integrated is the offline campaigns like, like doing advertisements in some specialist media print advertisements. This is not fully integrated.

00:08:33

LR: Interesting. And so back to to my my structure. How has the use of marketing automation affected the productivity and workload of your team in executing digital content marketing campaigns?

00:08:53

E2: Um so far I would say we have a better overview, but efficiency was not really increased by now.

00:09:04

E2: So, um maybe efficiency was increased, too, because we are, since 2019 when we started, engaging in marketing automation, we work with the same headcounts. Um, but we have increased the channels from, I think, uh around 10 to 24. So maybe this is a hint that also efficiency has increased.

00:09:43

LR: And have you have you measured the success of your digital content marketing campaigns using marketing automation? We talked about monitoring before. What metrics have you used to to evaluate the effectiveness of your campaigns?

00:10:00

E2: Yeah. Um. We use, on the one hand, Google Analytics and we have uh fixed defined KPIs. Uh, we always look at uh, reach response rates, interaction rates and increase in number of followers because uh, in our business units we started very late with uh, for example, social media activities compared with the competition. So for us, uh, um, also increasing the total community is still very important. And we also measure, uh the, the increase or the traffic through our website. And we, we measure on our website. The main KPI here is number of requests. Um, from, from the activities.

00:11:08

LR: Um, requests for like filling in contact forms?

00:11:15

E2: Yeah. Correct. Yeah. Every campaign is always interlinked with a call to action activity and therefore we measure, we set targets, how many interactions we expect to get or to receive. And, uh, the interactions are measured via our requests in the contact form or in download of information materials. So we also, uh, look at such things.

00:11:50

LR: Okay. So you also offer content on your website that is gated that people have to fill in a form to receive the content piece. [interviewee nods]. And how has marketing automation impacted the level of personalization you're able to offer to your target audience?

00:12:14

E2: Um. It for sure it had increased. But as a as we are in the in the beginning phase, if we are not able to really individualize the marketing content by now. So we have no customized websites, for example, or we don't display content on the website in the customized way this is discussed within our company, but not in place if it makes sense. And um, yeah, yeah, that's more or less. I think what I can say to this topic.

00:13:02

LR: Are you, are you sending emails for example, and use marketing automation for that? Is that maybe a field where personalization is enabled through marketing automation?

00:13:16

E2: Personalization so far not but target group oriented communication. So it is not on an individual basis, but it is really on a small target group basis. So and also follow ups are individualized. This is the current status.

00:13:37

LR: Great. So now –

00:13:41

E2: Is. Really individualized. And.

00:13:43

LR: Sorry, could you repeat that again, please?

00:13:45

E2: Yeah. The overall target for the next 3 to 5 years is to really individualize marketing communications with customers.

00:13:57

LR: That's great, actually, because my my next question, which is also my my last question for this interview is can you discuss any future plans or goals you have regarding digital content marketing campaigns or marketing automation in your company?

00:14:16

E2: Yeah. Um, we are planning to fully integrate all channels. So really to have this content hub in general, which so one database where we have our content and we are all the digital channel channels are interlinked so that we can really um create the complete content, um, process in really one tool and also integrate the monitoring on the campaigns because we use different tools now for creating content, for publishing content and for monitoring the

content. And we really would like to integrate that, um, in the next 3 to 5 years completely. And for one of our business units [name of the business unit], we really want to individualize the content. With the help of marketing automation. And so really, uh, but only in the fields of newsletter and direct marketing. There's the idea with individualizing the website content. It is really the status of an idea. And um, I cannot give really a hint if this will happen in the, in the near future.

00:15:52

LR: All right. Well, then, thank you very much. We're now at the end of the interview. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

00:16:08

E2: Um. No, I think we have discussed everything, which also came to my mind. But I would like to wish you all the best for your master thesis.

00:16:20

LR: Thank you very much. And thank you for participating in my study, I highly appreciate it.

00:16:23

E2: Of course, have a good day.

00:16:53

LR: Thanks, you too. Bye.

Appendix 4: Transcription of interview with Expert 3

E3 = Expert 3, interviewee

LR = Laura Riegler, interviewer

00:00:01

LR: Okay. So before we start, do you have any questions still? Is there anything open?

00:00:14

E3: Not at the moment.

00:00:17

LR: Okay, great. So let's get it started. Yeah. So I would like to start with you telling me a little bit about yourself, your educational background, and also your professional experience.

00:00:32

E3: Um, yeah, perfect. Um, so, um, my name is [person 3]. I'm an online marketing manager of [company 3]. And my educational background, um, started with, um, the University of Applied Sciences, um, and I studied journalism and public relations. So basically I started from the content creation point of view, and that's also where I started my professional career. For overall 11 years, I worked at two different advertising and marketing agencies where I learned more and more about the different fields of marketing, communication and also design. Um, my first task started also in the content creation, but creating texts for our customers. But then I moved on further to media planning because I knew the, um, yeah, especially the Austrian media landscape. And during these tasks, I learned all about TV spots, radio spots, but also online marketing. And I started specializing there and pretty much was learning by doing so, I started doing search engine optimization for our agency, doing um, all the technical background of our website as well, started Google ads campaigns and other online marketing platforms. Um, yeah. And after all these 11 years of online marketing and classical marketing in the agencies, I thought it was time to move on to the other side, to the customer side. And um, in fact I think at the end it was a perfect fit because I mainly had experiences in Austria and online marketing, let's say also some ideas of international online marketing, because we also had customers from Romania and also one customer who was doing online marketing in Russia. So I also had some first experiences there. Um, and my main tasks nearly seven years ago at [company 3] was also to um, do a website refresh, basically a whole relaunch. So we merged to a new content management system. And besides that I, um, set up together with our corporate communication teams, um, yeah, all the modern tools of online marketing. So we've installed first email, newsletter tool, all our campaign platforms. And finally in the last years we specialized on marketing automation which is mainly driven by our sales team within our IT department and also by the businesses themselves. Um, and during the last two years, I think one of my main tasks was also the further development of our marketing technology. And this means the overall landscape of all our marketing tools. So basically starting with Adobe Photoshop when talking about um, photo editing, for example, and going over the

website until all the or up to all the marketing automation tools and how to connect these tools, um, which are performing marketing, but also which are reporting the marketing. Yeah. I hope I didn't miss anything out.

00:04:26

LR: That's amazing. Okay, so now let's start with the questions about content marketing and marketing automation. First off, I'd like to know what do you think about content marketing in general?

00:04:42

E3: Um. Content marketing is very important, and I think many marketing teams are just forgetting about that, especially about the easy things, because from my point of view, content marketing already starts at all the unpaid platforms. We have our website, we have website sliders, we have teasers, we have many areas where we can show the great content that we have maybe offline or online. And I think it is also the easiest to adapt the content to the to the medium that they are being published. So basically there's just little adaption needed to create a LinkedIn post, for example, or to create a an email newsletter out of it, or also reuse the content. And in many cases I think we just put much, way too much effort into creating great content and I say too much effort because if we just create this great piece of content and then publish it on our website and then we let it be there and hope that something will happen, I think that's not enough because especially when we create a great video with just really low budget, we can really get much more views. So in many, many times I think we create a YouTube video that costs, I don't know, thousands of euros. I would assume in some cases, I guess ten thousands of euros. And then after, I don't know, half a year we have 500 views. So this is pretty nothing compared to the effort put into the content. So I think it is important to think, okay, if I would spend €500 more, I wouldn't have 500 views. I would have 50,000 views on YouTube, for example, or on other platforms as well. So I think most important is we create the content and then we should think, what can I do in an unpaid way to use our existing content platforms and publication platforms? And what can I do even with low budget to further promote this content? And I think that's one of the main tasks our marketing should have at the moment.

00:07:07

LR: And would you say that content marketing has helped you to achieve your marketing goals or the overarching business goals?

00:07:18

E3: Absolutely, because I think there has always been pretty much content there. Of course, you can always optimize content, but mainly there is so much content there and most effort is being put into the creation of content. And in many cases you can just take what is already there and make it more visible out there. And I think this is also important to make it internally visible and externally visible.

00:07:45

LR: And what kind of content do you publish or what kind of content does your company publish? Like is it educational content? Is it informational? Is it entertaining content?

00:07:59

E3: Um, I think [company 3] is a very straightforward and professional, uh, company which

also focuses on a very straightforward and professional communication style. So basically our main contents are, I would say, the promotional style also, um, um, more educational style I think, and something in the middle. So when I think about our, our podcasts or webinars or or website, there's always a part promotion and education. Of course they also are entertaining, but only for the right target audience who is really keen to get that high quality B2B content and professional content from a supplier like [company 3].

00:08:50

LR: Great. And that brings me to the topic of marketing automation. What do you understand by marketing automation?

00:09:00

E3: Um, yeah. I think there are two main dimensions in my head about marketing automation. The very obvious one is we would like to automate external activities. So basically, for example, if a customer registers for a webinar, there should be some automation who reminds that the webinar is going to start soon, who sends out the recording, who sends out follow up messages externally, but also internally so that we can take all the tasks that had to be fulfilled manually in the past and automate them wherever it is possible. And it makes sense for us and also for the recipient of the communication. I think in many cases there is too much copy and pasting content from one tool to the other tool. So I think there's also pretty much work that can be done there. Um, so mainly the first dimension was the external communication, the customer facing automation customization. Um, and on the other hand I think that's also something we, um, yeah, quite likely to forget all the time. There's also some internal automation or background automation. Many tools report KPIs and figures to us of our marketing activities, but in many tools we don't really get the quality we need. So I think the automation of marketing is also about to automate the background, to automate metadata when it is possible. Also to be supported by artificial intelligence to automate things like that. So for example, in our social media reporting and also in our community management, we also started using artificial intelligence and automation to get more out of our reporting and more out of our social media activities. Um, yeah. And on the other hand, also to automate, um, the, the presentation of data and also the interpretation of data in the past, it took hours and hours to just get the data and then there was not enough time left to really interpret the data or really get the value out of the data. And I think the automation also really helps at that end. So basically in the background it starts enriching everything with metadata. Then it comes to the external communications. It helps us to automate all the processes or many processes that can be automated and at the end of the process or also at the beginning, if you like, you get reporting data that helps you make your next marketing activity much better than the last one because you have all these learnings based on that metadata, based on the automation and based on the KPIs you get.

00:12:03

LR: So would you say that you're using marketing automation for digital content marketing campaigns because it makes the process more efficient and because of the advantage of having everything integrated with each other, like the channels, the messages, the reporting, um, having that all connected?

00:12:29

E3: Yeah. Yes. I see the great advantage to connect all the different parts of communication

and to make it more efficient, but also from the customer's point of view, I think we have more opportunities, um, to customize communication so that the customer, for example, in the email newsletter not receives ten articles where he's only interested in one of it, for example. So basically it is also easier to get more details about the target audiences and to automatically split into target audiences. So, um, at the end they get less messages from us, but more relevant messages. So it is also from a customer point of view, I think this is, um, yeah, very helpful for them as well.

00:13:26

LR: If you if you think of the latest campaign that you were involved in the latest digital marketing campaign, how far was that campaign, as a whole, automated?

00:13:42

E3: Um, I think in fact, there is still much work to do on our end because I think mainly we are now using marketing automation for some of these back background metadata processes, in some cases for the reporting and for the external communication mainly. Um, yeah, for direct marketing via email or for event organization, for example, for webinars and things like that. So I think there is still much improvement possible, but we're on a right on the right track and I think the whole marketing team is aware where we need to put the next steps and put the pieces together to automate it much more.

00:14:32

LR: Great. And if you think of your most recent campaign again, could you please describe the process, the implementation process of digital content marketing campaigns in particular. What does it look like? As detailed as possible?

00:14:51

E3: As detailed as possible? Okay. Okay. Um, so what really happens and what would be the automation in an ideal world or just what really happens?

00:15:05

LR: I would like to know what happens in practice and how you implement digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation. If you don't have marketing automation in place along the whole process, then maybe just describe where you could use it or where you would wish to use it.

00:15:27

E3: Okay. So thinking about one of the latest campaigns, basically the automation starts, I would say, at the target audience. So we have all our target audience there [in the CRM] and we filter it. And according to the previous activities, we can automatically update the target audience and get the latest version. And this target audience is then moved forward to the marketing automation program. Um, where yeah, all the predefined processes are being set. Um, I think mainly we use it now at events like webinars or trade shows or similar. So basically what would happen in the next way is that, um, our editors manually check and optimize the content. So the email text and also the landing pages to make that as suitable as possible. And then the automation starts running. So basically, for example, the first invitation to the event is being sent out. Maybe there is a first reminder, a second reminder before the event is, is starting. So this happens all automatically. Um, then for example, if it has been a webinar, um, there will be a recording that needs to be a manual step in

between due to our existing processes to publish this recording on the website. But as soon as this manual step has been done automatically again the next email goes out and says, okay, thank you for participating. You can now watch the recording or download the presentations for example. So this happens again automatically. Um, and I think for a B2B company like [company 3], one of the most important steps of automation happens after. So after this visible part because then the lead nurturing process is going to start so mainly, um, triggered by the status of the participants of the events, our sorry, our customer relationship management gets relevant data. So for example, there have been, let's say 50 participants, uh, I don't know, 30% or 50% of them stayed really until the event ended. Uh, that many opened up the recording afterwards as well. And we see, for example, that they afterwards visited our product website or our LinkedIn channel or similar channels. So, um, based on all this automation, we have also some trackable links for further communication and promotion activities. And all of that helps our sales team to nurture the leads so they see, okay, how many, uh, how or how much value does this potential customer or existing customer have? Uh, when is the right time to contact that person? And the automation triggers then a message to our sales colleagues to tell them, okay, this person has reached the value. This person is right to be contacted now. Yeah, I think that's the current process, how it is happening at the moment for [company 3].

00:19:05

LR: Um, so when you're publishing content, when you're pushing content out, you try to put as much as you can into the marketing automation system and have it rolled out automatically?

00:19:22

E3: Exactly. Wherever the automation makes sense. Yeah. But as you've heard, it mainly works for all event related contents or emailing related topics at the moment. And that's why I've also mentioned in an ideal world. Yeah, because in an ideal world we would start at the very beginning to also automate the metadata in this case to also get a better reporting. So for example, when I start a new campaign, automation could help us to already nurture the content to say, okay, what industry is the content meant for? What are the target target markets for this content, for example? Um, to make it, um, you know, make it easier to understand, yeah. How custom tailored this content is or if it is, it is just a general content and this metadata would be added to the whole campaign so that at the end of the campaign we get a better reporting. And in an ideal world, this marketing automation would not only trigger the emailings for an event, they would also automatically trigger, for example, um, LinkedIn posts. So organic LinkedIn post paid LinkedIn campaigns, maybe also some paid banner campaigns, for example, or similar, um, um, or also a video campaign, whatever content would be available. And in the end, the marketing automation could also help us to, um, yeah, evaluate all the reporting results based on the metadata also added before and really evaluate all these different steps and all these different content marketing channels. So also including the unpaid promotion on our website, for example, and things like that, so that at the end of the event you have a full list and you can say, okay, this was the best source, um, for example, for this specific target market. And this have been, uh, the results compared to other results. And then in an ideal world, there would be an artificial intelligence that tells us, okay, take a look. Compared to this and that campaign at your next campaign, you should try out, um, whatever, preparing it in a different language, for example, for a bigger target audience or for a different market or focus more on, let's say,

an infographic instead of an image photo, for example, so that we really know has the target audience, the target region being correct? Is the has the content been, uh, the best content that we could create or could we further improve? And yeah, then we also see what have been the results of this. And in an ideal world, also combined with our um, SAP system and CRM system so that we really see, okay, how did we nurture our customers? What was the um, value of proposals we sent out after this event? And in the end maybe how much order intake did we really receive out of marketing activity like this? Um, and don't get me wrong, I, I'm totally aware that we cannot 100% connect an order intake with a single marketing activity, but basically we can see how much influence do we have on the customers who then ask for a proposal and finally then really order machine. There are also other topics that need to be taken into consideration. All the sales contacts, for example. Also, how is our pricing compared to the competitors and things like that. But at least it gives us a feeling on how positive our marketing effect is on this whole customer journey and how our content also contributes to this journey and to the order intake at the very end.

00:23:36

LR: Great. Um, how has the use of marketing automation impacted the quality and the relevance of the content that you produce? I mean, you, you already talked about it briefly. Could you just elaborate more on that?

00:23:58

E3: Think about, um. In general, I think. Um, the main benefits have been so far is that we did a lot more of A and B testing, so tested different contents to different target audiences and also customized it more. So there were several newsletter projects or sorry, emailing projects also out of, of [business area] especially um, where they found out, um, is it really necessary to create that many language versions for example, or is English suitable in B2B marketing? So I think it really depends also on the business you're currently focusing on. But mainly, um, we found out things like that and we also did some analysis about um, which content is really relevant for which target audience. So this gave us more insights about the target audience, which allows us to, in the future send them more specific and more relevant content. And on the other hand, I think due to the marketing automation and also connected trackable links, we also saw the impact on different um on different campaign types and different contents on different platforms. So to just say one example for at LinkedIn, we just saw, okay, LinkedIn more and more became a channel that people are not willing to leave. If they see something on LinkedIn, they will mainly stay on LinkedIn. Only a few will click, for example, to our website. So we should also design our content to be consumable directly on LinkedIn and to be, um, yeah, let's say um, entertaining and fascinating directly on LinkedIn. So if we hide everything on our landing page on [company 3].com, this might not be the best way because most people don't go there. Um, whereas on the other hand, um, we learned that in email newsletters, for example, everyone is clicking the call to action buttons. So basically the best idea there is to have a brief introduction texts that really make people keen to read the whole article or to get more information and then put a call to action button so they can reach our landing page, for example. Um, yeah. And I think there are many other, um, insights we learned about these different types of media and how they work and how they, um, I guess collaborate is the wrong word. How they, uh, yeah, work together to improve our results in fact, and which role they can play during the customer journey and during our marketing efforts.

00:27:07

LR: So you would say that through the use of marketing automation, the quality and the relevance of your content improved and also the personalization increased.

00:27:23

E3: Yes, absolutely. So as you said, the quality and the relevance of the content has improved very much. Um, nevertheless, I think there is much, uh, more of the way to go. So I think there is still, uh, pretty much we can further improve here.

00:27:47

LR: And have you encountered any challenges or obstacles in implementing digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation?

00:27:59

E3: Um, yes, of course. I think there are always challenges when changing um, the way of doing things when implementing new tools. I think, um, there are two main challenges. Well, let's say sorry, let's say three main challenges. Let's start from a legal point of view. The whole topic of data protection and GDPR. Um, this makes it, um, not easier, uh, to stay aware of all these connected processes. So, uh, I think in most cases when we perform marketing automation, we really want to track who is doing what and when, uh, we need the consent of the customer or potential customer. So and this is not the same like the standard data protection clauses, you know, from everywhere. So basically we have an extra consent for this kind of let's, let's call it profiling or customization needs an extra consent. So we see that within the tracking, but also within the connection of the different tools. This legal aspect is a very difficult one and we really have many discussions on how [company 3] can still stay compliant, uh, but nevertheless perform professional and custom tailored marketing. So this legal aspect of GDPR is, I think, one major challenge here. Um, on the other hand, we also see that, um, if we have different tools means we need interfaces and of course there are many APIs available, maybe some out of the box integrations, but in many cases they just don't deliver what you expect from them. So you always see, okay, there are limitations in APIs, there are things you need to customize out of the box solutions. Um, yeah. If you find out what they really perform, you see, okay, that that's not what you really liked. And then you start customizing the interfaces between the tools and you start enriching the interfaces between, um, the tools, for example, you see that, um, let's say we have, for example, um, one marketing automation tool on the one hand and one other tool that sends out other Emailings for example, for press releases or similar stuff. And they calculate their KPIs based on a different logic. So basically if we want to have comparable KPIs, first of all, we need to make them comparable. So there are also steps in between that needs to be taken to make all these tools either connected or comparable. So I think this is the technical point of view we have. And third main challenge is the change of minds and change of the daily business of our marketing colleagues, of course, because, um, yeah, it is just a different world if you, if you were just used to you have your content plan maybe in an Excel list and you had your content in a word file and now it should all run via connected tools. So it is very, it is a different, very different way of working. You need to learn the new tools. We always try to, um, offer trainings and support and also convince people that this is some additional value for everyone because, um, as you and I have already mentioned, the efficiency of the process and, and the content creation and also the, uh, the content promotion and content marketing, um, is increased. So the more efficient everything is running, um, the easier it is for our marketing colleagues to at the end perform

what they need to do. So to create the content basically is pretty much the same effort. But of course also automation tools like talking about translation DeepL or chatgpt they help us in creation of content and also, um, Photoshop and other tools further improve. So the creation is becoming easier if you're willing to learn how to use these tools in an efficient way. And also the whole um, task of publishing the content and of reporting of contents is becoming easier. But on the other hand, we have to say, uh, many of our marketing colleagues in the past had nothing to do with reporting or KPIs. So basically it is also a new field of tasks and the new field of experience, uh, they are going to make. So basically it is, um, yeah, the job of global IT and also global corporate communications and also of the um, the communicators or the heads of our marketing departments to support all our colleagues, to get to know the tools to understand and convince them why this is a help for their daily business as well. And yeah, to help them to keep the minds open for all these new tools and all these new connections.

00:33:55

LR: Great. I have two more questions. So the next question is how have you measured the success of your digital content marketing campaigns? Meaning, which metrics or KPIs did you take a look at and did you measure it via marketing automation?

00:34:21

E3: Um, basically, wherever we used marketing automation, we, um, either measured it directly via marketing automation or we used marketing automation to get figures connected. So at least in one way, marketing automation was connected whenever used. Yeah. In some cases a direct measurement is not possible. Then some tracking parameters connect the different tools for the time being. Um, and yeah, we mainly, we used the classical um, KPIs, which I think is also not yet or sorry, where [company 3] is not yet state of the art. So basically we started by measuring for uh, for example, the impressions and the clicks and move them on to measure the click through rate and the engagement rate or the opening rate at emailings for example. And um, I think we need to move one more step forward in the near future to also see which impact does this really have on our business. So what is the value of proposals created? What is the value of the order intake that we've influenced? So I think we also need to uh, get one step ahead and track more. Um, yeah. How many prospects did we generate? How many leads did we generate? Yeah, how many proposals did we send out? How much order intake did we have? Yeah. Um, basically in the past it or still it is not possible everywhere to get this kind of data to connect the tools with this kind of data. But we're, uh, further working on that as well. Yeah.

00:36:22

LR: That sounds great. And now to my last question for this interview. Can you discuss any future plans or goals you have regarding digital content marketing campaigns or marketing automation in your B2B company?

00:36:40

E3: Um. Uh, yeah. One question back to you. Do you really want to hear, um, let's say the vision, which will take, I guess, several years to go, or do you really want to have the, yeah, real or the, the next planned steps that are, uh, more close to the horizon, let's say.?

00:37:09

LR: So either is fine. I would like to know what are, from your personal standpoint, your

personal plans or goals for digital content marketing campaigns and marketing automation, regardless of what has been decided in company. So what what is your vision?

00:37:33

E3: Okay.

00:37:35

E3: Okay. Let's let's start with with a decided one and then move on. How how I would see it from a long term perspective. Um, so in fact at the very beginning and what's also one of the things we are currently working on is to really get all these reporting data we get from all these different tools into one dashboard, into one system to make them comparable, to have a quick overview and to avoid all these manual efforts to get this data manually all together and to interpret the data. If you have one dashboard where you already have some basic quality assurance, you have the perfect start for your next content marketing activity because then you can take a look into the past and check, okay, if I take a look at my target audience and which content and which marketing channels we've used in the past, you would have the best, um, base for the next plans. And this from my point of view, is the starting point for everything else and from a long term point of view, um, the vision of our marketing technology would be exactly like that. We start with this, with this dashboard, and in an ideal world, we, we click the button and say, okay, I've learned this is my target audience and that's what we did. I want to move forward. I now plan my next marketing campaign. So basically the idea is that not the marketing expert, uh, him or herself, um, goes into Tool A and then into Tool B and then into tool C and manually starts all the processes. The idea is that our marketing technology drives this whole process. So you start at the dashboard, you have the next step. Let's say you plan your next campaign and then you also get support. For example, during content creation, you have a direct interface with DeepL, for example, that translates content for you. You have a maybe a direct interface with chatgpt or another artificial intelligence that supports you. For example, um, creating out of one piece of content, many pieces of content for your different communication channels. And then the marketing expert just, uh, takes a closer look, optimizes it based on these suggestions made by AI, and then all the approval processes and publication processes should be automated based on the data we gained before. Because, for example, if we learned that the best day and time to publish a LinkedIn post for this target group is, I don't know, Wednesday at 5 a.m., for example, then this should happen automatically and no need to manually change anything. You always have the chance, the chance or the option to manually change. But basically you should have um, out of the learnings of the past all optimized campaigns there. So basically, um, you get all the data, you create the content, but the whole process and everything moves on by itself. And you as a marketing expert, you always have the overview. What is the current status of which campaign, of which piece of content has already been? Um, or has everything already been approved and planned or published? And you only step into if you see, okay, there is a need for further improvement for, let's say, personal touch, for a more emotional message or whatever the AI is not capable of yet. And at the very end you should automatically receive a reporting for all these activities. Um, yeah, with recommendations. So you should not look in all into all the KPIs. You should directly also have some automatically created recommendations to be best prepared for the start of the next campaign. So that would be the long term vision.

00:41:45

LR: That sounds exciting. That sounds really cool. Thank you. Um, yeah, I'm amazed. And we're now at the at the end of the interview. And is there anything else from your side that you would like to add?

00:42:03

E3: Um. Good question. Um.

00:42:08

LR: Is there anything important that we left out on on content marketing, on marketing automation, on digital marketing campaigns? I think we covered pretty much all of it.

00:42:21

E3: We covered pretty much. Exactly. Um, I think maybe one learning that, that we see in, in many of the content marketing activities is that in B2B marketing, um, and maybe especially here at [company 3]. Um, we don't really spend that much time on creating different content versions, so they need to be much more improved because the more different content we really try out, the more data we receive, the more learnings we would have. And I think that's something that could be improved very much, especially if we would get help out of tools. Um, as I've mentioned, that could easily create alternatives, different options, different versions of the content for us. And we don't need to manually create everything by ourselves.

00:43:26

LR: Great. Well, thank you. Thank you very much for this interview. I will end the recording now.

Appendix 5: Transcription of interview with Expert 4

E4 = Expert 4, interviewee

LR = Laura Riegler, interviewer

00:00:01

LR: All right. So thanks again. And do you have any questions before we start, is there anything still open?

00:00:11

E4: No. Not so far.

00:00:13

LR: Okay, great. I would like to start with you telling me a little bit about yourself, your educational background, and also your professional experience.

00:00:26

E4: Okay. So I studied actually Business Administration in Vienna. And additionally, I have done an additional education for systemic consultancy and coaching. This is an additional personal goal that I wanted to achieve for myself, which I try also as best as I can to bring into the organization. Since we are working with a lot of different people. I'm working since approximately more than 20 years in B2B marketing. I started actually 15 years out of it in IT and technology companies, and since approximately eight years I'm now in [company 4] where I started as corporate marketing manager and five years ago I was promoted to the global director and I'm now responsible for the whole marketing and communication activities across all the [company 4] legal entities and also for sure, for the headquarter. So everything we do is centralized and let's say controlled and monitored and planned from the headquarter and distributed into the into the affiliates in the dedicated countries and markets that are relevant for our company.

00:01:40

LR: Great. Thank you very much for introducing yourself. So let's start with the questions about marketing automation and content marketing. My first question is what do you think about content marketing?

00:01:55

E4: Without content you cannot do marketing. I think this is the key. And as much as the landscape, the communication landscape is growing and also is accompanying us through all the last years, it's more key to differentiate yourself by storytelling and content creation and content can be split into different elements. It's about how you bring a content and a story across a video. Or you bring it into a product sheet. How you explain it in deepness, what your product is capable to do? And is it a considering all the channels that you need to contribute or distribute your content? And for sure the content is relevant to the stakeholder, so to whom you are communicating to. So for us, content is the most important thing. Even when you think about offline activities like events, how do you bring the best content as an experience to events? Because also here when you're, let's say at the moment or this week, [industry trade show] will start, you have a lot of booths there, a lot of competition there. How can you highlight yourself if you are there with a standard

booth? Yeah, so it's about the stories you tell across also your exhibition. So no marketing without content, I would say.

00:03:21

LR: And has content marketing helped you to achieve your business goals or marketing goals?

00:03:28

E4: I think it's the uh you have to, to differentiate. Yeah. So when you talk about the the company itself. So this is another type of content or it's another story. The uh what we have realized, the people who are actively engaging with you. Yeah. So they want to know who you are, what you do and why you do it. And we have also seen that the why, the purpose of the company is is immensely important to all the stakeholders and also for new applicants. Yeah. So when people want to come to your company and work with you, they want to, to, to know for what, what is your purpose, What are you standing for, What is what are your values? So the story that you tell about your company needs to be something that lasts over years in the mindset of the people. This is a completely different type of storytelling because it needs to be sustainable. The story needs to to be sustainable. And whenever you think about [company 4] this story needs to be connected and also for sure, the technologies that are connected with your brand, this is something you have to put on the top of mind of the people. When it comes to to technology there is also a little bit more layers, right? So you talk about technology itself. You say, for example, artificial intelligence is important or you say e-mobility is important. But also here you need to explain why is it important? For whom is it important? And also here you are on a higher communication level than when you really talk about a product that maybe some or the other already has installed or is already using. And then you try to to differentiate. Is it something uh you have a product for, for example, in place you want to communicate that a new product, a new version is coming out is a different story than we are releasing some something completely new and and even it's something completely new you also need to argument why should you buy it now? Yeah. And so you always have to consider about what you're talking about, which topic you're talking and to whom you're talking.

00:05:47

LR: And what kind of content do you publish?

00:05:52

E4: All of them. So I think there is no content that we are not, uh, not communicating or using or publishing. Is it in different format, is it from, from podcast video podcasts, is it is it from standard videos also? Here we differentiate between multiple types of videos that you use like brand videos to how-to videos, demos, webinars, uh, then product sheets, brochures. There is everything considered, but you should also not forget media. Media is also another channel that we intensively use. Whether it is a paid media like industry media that we definitely need. Because the a lot of our customers reads industry, media. Right. And and then there you have also other stakeholders that are in a higher position, like in a C-level. A CEO might not read, uh, uh, a industry magazine. They want to understand what technology is coming up, what, what is the change, what is the, uh, the cost saving behind it or the value that he can gain for his company. This is then other media that you would go rather in business media, uh, in, in weeklies or whatever. So it depends, uh, about which topic you want to place and as automotive industry is also it has a socio ecological meaning

that also everybody wants to know how do I drive in the future? Yeah. Do I drive battery? Do I drive autonomous? So it's also a topic that is for everybody of value, but also for politics, right? So and universities who are doing a lot of R&D. So there is a lot of content that you have to distribute. And media work also helps a lot to bring stories across to dedicated stakeholders. But for sure there is also social, social we should not forget. Also here we have different activities or content that is relevant for specific social channels. For example, in China we are a little bit disconnected from the European channels since in China, Google and so on is forbidden. So you also have to think about which channels or communication assets are relevant for the global organization and which markets have their own specifics and where you really need your local teams to support them. Also, in terms how you manage journalists is different in Europe or is a completely different, um, understanding how we treat journalists when we invite them, how they interview us than in Asia, Yeah. So this is also a completely different way. So you need always to consider localization in every content that you do. It's not only about the different cultures that you put an image where you put, I don't know, with different backgrounds, but it's also how you really localize the content for for dedicated markets.

00:09:10

LR: And so you mentioned that you are publishing product information to probably explain the complex technology behind it. And you're publishing educational content as well as promotional content when you're speaking about paid media, for example, and on your social media channels, do you also choose to publish entertaining content?

00:09:37

E4: Exactly. We discussed it. You had, let's say, these funny videos. Yeah. So we had requests from Asia and especially from China. Yeah. So because they tend to use more this in WeChat in special entertaining content, this is something where we don't see us. This is not fitting to our overall brand that the really emotional brand elements. Yes. But classical that we take part in a in a dance challenge for example. Yeah. So those things we are fighting, we discussed it. Yeah. But we don't see us there because you have to imagine that as a technology leader in a in a very, very, very tight industry like the automotive that is, you know, super transformational phase. It's about trust and and about education. It's about how a future of mobility looks like. And we are not B2C yeah, but this will not fit to our to our goal. Yeah. So at the moment we are distancing ourselves from entertaining activities when it comes to social. For sure when we have an event and we do some some stuff on site. Yeah, we do. Um, I don't know, test tracks where people can drive and, and you know, something like this with an experience part for sure we do, but not this classical fun activities. Yeah these funny videos we are not going to do at the moment. No.

00:11:06

LR: Understood. And what do you understand by marketing automation?

00:11:12

E4: Marketing automation is something that we have implemented, I think approximately six years ago. And marketing automation, when when you discussed automation was very close to email automation, you know, email journeys, automation that you track what content the reader has read, and then automatically you send the next communication or also using this as a retargeting activity in terms of within a campaign. But it's now more for me, marketing automation is much more and this is where we are also striving for. It's more

about personalization. Yeah, so personalization, I'll give you an example. I think it's a very complex topic, automation. So automation, the, the basis of automation is data, right? So you need first of all to collect data as much as you can. And we also have to consider that GDPR and cookie cookies are also not helping us a lot. In this case, what is very easy for B2C retail companies is more complex for us, but we can do it. We prove that it is still possible when you deliver the right content, so you need to deliver content that makes people engaging, giving their data and their preferences. And this is for sure happening by a lead scoring and, and, and the lead management tools that we are doing in our CRM database. So whatever someone is doing this is this is automatically tracked. So if it consents to to to give this data and all that, let's consider everything is allowed. They do it. They give us their allowance, we track them. But what we are striving for is a little bit the next step we have released. For example, at the moment our new website and now in the conception phase. And we are also discussing with our suppliers that for example, when you go on our website, you log in like your Amazon account. So we automatically, based on the data that we have collected from you in our CRM system, we can automatically also additionally give you content that is dedicated to you and based on your preferences and that we also get a little bit rid of all content fits to all. Yeah, so we know it from B2C. This is I discussed it with several B2B companies. We are much further than they are, so we have no best practices from B2B, but we are doing at the moment our first POC. So the proof of concept to test how that looks like that. Also the website in the future is also automated by content and by preferences. And then when it comes then to campaigns, you can really also use the website as a as a platform where you can retarget the people. Again, this is a now thinking about the website, the same thing. You can also uh we are also going into the POC you can do it same with a social. At the moment for sure we do that in some cases. For example LinkedIn paid activities and you don't go organic or even if you go organic, you can do that. You see. Okay, who are your your customers? Who are your I don't know other companies might name that different, we call it the installed base. Installed base are all customers who have a software bought have a license, for example, or a hardware equipment that is really installed on their facility. So every active user of software hardware. So yeah, so those people that are the existing customers. So what you can also do in social when you have an an release, a new release coming, you can definitely retarget them by data and say, okay, those people and you can also give that automated tool from CRM system to LinkedIn, for example, that they are automatically targeted or excluded. Yeah, this is also a part of it. Yeah. And in the perfect world, everything is connected and what we do, what we already have done that from all the channels that we have that you have dashboards. Yeah. Where you have analytics without uh you can do everything, but if you can not analyse the output it's useless. So every part from where they are coming, what they are doing, which topics that they are interested, clustered and that is relevant for us. So the we see, okay, we see a high activity here in Battery Electric. We see a high demand in this field which is maybe relatively new. And then we can again build our content strategy based on on their preferences.

00:16:18

LR: So you talked a lot about the future vision and you also mentioned how uh the automation level that you're at right now. So how far are your digital content marketing campaigns automated right now?

00:16:39

E4: So lead management is a set. This is what we can already do. We can already email automation is also something we can do sincere. So this is also done. We could also even, but this is about resources. So you could also definitely also adapt each content segment in your newsletter based on preferences. This system is in place. We can do, but we don't have the time to go in such a detail. That would mean you need a content creation machine. You need a own department who is doing nothing else and think this is something that also the the companies have not understood the importance and the amount of content that is needed that you have to create it's impossible. You need own departments or agencies or you put money into an agency that is doing nothing else than this. Yeah, but I would say also that when we created a new platform for our website, this was one of our technical requirements. We said, okay, everything that we need needs to have the APIs to CRM system and to this and to this because we set of foundation, yeah, and this is what we did and released this year and now we are on the, on the roadmap and doing this pilot technical proof of concept to test it. So everything needs to be tested in a smaller piece and then step by step rolled out. So what we are not doing is also we learned, yeah, this is also what I also say to my team never if if you have a complete new idea, don't roll it out in a in one piece because you cannot test and then then you crash you crash with a lot of investment and so on. So if you start new technology, start small do a test balloon. If it's working, find your influencer stakeholders in the organization. They will use us. If they love it, then let's extend it.

00:18:29

LR: And have you encountered any challenges or obstacles in implementing digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation?

00:18:41

E4: Uh, I think in, in, in general, it's a, it's a, it's a challenge that marketing, first of all, marketers need to change their discipline, how they do marketing. This is for a lot of people who historically started to do some activities for sure um, a challenge. Yeah, this is a completely change because they need to understand data. They need ongoingly to, to, to read data weekly and understand what that means. Yeah. So digital marketing is not that complex. It's not a complicated discipline. The, the, the, the, the complicated part is so. Oh my God, what is going on? So is it successful? If not, okay, you need to adapt, the marketing needs to be adaptive. And if you cannot be adaptive in a digital environment, you lose, you lose track, you lose target. And this is important in the implementation for sure. Uh, it's. It's huge. Yeah, it's huge. You have a lot of challenges that you need to, to overcome, and this makes it not easy for everybody. Yeah. It took us months to implement. But give me one second because we have a -

00:19:57

LR: Sure.

00:20:15

E4: It's not always easy with many people being on the telephone. So what was the what were have we been the challenges? Right. Yeah. So, um. Yeah. You have to the uh in technical implementation to challenges that you have to oversee your complete technical landscape. And uh because when you change here something in one system, it impacts the other system. And if you don't have a deep understanding how what, what each of these

systems are standing for and what they're capable to do and how they can interact with other systems, if you don't have a clear understanding, then you do things that are useless. Yeah. So this is what where you really need people also in your teams who have a good understanding of digital ecosystem. And not a typical marketer is might not be his job to understand. And now our let's say this is a competence between the where IT and the marketing competences or merging together. So you need to be both in one person suddenly.

00:21:25

LR: And um if you if you think of your most recent campaign, please describe the process of implementing a digital content marketing campaign with marketing automation.

00:21:43

E4: Uh. I think I can. This may be a good example because we have a lot of I was thinking which one it would fit. I think bring this on table because it's first of all, also for [company 4] completely something new. We have implemented a complete new e-commerce shop. And this is also not very typical because we sell high complex solutions. And why should a B2B customer buy from an online shop? But we said, okay, let's start. Because it was also the need from from sales that say, okay, there are some products where we don't need to sell it through a person anymore. It should be a self-service. Yeah, and this is completely new for us. How to promote a shop is because we have never uh we are not a Zalando, we are not Amazon. So this is, I think also for our customers how to accept this. This is something, for example, where we see that will take time. And we did a lot of uh, what they, what they started this team was they did a lot of performance marketing activities to promote the shop itself. And we, we then I came in and said, You don't promote the shop itself, you promote the products in the shop because it's we are not a shop brand. Yeah. So that means the, the user needs to know what is in there. And then it automatically led into the shop and we hear there was a lot of trial and error and still is still is because also the diversity of the products that are in the shop. This is also, I think, a challenge that also needs to to overcome. And here we played everything. Yeah. So from a classical Google ads, search ads, SEO, newsletter, newsletter automation, I think we tried out everything. Yeah. And now the they're still in this trial because we want to have a period of time to see, okay, this is working, this is not working because at the moment they can say, hmm, interesting. This performance activity works for product A, but they have zero engagement for product B. So we have not the correlation. Is it because of the product or is it because the people are not willing to buy from a shop or because the product is not interesting at all? Yeah. So this is something that we need to evaluate. But I would say, um, you have to really in performance marketing, really, really think case by case. If digital marketing to which extent in which communication channel, it makes sense. Not everywhere. It does make sense. Yeah. So it's a lie to say, uh, this is one uh, yeah, we have a recipe and you can adapt it wherever you want. No, you have to base by base. Whatever you want to do, you have to prepare your marketing plan. You have to to figure out what is the best channel based on the target group and then test it out. And if you after two weeks come up by data that is not working you immediately have to adapt.

00:25:17

LR: And when you so you probably start with an analysis of of what you can do or what you already did in the past or what your competitors are doing. And then you start the planning,

like you said, which, which content formats or which channels you would like to use in the campaign. And then when you roll it out, do you also use marketing automation for that? I know you said you use, for example, newsletter automation, but do you leverage marketing automation in other tasks here as well?

00:25:53

E4: So, um, we use it also for internal communication. Yeah. So when we, we use all our tools also for internal activities, uh, we also, for example, when we do start a campaign outside, we for example, the first two weeks we target also the [company 4] employees. So we give this a spent budget where we say, okay, that is also, um, giving awareness that this is running. But then after two weeks we stop it, but only that they see this is something that's going on because we heard a lot, uh, you're not doing anything in this case. And we said we do. And they said, I have not seen that. And we said, Yeah, because I pay by click. Yeah. So I'm paying for all of you. So the we said, okay, let's agree on that, that we give them the chance. So we need uh, also when they don't see then after two weeks on LinkedIn, they should be capable to hear and know that this is running through other, um, communication, internal communication. So we have to inform. Let's say that at some point an idea starts so that we start always with an idea. Then we have to validate this idea. Then we think, how can the idea we need to bring this idea into concept. This concept is that although there's a lot of stakeholders, we go further back and say, okay, is that the right concept? Then we say, okay, what is the storyline? Then we create the storyline and then we say, okay, what is the story for which channel? Which assets do we need to create for them? For which channels? Then we think about this and then we start basically based on the plan, the execution, and then regularly, do you need to monitor. I would say this is the always the same approach that we are mostly going through. And you also have to consider that when we started, because you asked me for the challenges, I remember six years ago when I started to say we need automation. The whole sales organization was against it. They said, we know our customers. We don't need something like this. Impossible. No, no need. No need. And because they could not understand what value that can bring to them. When then uh but we did it. Yeah. So because we knew that this is relevant. This is the this is a basic stuff marketing should have. So you cannot this yeah. You cannot do something without having your the right platforms and instruments to do your work. And we had the same thing when the they said we need webinars for example. Yeah. Also to do evaluation and so on. But when the pandemic came. Well, everybody could say, Oh God, my God, I cannot reach anybody. Then we have been the most overloaded department ever because we have been the only one having the immediate solutions to communicate. We could immediately set up a event, digital event, which we never had before. We could do a communication platform. We could send automated newsletter. We could do everything. So I think even when the company is not mature enough to accept it, but it's important for marketing to think always one step ahead. Yeah, that's why I said maybe not everything in a huge thing, but have it in place. Use it for your purpose, but bring it out when also the organization is mature enough.

00:29:22

LR: And has the use of marketing automation or how has the use of marketing automation impacted the quality and also the relevance of the content that you publish?

00:29:35

E4: The automation. I think the automation it's based on, it's not the automation, it's the it's the uh. Because automation sounds like it's one part, but it's think that the the analytic is coming from automation, from all activities. So let's say you put the customer into the center and then you have some products and solutions you want to sell him, and all of that is the data. So this is what is relevant for us. And then we see that there is low engagement in something. Then we have to think about is the content bad, is the product bad? So then we have for sure to improve. But but we also see also in social, people are extremely soon bored out. So you have to think about and be creative how you bring content across and but you're also in marketing in some extent you're limited. So what you can then we would be back in your first question about the the funny stuff. Yeah so then what is what what stays at the end. Yeah. Um, you, you cannot I would say. To provide every part of it 100% the best content because it's a process.

00:30:54

LR: And because of you said, I mean, marketing automation as a as a framework where you're using the data to analyse the content that you publish. Has it improved the quality or the relevance of your content by saying, okay, you have the data, you can analyse it, and then out of that you can create more relevant content that reaches a higher interaction rate.

00:31:19

E4: Exactly. First, first of all, I think don't think that IT driven technology platforms can help you to create better optimized. But the data insight that you gain out of it gives you an indication if what you have done is good or not. I think this is the output is relevant for us. Yeah, not the system because which system I use is up to me. Yeah. So most of them are very similar. But how I use automation to achieve my goals, I think this is the another part of it and it must be in the head of a marketer. The marketer must be capable to continuously improve their content and this is why we are here. Yeah.

00:32:02

LR: And has marketing automation also impacted the level of personalization?

00:32:09

E4: Yeah, definitely. Yeah. So this is something that is valuable for us. Yeah. Because we also have, besides a standard newsletter communication, we also have a subscription, we have media subscription, so we can really by topics we have tagged everybody. And I think it was what the most relevant stuff is we do marketing also as a as a pre-sales support for the sales organization. What we have done is that every sales guy who is opening his contacts in his CRM system can see now what was the last thing that the person has downloaded, what is the last thing or participate in a webinar or registered for an event? So he opens up and he can immediately see what is the last actions that this person has taken. And we also have classified them by topics. This is this information that is coming directly from the person. So then you can see how has he now consumed so much content for dedicated topic? And he can automatically, when he is calling him, say, oh, are you interested? Do you need more? Yeah. So he has a basic tool to start a conversation from another level. This insight is visible for the sales organization.

00:33:37

LR: And how has the use of marketing automation affected your team's productivity and workload in executing digital content marketing campaigns?

00:33:48

E4: Massively up the huge workload. Yeah. So I always say it's a lie to think that digitalization makes life intact or can replace people or can, um, uh, is leading to less work. It's more complex. You need to because, if you have an event. Yeah, you have an event. Okay. You have to take care that the event is taking place. But if you use it to promote this event or, or even to, to, uh, the world of automation, you have to consider everything. The dataset is the setup of the tools. How many tools we need to setup even to communicate. So there is you have to set the URLs, right? You have to set the UTM trackers, right? Yeah. So you have to have the the, the data clusters first reported in a correct way. So there is a lot of steps that you need to do before you start your campaign. And we are not even here talking about the content that you have to create because all the content in our case is a global organization, also needs to be translated in different languages. So here also be uh we are not considering that in some markets we cannot send them English content only. So also where this person is coming from is a, is a massive, uh, is massive of importance. So it's it's a huge work. And I see that the last year, the more tools we have implemented, the more automation we are implementing, the harder it is. Yeah.

00:35:36

LR: And have you measured the success of your digital content marketing campaigns with marketing automation, or which KPIs did you look at to interpret the data?

00:35:48

E4: You need other tools. The marketing, classical marketing or how they sell it. So let's say if they most of the companies who sell a marketing automation, it's about newsletter automation. So this is how they sell it. Yeah, but when you think about whole digital marketing and the stuff, um, you need to, to think about the, the, the right toolset, what you, what you have and what you need to implement. So it's I would like to to do a little bit the position marketing automation on the newsletter only uh it's only it's only a puzzle, it's not covering everything. I don't know what what you're writing about. Maybe it helps. Maybe you also have. But for example, what is about future in communication? So there is a lot of other stuff coming now. They also have to investigate to say, okay, how do we use a marketing AI technology in video, text and audio, uh, in the next years? Yeah. So how will that evolve? How can that be part of the automation process in the future?

00:36:58

LR: And yeah, this this is actually my last question for this interview. I would like to ask you if you can discuss any future plans or goals for marketing automation, but also for digital content marketing.

00:37:17

E4: We are tending we are thinking about we want to test it out next year. So we want to also think because we use already VR a lot and augmented reality also. Yeah. So those things, they bring it also more and more to our events. Yeah. So that because you have to imagine that in the automotive industry when you have a classical motor, you had a lot of hardware as an exhibit that you could put on on your, on your events, for example. Now,

since also everything going more into the world of software, we don't have this classical haptic stuff that you can touch. Yeah. So everything is going into the digital world. You have to investigate a lot about communication, how digital content yeah, I'm not talking about digital marketing, digital content yeah can be provided. So we started a lot of VR. Yeah. So you can really go through and see and touch the hardware where you see, you can click on it. It explains you what you see here. You can do a walkthrough also with the augmented reality where you stand in front of something and then you have your mobile phone or your iPad and you see extra content that is there. We also have a lot of simulation stuff where you can simulate a lot of like test racing or you sit there and you drive and you simulate that well. And now we are thinking how bringing AI in this all. Yeah. For example bringing um, because we don't want to replace other tasks for example, to exchange with our, our experts. This is nonsense. Yeah. We have good people. We have great brains. And first of all, don't want to tell them you're not well, you're not important anymore. You have other tasks now. But, um, for example, when you do tours. Yeah. Where you want to guided tours, where you want to explain something that you have, uh, that you can exchange with another [inaudible], we feed them with all the relevant information and you can communicate with this, with this person standing across your, your equipment and they explain, for example, and you can raise questions. And these things we don't know so far. We started the discussions and we want to evaluate that for the beginning of next year to also pilot it at some extent, because internally piloting is always okay. Also to see the reaction of the people. It's also very because we have the most sales organizations in there. Um. And I don't know how, how, how intelligent the AI stuff really is at the moment. Yeah. To which extent. But we have that at the moment plan. So this would be the next level of VR / augmented reality would be also to bring those elements together.

00:40:03

LR: And in regard to the content marketing campaigns, the digital content marketing campaigns. Are you planning to establish like a content hub or an integrating marketing automation platform in which you can connect all of the channels, all the different formats and where you have, all the different monitoring metrics all in one place, or is that something that is not planned for the future?

00:40:37

E4: The reality is there is nobody who can offer you such a tool where you really can bring that together. For example, we are evaluating at the moment we are implementing a social advocacy tool, uh, where we at least want also that not only marketing is publishing content but giving also content. We write a little bit content for dedicated influencer in the company experts where they can publish that by their by themselves on their own LinkedIn channels, for example, but they can adapt that. Yeah. And you will find in every implementation process restrictions, for example, LinkedIn is not allowing direct connections. So uh, or social listening you we cannot track, um, or no one can track what, what is going on in terms of social listening in LinkedIn because LinkedIn, LinkedIn is not allowing that. So also the platform itself has its restrictions. Yeah. So they also want to keep their stuff by themselves. Yeah. They don't want that we get so many insights. For us, Super LinkedIn is the most performing channel. Which value do I have on Facebook? Yeah, we have it, but it has no value for us. But LinkedIn, we cannot. So uh, we are managing already our content, so we have our own tool and everything for uh, magazines, social and so on is already placed there, so we know what is published when. So this we have um, for sure. And

uh, but how we are tracking is another tool. And each tool, now let's say that for each tool tracks by itself, you can track each tool. You can say in the newsletter what you have the data in the social advocacy, you have your data, and the other in LinkedIn you have your data. So but you need a business intelligence analysis tool where you consolidate all the data and then you have one view and this is what you need and this is what we have and continuously extend.

00:42:38

LR: Okay. Yeah, that sounds great.

00:42:40

E4: I don't know. I hope I hope it could explain that in an easy way or what I wanted to say.

00:42:45

LR: Yes, you did. All right. So we're now at the end of the interview. Thank you very much for your participation. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

00:42:57

E4: No from my side, everything said. So if you have any other questions, happy to answer you. Yeah.

00:43:04

LR: Thank you. Thank you very much.

00:43:07

E4: Thanks.

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