Business communication online:

Case Profin

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1 Introduction

The general aim of this study is to increase the understanding of online business communication and find out the relevant issues for companies operating in international markets. The focus of the research is on Profin, a Finnish developer, manufacturer and marketer of sliding doors, windows and doors (Haapala, 2012a). The questions that the research aims to answer are: What are Profin’s aims in business communication? What are Profin’s current business communication activities? How could Profin’s homepage be improved? How could Profin benefit from participating in social media?

The elements of web based business communication are defined in the theoretical framework on the basis of previous research. The theoretical framework comprises a comprehensive review of different areas that online business communication is concerned with, such as communication theory, business communication and marketing as well as web page design and the social web environment.

The theoretical framework supports a study on Profin and its homepage. The intention of the study is to draw attention to issues concerned with online business communication. Different sources of data are used to give readers a clear picture of Profin’s profile in business communication. Profin’s homepage will be used to carry out a qualitative contents analysis. The research applies case study methodology.

The chosen research is topical because the features of online business communication change constantly. Business communication is also a subject that has not been researched thoroughly. In the research it is acknowledged that the current trend in online business is companies increasingly getting involved with the social web environment. A study in this area not only benefits Profin but also any other business with online activity.

The research discusses the various challenges that online business communication involves. Some of these challenges are discussed in connection with barriers to communication, such as cultural barriers and language barriers. Other challenges are,
for instance, competition, time and resources as well as different challenges presented by the social web environment.

The research will produce information about how a company that does not actively participate in social media, or has limited activity in social media could benefit from getting involved in it. Different possibilities and recommendations on how a company can plan or structure its participation in the social web will be given in the discussion and conclusion.
2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework explains what communication is, including some reference to classical theories, semiotics and features of modern communication. Different elements of communication, functions of communication and barriers to communication will be discussed in detail. Specific attention will be given to features of business communication. A short chapter focuses on distinguishing business communication from marketing, because the two mentioned areas are sometimes mixed and quite often they overlap.

One chapter concentrates on intercultural communication. Since the case study focuses on a company doing business internationally, the challenges and issues of intercultural communication are relevant. A key channel for a company’s communication is often the company’s homepage. Therefore special importance is given to web page communication as well as web page contents.

In connection with websites, this study is also interested in visual communication and visual design. Visual design continues to chapter about multimodality and semiotics. The chapter reviews the melange of different modes and how they are used. The variety of modes can be studied from the semiotic perspective; hence some theory of semiotics is also included.

An area that cannot be left without remark is the social web environment. Businesses are increasingly integrating with social media and even if a business decides to stay uninvolved, it can still be affected by it. The chapter reviews different categories and types of social media applications, technical features as well as recent trends.
2.1 Communication theory

Most books about business communication seem to define ‘communication’ rather than ‘business communication’. For example, according to Doshi (2008) communication is an important element of management, as well as a tool for changing social behaviour either to create harmony within people or to motivate them in achieving social goals. Communication includes the concepts of transfer, meaning and information. It is also an essential part of business organisations. (Doshi, 2008, 22).

Krishnamacharyulu (2009) points out, that communication is something that we all do every day. Communication takes place in different environments, for different reasons and in different forms. The word communication derives from Latin word ‘communis’ which means common: “Communicator tries to establish commonness or sharing of information, attitudes, ideas and understanding”. (Krishnamacharyulu, 2009, 4).

Many theories have been created to explain the communication process. Perhaps the most cited theory is Shannon and Weaver’s mathematical theory of communication which explains communication as a linear process; a transmission of messages (Shannon and Weaver, 1949). Other theories have been created subsequently. There is, for example, Gerbner’s model (as cited in Fiske, 1990), created in 1956. While maintaining Shannon and Weavers model as a backbone, Gebner’s model comprises two alternating directions of communication: perceptual and receptive. While the old models remain the foundation of communication theory, new innovations and technology demand newer solutions and new ways of thinking. (Fiske, 1990, 24-25).

Barad (2008) explains communication largely along the same lines with Shannon and Weaver. The communication process involves a sender conceiving an idea which is encoded so that it can be understood by the sender and the receiver. The information is sent through an appropriate channel after which it is decoded by the receiver. When the receiver understands the message the communication process is complete. (Barad, 2008, 35).

Lasswell’s model, concerned with mass communication, was published in 1948. Lasswell (1948) argues that understanding communication depends on studying the
different stages of his model: who, what, which channel, whom and what effect (Lasswell, 1948, 37-51). Newcomb’s model (as cited in Fiske, 1990) from 1953 is an example of a communication theory without a linear process. Newcomb explains communication as a triangular model. Besides having a communicator and a receiver the model introduces a third dimension – the society. Whilst communicating with each other, the two different parties need to stay in balance with the social system. (Fiske, 1990, 30-31).

Westley and MacLean’s model (as cited in Fiske, 1990) from 1957 develops Newcomb’s model a little further. While acknowledging the social factor Westley and MacLean introduce the editorial function: the message is published or broadcasted to an audience (Fiske, 1990, 32-34). Jakobson’s model (1960) has features from both linear and triangular models. Jakobson (1960) combines the different views of communication: the process and semiotics. An act of communication is based on constitutive factors: addresser, addressee, context, message, contact and code. Jakobson (1960) also lists functions of communication - hence his model is a double one. The functions are: emotive, referential, poetic, phatic, metalingual and conative. (Jakobson, 1960, 353-377).

When discussing the different communication theories, Baldwin and Roberts (2006) note that most theories view communication as a linear process: a message is first produced and then sent from A to B. Baldwin and Roberts (2006) draw attention to another theory: semiotics. They explain that in semiotics communication means the production of the message itself. (Baldwin and Roberts, 2006, 34). Fiske (1990) also mentions these two “schools” and how they view communication: as “the transmission of messages” or “production and exchange of meanings” (Fiske, 1990, 2-3).

Communication can be divided into different forms or categories according to its context, media and persons involved. Context often determines whether communication is formal or informal. The informal communication channel is sometimes called grapevine (Pathi, 2008, 13). According to Krishnamacharyulu (2009) formal communication means the flow of information through established channels in an organization. These channels are official and usually work related. Formal systems for communication are developed when organizations want to ensure flowing continuous
communication. Informal communication is often people related, unofficial and spontaneous. (Krishnamacharyulu, 2009, 5).

Communication media include the means of “transmitting or conveying a message”. Communication media may contain written words, pictures, graphics or voice. The choice of appropriate media depends on a number of things, for example: who the audience is, the urgency of the message, need for confidentiality, need for accuracy, need for a reliable medium, cost of medium, feedback capacity of medium, formality of medium and complexity of the message. (Urmila, 2008, 16-17).

Oral communication, also known as verbal communication, is “the spoken interaction between two or more people”. As much as 60% of working time in organizations is spent talking to others, in other words communicating verbally. Verbal communication can be formal or informal. Both forms of oral communication take place in organizations, however, more communicating is done informally. Some forms of oral communication are, for example, an interview, a telephone conversation and a seminar. (Pathi, 2008, 77-84).

Advantages of oral communication are the speed in which information can be sent and received, as well as getting immediate feedback. Oral communication creates quickly a link between the communicators. It is also economical time- and moneywise. Oral communication is also the most efficient tool when motivating or persuading others. Aids that support oral communication are, for instance, eye contact, body language, tone of voice, as well as pace of speech. It is also possible to use visual aids or give handouts when, for instance, giving a presentation. (Pathi, 2008, 79-80).

There are also disadvantages in oral communication. Oral communication may not always save time and money, for example, when a meeting does not bring any results. The effectiveness of oral communication depends on the attitudes of the sender and the receiver. Oral messages are also difficult to retain and there is always a possibility for misunderstanding. (Pathi, 2008, 81).

Fiske (1990) organizes communication into different forms according to its presentational codes. Codes not only provide systems for understanding and arranging data but they also have social and communicative functions. Representational codes are
used in written communication; when text is produced. Representational codes in texts are symbols and signs. Presentational codes are performed in, for example, non-verbal communication. Presentational codes give messages about the present moment. These codes include tones of voice, gestures and eye movements. Presentational codes can only be performed when the communicator is present. (Fiske, 1990, 66-67).

Presentational codes consist of two functions. The first function is to communicate indexical information, in other words, information about the speaker and the speaker's situation. This information may include, for example, the speaker's identity, emotions, attitudes and opinions. The second function is managing the interaction. Presentational codes are used to create the type of relationship that the encoder wants with others. Different qualities of voice, gestures and postures can be used to influence others, be placatory towards them, shut oneself off from them or indicate one has finished speaking. (Fiske, 1990, 67).

Communication can be divided into upward, downward and horizontal communication. Upward communication means communication flow from a subordinate to a superior. Downward communication is the opposite, meaning the flow of communication from a superior to a subordinate. Horizontal communication means communication among different divisions within an organization. (Pathi, 2008, 13).

Pathi (2008) writes about barriers to communication; factors that make communication complex. According to Pathi (2008) the most important seven barriers that an organization usually faces during communication process are:

- Physical barriers, referring to, for instance, physical distance or distraction in message delivery
- Perceptual barriers, referring to erroneous perceiving or understanding a message
- Emotional barriers, referring to fear, suspicion or mistrust
- Cultural barriers, referring to barriers, for example, between people from different departments within an organization
- Language barriers, referring to misunderstanding a message
- Gender barriers, referring to problems due to different speech patterns between the sexes
- Interpersonal barriers, referring to relationship-attitude- or value-related barriers in communication

(Pathi, 2008, 10).

Wiio focused his research on organizational communication. He has created a set of communication laws known as Wiio's laws. These humoristic laws about human communication explain how “communication usually fails, except by accident”. The aforementioned phrase makes up Wiio's first law. Altogether there are seven laws explaining failure of communication. Although Wiio's laws are humorous in their pessimism, they act as a useful reminder of the risks in communication. (Kauhanen, 2013, 4-5).

Korpela (2010) has written a commentary on Wiio's laws in regard with communication on the Net. According to Korpela (2010) one reason that online communication sometimes fails is that it depends on "vaguely defined symbols". He notes that symbols, "signs to which some meaning is assigned by convention" are prone to being misunderstood. Words may mean different things to people. Therefore a message could hold different meaning to its sender and the receiver. (Korpela, 2010).

2.2 Business communication

A few of the sparse definitions for business communication that could be found have been collected in this chapter. Functions of communication and areas of research in regard with communication are also looked at. Communication is not only important for individuals but it is essential for organizations. As Krishnamacharyulu (2009) describes, communication is “indispensable”. For instance, communication has power to influence
events. It can also project an image of competence and promote trust. In organizations successful communication can increase productivity. (Krishnamacharyulu, 2009, 4-5).

Gopal (2009) combines communication and business in his definition: “communication in business includes all contacts made both inside and outside the organization”. He describes business communication as the “process of transmission of information within the business environment”. (Gopal, 2009, 3). Urmila (2008) gives specific examples of what business communication is: it is formal communication, incorporating written communication such as letters, memos, reports and notices as well as oral communication, for example, interviews, conferences, meetings, presentations and negotiations. (Urmila, 2008, 2).

Pathi (2008) writes that efficient business communication means “the use of effective language to convey a clear business message to achieve a predetermined purpose.” (13). Bisen (2009) defines the term rather similarly: “The term business communication is used for all messages that we send and receive for official purpose like running a business, managing an organization, conducting the formal affairs of a voluntary organization and so on. Business communication is marked by formality as against personal and social communication.” (Bisen, 2009, 1).

Bisen (2009) identifies ten purposes of communication in a business organization, including both internal and external purposes. Delivering information is the main purpose of communication. Information can be communicated to an individual or a group, horizontally, vertically or diagonally through various channels. The evaluative function is used when assessing how well something was performed. Communication is also required when giving feedback. (Bisen, 2009, 4).

The instructive function has a commanding and directing character. Instructions are usually given in order that the receiver accomplishes something. Instructions often flow from higher levels of management downwards. The aim of integrative function is to bring consolidation and unity among different departments in a business organization. A thorough communication process is also needed for influencing or persuading others. (Bisen, 2009, 4).
Communication can be used for direction: top level management needs communication when issuing directions to the employees. Clear directions lead to better performance by the staff. Teaching and orientation functions are closely related. Proper communication when training and educating workers enable them to follow procedures, work cost-effectively, and avoid accidents. Through communication the employee learns about the organization culture, policies and programs. (Bisen, 2009, 4).

Communication is needed for image building. There is interdependence and interrelationship between businesses and the society in which the businesses operate. Society needs to be informed, for example, about the goals, social responsibility, progress and activities. Effective communication also supports decision making. When employees are given the necessary information they can carry out tasks effectively. Figure 1 shows the different functions of communication (as adapted from Bisen, 2009, 4 and Krishnamacharyulu, 2009, 4-5).
Figure 1. Functions of communication (as adapted from Bisen, 2009, 4 and Krishnamacharyulu, 2009, 4-5).

Written communication is an important form of business communication, which most organizations rely on. Written communication is used inside organizations as well as between businesses and customers. Writing is crucial for businesses also because it is the principal source of documentation. Written document can be used as a permanent record, evidence, or a legal document. Written communication can save time and money. Forms of written communication include, for example, business letters, reports,
orders, notices, bulletin boards, e-mail instructions and advertisement. (Pathi, 2008, 15-27).

In written business communication it is important to pay attention to appropriate wording and suitable language. Messages should also be coherent and uniform. Ambiguous messages, poor language and grammar, spelling mistakes as well as writing too much should be avoided. Despite all advantages of written communication it also holds some disadvantages. Quite often there is no immediate feedback. Written communication may also be time-consuming, costly and involve a lot of paperwork. (Pathi, 2008, 15-27).

A relevant field of study, business discourse, is discussed by Brummans, Chooren and Chaput (2009). They find that one of the goals of business discourse research is to understand how business is “done” through text and talk. The authors also mention that there are similarities in conversation analysis and business discourse analysis. Research on business discourse, however, usually focuses on larger contexts. (Brummans, Chooren and Chaput, 2009, 53).

Gimenez (2009) discusses mediated communication in business (MCB). Gimenez (2009) reports that the concept of MCB was created in the late 1980’s and it has been researched extensively ever since. He groups research in the area into “medium turn” and “discourse turn”. Medium turn concentrates on the medium such as e-mail whereas discourse turn focuses on context and how the medium and context interact. While the different forms of media have advanced during the past decades, the focus of research has also shifted. At first the focus was on establishing electronic media for business communication, from where it moved onto the capacity, capability and advantages of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Lately the researchers have been, for example, analysing different features of communication in corporate culture. (Gimenez, 2009, 132-134).

A number of approaches and issues in relation with MCB have helped making business discourse the engrossing subject of study it is today. Gimenez (2009) argues that in future studies of MCB research “should adopt a new, more critical perspective by which the interaction between power, identity and media can be discursively analysed” and calls this the “critical turn”. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a well-established
discourse approach that offers a practical tool to view identity, power and other related aspects of corporate communication. (Gimenez, 2009, 136-137).

Fairclough (2006) describes CDA as an area of interdisciplinary research and analysis that has been developing for the last thirty years and now includes various approaches. The different approaches share the common goal in ensuring more adequate attention in critical social research to discourse as an aspect of social life and its connection to other aspects to social life, than they have got in the past. CDA includes instances and analyses of language use, such as texts, speeches and presentations in media. (Fairclough, 2006, 8).

2.3 Business communication vs. marketing

Drawing a line between business communication and marketing may be sometimes difficult because the two areas have a lot in common. Only few sources appear to explain the difference between the two. Emmerson (2010) links marketing with the four P’s. These are: product, price, place and promotion. According to Emmerson (2010) business communication covers online relations, public relations, event management, printed materials, corporate design and internal relations. Online relations include, for instance, the company homepage and advertising on other websites, use of social networks, PR-related internet activities and search engine optimization. (Emmerson, 2010).

Dave Samuels (2013) explains the differences between marketing and communications as follows: “Many small businesses lump advertising, promotions, public relations and other communications tools together and erroneously call them marketing. Communications serve a marketing strategy, which is more planning than execution. Understanding the difference between marketing and communications will help you create effective sales strategies and tactics that boost your bottom line.” Samuels (2013) further refers to marketing as a discipline that guides companies concerning their
business planning and strategies. Marketing includes functions such as product development, setting prices, brand management, choosing the distribution channels as well as determining target customers. (Samuels, 2013).

Samuels (2013) describes communication as “the executive side of selling”. He also recites that marketing and communication have different points of view regarding advertising, social media, promotions and public relations. In marketing the emphasis is on strategy whereas in communication the focus is on delivering the message. (Samuels, 2013).

One example of an activity that could be both marketing and communicating is building a customer e-mailing list. E-mail is a communication tool that can also be used for marketing. Social media tools may gain a lot of popularity in a small amount of time. However, they are often forgotten just as quickly, whilst e-mail remains an integral part of web communication. (Plumley, 2010, 194).

E-mail marketing is also known as “permission-based marketing” since a permission is required from a person that is added to the e-mailing list. Getting permission, which is also referred to as “opting in”, can be done easily online: there are services and products that check if the the owner of an e-mail address has agreed upon receiving, for example, a newsletter from a company. (Plumley, 2010, 194). E-mail is just one example of how marketing and communication intertwine. Many business communication activities involve marketing one way or another, and it could be argued that all marketing involves communication.

2.4 Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication, also known as cross-cultural communication, is communication between different cultures. Intercultural communication has its challenges for a number of reasons. One issue regarding cultures is change: cultures change over time. Some cultures may last for hundreds of years while some change daily. (Hartley and Bruckham, 2000, 47). Peterson (2004) mentions that it is impossible
to escape the forces of culture. Adjusting to them is necessary in order for a business to thrive. (Peterson, 2004, 28). Brummans, Chooren and Chaput (2009) claim, that scholars have found links between culture, language and organizing by comparing business interactions across cultural contexts (53).

The barriers to communication were listed in chapter 2.1. It would be possible to list all those barriers again in connection with intercultural communication. Especially cultural barriers, language barriers, physical barriers and perceptual barriers are highlighted when communicating cross-culturally. Simply defining the concept ‘culture’ can prove complex. The human sciences and different authors have various definitions for the word. It is usually connected to geographical location, community, history and social practices and norms. The community can be a small group or a whole nation. Smaller cultures can exist within larger ones; these ones are called subcultures. (Hartley and Bruckham, 2000, 51).

Peterson (2004) writes that culture is often assumed to be what people perceive with their senses, such as language, architecture, population, music, food, clothing, art, literature, the pace of life, emotional display, gestures, leisure activities, eye contact and sport. These things can be called “tip of the iceberg” culture. Some things related to culture are deeper, and cannot be seen. These things, the so-called “bottom of the iceberg”, culture are, for instance, core values, attitudes, beliefs, society’s norms, legal foundations, assumptions, history and cognitive processes. (Peterson, 2004, 19-25).

One of the issues is stereotyping: “A stereotype is generalization about a group of people based upon their group membership” (Hartley and Bruckham, 2000, 47). Stereotypes have three components. The first component is a characteristic that a group of people are identified by, such as nationality or religion. The second component is a set of additional characteristics that we attribute to the groups as a whole. The third component is identification that someone is part of a group, and therefore linking the additional characteristics with the person. (Hinton, 2000, 6-8).

Aronson (2008) suggests that categorization invokes stereotypes that guide expectations. When a person is categorized according to stereotypical beliefs, also future expectations about interactions with that person are similarly based on stereotypes. (Aronson, 2008, 143-144). Although stereotypes are usually thought of as
giving erroneous information, they can also be viewed positively. Yzerbyt, Spears and McGarty (2002) identify stereotypes as shared group beliefs that help to explain and make sense in the situation. Stereotypes can also function as energy-saving devices for knowledge creation. (Yzerbyt, Spears and McGarty, 2002, 2-3).

Generalization could be described as a weaker form of stereotyping. Peterson (2004) describes generalization as looking at large number of people and drawing certain conclusions from what is seen. Generalization can be research-based and offer rather accurate pictures whereas stereotyping is often based on images. (Peterson, 2004, 27).

A number of ways have been created to describe cultures. Peterson (2004) identifies five basic culture scales: equality vs. hierarchy, direct vs. indirect, individual vs. group, task vs. relationship and risk vs. caution. Where in the scale a culture fits determines the nature of the culture. To give an example, if you compare a Finnish business and a Chinese business, it is likely that the Finnish business would position in the left of these scales whilst the Chinese company's values would place it in the right side of the scales. Nonetheless, both cultures would remain in the grey middle area and avoid the far ends of the scales as most cultures do. Most things are usually not black and white, and cultures are rarely that extreme either. (Peterson, 2004, 31). The culture scales are illustrated in figure 2.

![Culture Scales](image)

Figure 2. Five culture scales (as adapted from Peterson 2004, 33).
‘Cultural intelligence’ and ‘cultural competence’ are terms often connected with cultural understanding. Just like ‘culture’ these two can be defined in numerous ways. Peterson (2004) suggests the following definition: “Cultural intelligence is the ability to engage in a set of behaviours that uses skills (i.e., language of interpersonal skills) and qualities (e.g., tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility) that are tuned appropriately to the culture-based values and attitudes of the people with whom one interacts”. (Peterson, 2004, 87-89).

2.5 Online business communication

This chapter reviews issues that are relevant when planning web communication for a company. Web page contents, visual design of web pages, multimodality, and the social web environment are all important factors that can affect significantly the customers’ perception about the company. While acknowledging that there are also other issues relating to online business communication, some of them discussed briefly, the focus of this study is limited to website contents, visual design, multimodality and semiotics, as well as the social web environment.

2.5.1 Web page contents and other issues relating to websites

According to MacGovern (2006) web page contents has been a greatly undervalued asset, until recently. When the Web first came to exist, the focus was mainly on technical issues. It later moved to visual design. Only lately people have started to recognize that the right content is what makes a winning web page. (MacGovern, 2006, 3).
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services describes web page contents in their research-based web design and usability guidelines as follows: “Content is the most important part of a website. If the content does not provide the information needed by the users, the website will provide little value no matter how easy it is to use the site.” The guidelines further advice to use familiar words, avoiding jargon to ensure clear understanding. (The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006, 158).

The work of Redish (2007) shows that people come to web pages to satisfy their goals, do tasks and get answers to questions. They come to search for information, in other words, the web page contents. That is why the contents are so important. Users visiting a website may not do much reading prior to visiting the site. Visitors often skim and scan through the page rather than read everything; most users read only enough to find the information they were looking for. (Redish, 2007, 8).

One issue relating to contents and design is accessibility. When creating a web page it is essential to make all contents easily accessible to visitors. The most important contents should be most visible and most frequently accessible. Accessibility can refer to, for example, the contents’ placement in the navigation, on each page, and on the home page. The contents’ vertical placement matters as well. The higher on the web page a content element is set, the more probable it is that visitors will see it. Elements placed far up of a web page also carry greater importance than elements that are placed lower. Horizontal placement is also significant. Important information should be positioned as far left as possible. (Plumley, 2010, 148). Accessibility is closely related to usability.

Usability is a key factor in building a successful web page. Plumley (2010) mentions the easiness of navigating and the logic in a website’s organization as some of the main factors affecting usability (88). Jacob Nielsen, a pioneer in his field, has created different ways of measuring usability. Nielsen’s latest research concerns the relationship between user experience and quality assurance: according to Nielsen usability is a quality measure for design and quality assurance thinking is required to ensure usability. (Nielsen, 2013).

Images, photos and graphics, are important part of web page contents. They draw viewers’ attention effectively away from other elements on the page. Just as important texts, also important images should be placed focally. Image size should be relevant to
its importance, and important images should be larger than the rest of the content. (Plumley, 2010, 149).

Halvarson (2009) notes that sometimes less is more, when it comes to web page contents: smaller contents are user-friendly and easier to manage than larger contents. Smaller websites also cost less to create. Halvarson (2009) mentions basic types of auditing contents: qualitative inventories and quantitative assessments. Periodical auditing helps keeping contents relevant and up to date. (Halvarson, 2009, 7-9).

Plumley (2010) underlines the importance of linking within a web page. He describes linking web page contents to a related content on the website as a "great promotional tool". Linking also increases search engine optimization. Another promotional issue is frequency of the message: people need to be exposed to the same message numerous times before they act. Hence the same message has to be repeated in several places on a web page. Internal ads and banners are a way to promote a special offer or a service on a company's homepage. They draw the potential customers' attention and direct them to other areas of the website. (Plumley, 2010, 211).

Search engine optimization (SEO) deals with aiding search engines rank and analyze web page contents. Plumley (2010) rates search engines as the most important way users find web pages. It takes a while for search engines and users to find a web page: a typical amount of time for SEO to start affecting a new website is approximately three months. Search engines use a number of factors to rank web pages. Because search engines attempt to provide as useful pages for their users as possible, regular updating of web pages and relevant content help to gain better ranking. (Plumley, 2010, 238).

Inbound links to a company's homepage are important to better search engine rankings. Desirable inbound links are on sites that search engines rank high and relate closely to the company's homepage. When a company's homepage has something to offer to another web page it is more likely that the page gets linked. Making a list of important keywords may be helpful; those keywords can be used to search for businesses that are relevant to the company. Services such as Yahoo! Explorer help to search for links between companies. (Plumley, 2010, 213).
Content management systems (CMS) enable users to promote websites. CMS’s offer built-in tools, used to share information about web pages. These tools enable users to send an e-mail to others regarding a website, bookmark web pages, or use social media as the means of spreading the message. (Plumley, 2010, 212). Web pages are often researched by content analyses. Therefore the following section concerns content analysis research.

2.5.2 Content analysis research

A number of theories have been created that are concerned with analysing contents. There are quantitative analyses that give statistical information about contents. Qualitative analyses are appropriate when the emphasis is on qualitative description rather than on numerical information. This section comprises theory about content analyses. The section begins with Berelson’s (1952) comprehensive definition of content analysis.

Berelson (1952) notes, that in the communication process content plays a significant role. Communication content means “the body of meanings through symbols”. Content represents requisites through which a person or a group communicates with another. Communication content is so rich with human experience that it is difficult to describe it with accuracy. Content analysis is a scientific method, developed to describe the various facets of communication content. Content analysis can be summarized as a research technique for systematic, objective and quantitative description of the evident content of communication. (Berelson, 1952, 13-18).

Communication, business, journalism, sociology and psychology have been using content analysis for more than fifty years. Methods of content analysis spring from work in behavioural and social sciences. Today content analyses are often

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1 Different sources use the word content or contents. In this research both forms have been used according to the source and depending on which form suits the context better.
According to Fiske (1990) the purpose of content analysis in semiotics is to give measurable, objective and verifiable statement of the evident content of messages. Content analysis should produce the denotative order of signification. The larger the content is the more accurate the results are. The units in content analysis can be anything as long as they are easy to identify and occur frequently. If these requirements are met content analysis provides statistical results. (Fiske, 1990, 136).

Neuendorf (2002) defines content analysis as a “systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics”. A large number of methods have been created to analyse messages, however it is possible to name a few main types of qualitative content analysis. The main types include: rhetorical analyses, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, semiotic analysis interpretative analyses and critical analysis. (Neuendorf, 2002, 1-7).

Neuendorf (2002) also names different approaches to content analysis. There are descriptive, inferential, psychometric, and predictive content analyses. Although the mentioned approaches can all be well suited depending on the case, it is also possible to use the integrative model which combines different methods or approaches. (Neuendorf, 2002, 52-57).

Discourse analysis has been widely used to analyze public communication. It focuses on evident language, use of words, as well as describing topics to theme and typify presentations on media. Discourse analysis should provide the motives or ideology behind writings. Another method that is potentially suitable for analyzing website contents is semiotic analysis. This method is used to discover latent meanings and deeper messages. Typically to semiotics, signs and codes are in focus of this technique. (Neuendorf, 2002, 5-7).

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) combine Laine’s framework for qualitative content analysis with their own view, thus forming a step-to-step directions for analysing content. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) suggest beginning by deciding what to include in the research material and what to leave out. The material should be then sorted into manageable sets.
according to its theme or type. The last step is writing the actual analysis. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, 91-92).

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) note that a typical problem that occurs when analyzing contents is that when the research material is reviewed, interesting things often appear that were not considered in the beginning of the project. Nevertheless, the surveyed area has to be limited somewhere – it is impossible to include everything. When this area, however, is narrowed down, then everything possible that can be said about it should be said. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, 92).

Content analysis is a procedure that enables analyzing documents systematically and objectively. A document could be anything written such as a book, a letter, a report or a text originating from an interview. The method gives a general summary of the data. (Kyngäs and Vanhanen, 1999, 3). Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) note that the weakness of content analysis is often that it simply provides a way to reorganize the content. The analysis is described in detail but there is no meaningful conclusion. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, 103).

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) separate content analysis from content breakdown. Breakdown of contents means analyzing documents by describing quantitatively, for example, contents of a text, whilst content analysis is concerned with describing contents of a document in writing, qualitatively. It is also possible to continue the content analysis by quantification. Quantifying means that the data that has been described in words is turned into quantitative results. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, 106-107).

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) the purpose of content analysis is to give a clear textual description of a phenomenon. The data is summarized and organized without losing any essential information; the objective is rather to increase the informational value. Inductive and deductive analyses are often discussed in connection with qualitative content analysis: inductive analysis means from individual to general and deductive from general to individual. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, 95-108).

Qualitative analysis can be divided into three categories, distinguished by the analysis, reporting, and how the researched data is obtained. In data-driven analysis the purpose
is to create a theoretical entity out of the researched data. The traditional analysis used by science is theory-driven analysis. Theory-driven analysis is strongly supported by a theory or a model. The analysis begins by introduction of a theory, followed by definition of the researched phenomenon. In theory guiding analysis there are some couplings with theory, however, the analysis is not entirely based on the theory; theory is rather used as an aid. The analyzed units are chosen from the data and earlier theory guides the analysis. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2009, 96-98).

The rest of this section will review issues relating to websites. Several factors other than web page contents also account for the success of a web page. Those factors, as well as how activities on a web page can be measured will discussed briefly. According to Plumley (2010) domain name is an important factor relating to web pages. Domain name should be memorable and relevant to the company. Choosing a reliable and efficient service provider is also well-advised, for instance, for web hosting and e-mail. Plumley (2010) points out that website design comprises a lot more than “visual appeal”. On the top of designing texts and graphics there is, for example, translating the information into HTML and CSS. (Plumley, 2010, 2-50).

Peterson (2005) gives definition for two concepts concerning measuring activities on a web page that often get mixed with each other. Web measurement means “the act of gathering data and parsing it into useful and human-readable form (e.g., reports)” whilst web analytics is “the act of interpreting measurement reports so that organizations can take some action”. Peterson (2005) explains that “hacks” are ways of measuring hits, page views and visits which are not to be confused with each other. (Peterson, 2005, 3).

A hit means an action on a website that could be a page view or file download. A page view is the basic web measurement unit meaning “successful loading of any document containing content that was requested by a website visitor, regardless of the mechanism of delivery or the number and frequency with which said content is requested”. A visit, which is also referred to as a user session, a session or a click stream, is the compilation of pages viewed by the user when browsing a web page. (Peterson, 2005, 5-6).

With the recent massive growth of contents in the Net it has become increasingly challenging to find information, and for content providers to list and classify documents. The need for clustering and classification of the information has created
knowledge discovery in databases, also referred to as data mining. These techniques applied to the Web are known as web mining and to web page contents as web content mining. (Schenker, Kandel and Bunke, 2005, 1-2). Data mining can show patterns and relationships that would go unnoticed by manual analyzing techniques. The information gathered from data mining can be used to customise website contents or, for example, to target particular user categories. (Moeller, Cicaterri, Presser and Wang, 2003, 39).

2.5.3 Visual design

Baldwin and Roberts (2006) apply Shannon and Weaver’s three levels of communication problems (Shannon and Weaver, 1949, 4) to visual communication. The three levels are: technical, semantic and effectiveness. Technical level refers to how effectively the message can be communicated and what system will be used. Semantic level deals with language, symbols and codes. Effectiveness means how well the message worked: did it produce the desired behaviour and what can be done in case it did not. According to Baldwin and Roberts (2006) the most important level for visual designers is the semantic level because they are supposed to convey the intended message without changing it or adding anything to it. (Baldwin and Roberts, 2006, 23-25).

Hashimoto (2003) describes design as “purposeful organization”. He explains purposeful organization as “opposite of chance”: everything is planned, arranged and placed for a reason. Visuals are things that we see. They may consist of one or more different visual elements or “principles of design”: colour, texture, value, volume, line shape and space. Design that is aesthetically pleasing and communicates the desired message depends on clear understanding and efficient application of design principles. Hashimoto (2003) explains design principles as “concepts and ideas that use the elements of design to create visuals”. (Hashimoto, 2003, xvii-xviii).

Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001) identify different methods and perspectives of visual analysis. These different perspectives are content analysis, visual anthropology,
semiotics and iconography, psychoanalytical image analysis, social semiotic visual analysis and ethnomethodology as well as film and television analysis. (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001, 1-4).

Raines, Williamson and Hicks (1995) list instances when visuals should be applied or avoided. Visuals help to clarify or emphasize a point. They also give variety and change focus. For businesses visuals can improve the professional image. Visuals also help to organize information and be concise when needed. There are times when visuals should be avoided. Visuals that are irrelevant, outdated or poor quality should not be used. When considering visual aids one must take in count who the audience is and whether the visuals suit the purpose. As visuals draw a lot of attention, they should not be used when the attention needs to be elsewhere. (Raines, Williamson and Hicks, 1995, 5-6).

Content and form are the two primary concepts of design, content being the subject matter and form the actual created visual. Art, for example, can be created purely for aesthetic pleasure, without a problem that needs to be solved or a subject matter. Nonetheless, most visuals with communication or marketing purposes have some sort of form or a message behind them. (Hashimoto, 2003, xviii). As Plumley (2010) describes it, the website’s visual design needs to communicate what the website is required to do efficiently, whether it is to sell, entertain, convince or inform (50).

Hashimoto (2003) draws attention to a widely accepted theory regarding human perception of visual elements: the Gestalt theory. The theory states that it is natural for humans to search for relationship or order among various elements. Separate parts in images are observed and analyzed individually before being grouped into a larger image. Unity and harmony are often linked with the Gestalt theory: people tend to search for these concepts in visuals. Lack of unity can create chaotic feel. When designing, for example, a text, a layout or a composition, unity is an important aspect to remember. (Hashimoto, 2003, 25-27).

Visual effects can be applied also to text to give different effects. Information is normally grouped into sections to give text the right emphasis. Lines of type can be organized in justified or unjustified way. This thesis gives an example of justified text: additional space is inserted between words and characters in order to make the lines of type start and finish at the same point. Unjustified text can be flushed (left or right) or
centre justified. Books and newspapers use commonly justified or flushed left text, in which lines begin at the same point but have uneven right side of lines. (Pettersson, 2002, 177-179).

Another textual effect is pace. Placing letters close to each other creates an effect of fast pace. Placing letters further from each other creates a text that has to be read at slower pace. The distance between letters is equal to time. (Hashimoto, 2003, 28-30). In general letters should be placed proportionally from each other. Leaving too little or too much space between letters causes reading difficulties (Pettersson, 2002, 168). Figure 3 illustrates how space between letters affects the pace of reading as well as readability.

![BUSINESS COMMUNICATION](image)

Figure 3. Spacing of letters.

Pettersson (2002) highlights structuring texts for better readability. Structured texts with distinct paragraphs, portions or sections are much easier to read than texts with no distinct structure. Short paragraphs are preferred by readers over longer ones. Paragraphs with indents or leaving space between paragraphs indicate the reader that one section has ended and a new one begun. Paragraphing also enables emphasizing certain parts of text. (Pettersson, 2002, 189-190).

Pettersson (2002) defines type as “a letter, a number, or any other character used in printing” whilst font means a full selection of characters of the same style (164-165). When creating textual elements it is important to consider what would be a suitable typography. A simple and straightforward font is usually easy to read and does not distract attention from other elements. Upper and lower cases suit different purposes. Capital letters are often used in titles because they make the reader slow down, thereby
giving titles extra emphasis. (Raines, Williamson and Hicks, 1995, 62). Pettersson (2002) suggests that a change in type style can mark a new section in text or, for example, higher importance. Different type styles should be used in moderation, however, because using multiple fonts can cause confusion. (Pettersson, 2002, 164-165).

According to Pettersson (2002) serifs are terminal strokes that are usually at the top and bottom of Roman type style letterforms. Roman type includes most of the typefaces that are commonly used in present-day printing. The four main types of serifs are called bracketed serif, hairline serif, wedge serif and slab serif. This thesis uses New Roman type that has bracketed serifs. Serifs are there to help identifying different characters and to make reading horizontal text lines easier. It is usually possible to tell whether or not a font has serifs, however making a distinction between the different serifs can be difficult in small text. (Pettersson, 2002, 167).

Typefaces are typically named after those who designed them or after printers that used them first. The first Roman type style was created in 1470 by a French printer Nicholas Jenson. Roman typefaces are, for example, Baskerville, Bookman and Caslon. Sans serif type styles have no serifs on the characters. Sans serif types include, for example, Avant Garde, Futura and Helvetica. Script types, such as Palace Script and Constance emulate modern handwriting by joining individual characters together. Black letter type, such as Rotunda and Textura, imitates old German manuscript handwriting and is difficult to read. (Pettersson, 2002, 167-168).

According to Pettersson (2002) vertical and horizontal lines in visuals create calmness and equilibrium. Vertical lines are especially peaceful, creating the sense of balance. Vertical lines stop the eye movement and symbolize power. Diagonal lines create visual stress and imply the sense of movement. (Pettersson, 2002, 117).

Hashimoto (2003) identifies two different types of shapes: rectilinear and curvilinear. He notes that designs consisting of similar shapes are normally harmonious. Anyhow, it is possible to combine the two shapes in a unified design without creating a sense of chaos. This can be achieved by balancing variety with unity. Other harmonious effects are rhythm and repetition. These two represent unity and can be applied to any design elements. Rhythm and repetition are closely related: rhythm differs from repetition only
by its sense of pacing and degree of elements’ duplication. Ideally visuals should contain some variety and some unity to be both interesting and harmonious. (Hashimoto, 2003, 31-40).

Colour can be used as a major part of a design. Three important components of colour are hue, value and saturation. People often refer to hue when speaking of colours. Hues are created by different wavelengths of light reflecting from objects. Humans are able to see millions of different colours, but distinguish between approximately 10,000 colours. The perception of light is affected by any surrounding colours as well as lighting conditions. (Pettersson, 2002, 124-127).

Value, also known as tone, determines the lightness or darkness of a colour. Saturation, which is also called chroma or colour intensity, means the purity of a colour or the lack of greyness. Pure and bright colours are saturated having no grey in them. When some grey is added colours become less saturated or unsaturated. Saturated colours are viewed as bold, aggressive and attention-grabbing whereas unsaturated colours are often peaceful and soft. (Pettersson, 2002, 124-127).

Describing the relationship between hue, tone and saturation can be very difficult. For practical industrial use different systems with numerical indexes have been created. The Munsell system was brought into use in 1905. Since then it has been modified several times. The system comprises fixed groups of samples with varying components. The value scale goes from black to white with nine degrees of grey in between. The range of hues contains forty variables, represented in a circle. The value and the hue are joined together by maximum of sixteen saturation steps. (Pettersson, 2002, 127).

A focal point is an element with additional emphasis to attract viewers’ attention. One way to highlight a focal point is by contrasting; the focal point is somehow made different than its surroundings. Another way is positioning. A focal point can be created by positioning an element differently from most other elements, thus giving the element additional emphasis. Designs can have one or many focal points. When there are more than one focal point, attention must be paid to how they are organized. If they all command the same amount of attention the design can be confusing. By putting design elements in hierarchical order the viewer’s attention shifts from the most important focal point to the least important one. The idea of visual hierarchy is to organize
elements so that they do not conflict with each other. It is possible for a design to have no focal points. An example of a design without any focal points is pattern. (Hashimoto, 2003, 44-45).

Pettersson (2002) discusses layout of pictures and texts as part of informative pages and spreads. Information layout differs from decoration layout. Its emphasis is on message transmission whereas decoration layout is predominated by aesthetic aspects. A business website is an example of information layout. Its goal is message transmission which is achieved by using pictures and text. The appearance of elements on a page provides strong cues to readers. Therefore visuals that relate to a certain part of a text should be placed in the vicinity of the relevant section. (Pettersson, 2002, 199-200).

Studies have proven statistically that when entering a web page, visitors decide in 6-8 seconds whether they stay on the page. Because of this it is important that the design and layout of web pages are planned carefully. Plumley (2010) claims that the two tasks a website should perform are communicating the purpose of the site and focus visitors’ attention to what is important. Companies’ homepages should communicate quickly the type of business they are in, what services they offer, and if the location is important, where they are located. (Plumley, 2010, 52-53).

A website’s layout acts as a map for visitors. Typically the focus is first drawn to the name of the site, which could be a title or a logo. Next in order is the navigation, followed by the rest of the contents of the page. Plumley (2010) suggests dividing the creation of layout into two parts: laying out the areas of general content and laying out the areas with specific content. This could include choosing the order and spacing for the contents or, for example, what will be in the sidebar. (Plumley, 2010, 52-53).

2.5.4 Multimodality and semiotics

Multimodality tells us what modes are used in communication. To give an example, a piece of advertisement in a magazine often uses text, pictures and color; three different
modes. A text alone does not have the same effect as using multiple modes has. When representing something multimodal approach offers different possibilities. Some things may be best presented in writing while others may require pictures. Sometimes an ensemble of modes is required to best communicate a certain message. (Kress, 2010, 93).

Different modes are used to highlight messages. Kress (2010) defines mode as “a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack and 3D objects are examples of modes used in representation and communication” (Kress, 2010, 1-79). Development in computer-mediated communication and the evolution of the Net have made a wide selection of new multimodal options available to businesses, thus profoundly affecting communication of organizations. (Garzone, 2009, 155).

Computer-mediated environments offer a quick access to integrated media enabling the utilisation of a whole range of multimodal resources: images, sounds, animation and videos. This way a single communicative process can combine numerous different semiotic resources. These computer-generated multimodal products can be potentially accessed by millions of users. Garzone’s (2009) observations clearly signal that multimodality is an integral part of the makeup of websites. (Garzone, 2009, 155).

Social-semiotic theory of multimodality concerns meaning in all possible forms. Meaning springs from social interactions and social environments. Kress (2010) describes “the social” as the generator of meaning in regard with semiotic forms and processes. (Kress, 2010, 54). In semiotics ‘reader’ is viewed as an active player in the communication process. The reader adds their own influence to a text by including their experiences and feelings, thus creating a meaning. (Fiske, 1990, 40).

The aim of semiotics in regard with communication is to form extensively applicable principles. Semiotics is interested in how communication works with language and especially in the structural relationship in semiotic system, culture and reality. (Fiske, 1990, 135). Baldwin and Roberts (2006) mention polysemy in connection with images and semiotics. Polysemy means quite literally “many meanings”. Baldwin and Roberts (2006) note that French writer Roland Barthes went as far as suggesting that all images are polysemous. (Baldwin and Roberts, 2006, 35-36).
Fiske (1990) assumes that all communication contains signs and codes. Signs are acts or artefacts that refer to something else than themselves. Codes are systems that incorporate signs. Codes determine how signs relate to each other. (Fiske, 1990, 1-40). Signs are also the core units of semiotics. All different modes have signs, which are made and used in social interactions. In practice the social-semiotic theory could be realized, for example, when workers of a company are together planning contents for the company’s homepage. In this example the social interaction generates meaning that is then processed into signs that can be seen in different modes on the web page. (Kress, 2010, 54).

Fiske identifies three areas of study in semiotics. The first two are signs and codes. The third area of semiotics is culture, within which the signs and codes are presented in. Culture is dependent on the use of signs and codes for its own existence. Codes have one or many units. A selection is made out of these units, creating a paradigmatic dimension. These units can be integrated by rules or conventions, creating the syntagmatic dimension. (Fiske, 1990, 1-64).

Denotation and connotation are the two levels of meaning that signs have. Denotation means the intended message and connotation means the perceived message. Semiotic research is concerned with the relationship between these two (Baldwin and Roberts, 2006, 36). Fiske (1990) extends the idea of denotation and connotation a little further. He argues that the way something is expressed connotes the feelings of a speaker. The choice of words is many a time the choice of connotation. Reading connotative values as denotative facts is easy. Therefore semiotics is interested in providing the analytical method and state of mind to avoid misinterpretation (Fiske, 1990, 85-87).

Signs have three relations. There is an interior relation, which unites the signifier and signified. There are two exterior relations. A virtual relation links the sign with a specific collection of other signs in order to be set in the discourse. Another exterior relation is an actual one, uniting the sign with other signs in the discourse. The first relation refers to symbolic meaning. The second relation refers to the existence of a sign in a reservoir in which it is distinguished from others by the smallest difference, enough to change the meaning. The third relation, syntagmatic relation, is concerned with a sign
relative to its neighbours: letters placed next to other letters creating words and words combined with other words creating sentences. (Barthes, 1964, 205-206).

Signifying can be also symbolic. Fiske (1990) explains symbol as something that has obtained a new significance through use of the meaning and convention. Certain cars or clothing brands, for instance, are viewed as symbols or wealth and social status. Metaphors also give words a different meaning. Metaphors are figures of speech. By metaphoric transposition another word replaces a more common word. (Fiske, 1990, 91-93). For example, in sentence *a car flew past a group of children*, the word flew has replaced the word drove, to give an impression of fast speed.

Jewitt (2012) claims that multimodal perspective on reception challenges the early communication models that view communication as a linear process, production and consumption. Particularly digital texts, for example, in hyperlinks and visual layering show the work of active reception as remaking. When the message was originally sent from A to B, digital texts provide dynamic stimulus-responsive processes instead. Multimodal research offers tools for describing and analyzing dynamic communication processes. (Jewitt, 2012, 97).

Multimodality approaches the encoding and decoding of messages as a constant semiotic chain. Texts are viewed as continuously being remade. Even the process of reception of signs can itself be seen as making of meaning. Jewitt (2012) argues that multimodality is based on the theoretical assumption that meanings of signs from multimodal semiotic resources are social. All modes in multimodality have been transformed by their historical, social and cultural uses to actualize social functions. In multimodality meaning is orchestrated through the choice of modes. Hence the interaction among the modes is significant for making meaning. (Jewitt, 2012, 98-99).

Fiske (1990) draws attention to the fact that we rarely see pictures without verbal captions. Most of the time photographs are accompanied by a text even if the text simply describes what the picture is (Fiske, 1990, 110). Pettersson (2002) notes, that a picture with no caption or legend is normally too ambiguous. For informational value caption is often needed. Legends are typically placed below the picture they describe so that there is no confusion to which picture a legend refers to. (Pettersson, 2002, 191).
Loenhoff (2012) explains how new interactive technologies work with senses. As communication is based on perception and perception is based on senses, it can be argued that multimodality is concerned with affecting the different senses. Video conferencing, for instance, includes picture and sound. Therefore the multimodal communication process involves sight and hearing. Interactive technologies allow high synchronicity and permit the incorporation of heterogeneous symbolic elements such as image, text and sound production. (Loenhoff, 2012, 19-25).

2.5.5 The social web environment

The social web, which can be also called social media or Web 2.0, is a set of technologies and tools that enable users to share ideas, create and publish content and, for example, recommend things to others. Evans (2010) claims that social business, whether it is B2C (business-to-customer), B2B (business-to-business), profit or non-profit, follows a social feedback cycle. When something is purchased from a business, the feedback cycle begins, moving from expectation to trial, from trial to rating and from rating to sharing. Businesses need to be familiar with this cycle to comprehend how social business functions online. (Evans, 2010, 4-5).

The simplest way to define social media is probably “the media we use to be social”. Social media consists of a large amount of technology and tools that are used to reach out to others. From companies’ point of view social media offers highly practical and modern tools for marketing, sales, public relations and communication. (Safko, 2012, 3-8). Fred Cavazza (2012) points out, that social media has never been as important as it is now. He goes as far as referring to social media as the whole Web. The Web is an increasingly social environment and it is hard if not impossible to find websites that are not social. (Cavazza, 2012).

The social web environment can also be defined as three complementary and interconnected elements: communication media, content and social interaction. Communication media means the virtual infrastructure that allows the content and
social interaction to exist simultaneously in the virtual space. Content is the essence that brings users to a site in the first place. Social interaction is the direct connection amongst users through a site, such as Facebook. (Dann and Dann, 2011, 3459).

Plumley (2010) claims, that if e-mail and search engines are the first two cornerstones of web marketing and promotion, then social media is the third one. Plumley (2010) identifies four categories in social media that are useful for marketing purposes: social networking, social book marking and news, media sharing and social content. Figure 4 lists the social media types. Nonetheless, there are also hundreds of other social media sites and new ones are being created all the time. (Plumley, 2010, 205).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| Social networking           | Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn | • Sites function as large communities  
• Smaller communities can be created by the users  
• Content sharing, conversations and games |
| Social bookmarking and news | StumbleUpon, Delicious, Digg | • Sites direct users to interesting news or useful sites  
• Possibility to rank the sites by voting or promoting |
| Media sharing               | Flickr, YouTube, Slideshare | • Sites enable users to post, for example, pictures or videos for others to view  
• Possibility to comment or rate the shared media |
| Social content              | Yahoo! Answers, Wikipedia, Yelp, Ehow | • Visitors can pose questions as well as answer and rate them  
• New pages are built and edited by users |

Figure 4. Social media types (as adapted from Plumley, 2010, 205).
Social media has caused a fundamental shift in power. Communication has shifted from pontification to two-way communication in which the corporate messages are no longer controlled by businesses. Now communication is something that all stakeholders participate in. Instead of selling, the companies have to listen first, understand, and speak last. (Safko, 2012, 5-6).

Safko (2012) notes that in social media word of mouth spreads at immense speed. Positive and negative experiences are rapidly shared with others, especially the negative ones. A single message can reach hundreds, thousands or even millions of users when shared in social media. A satisfied customer shares their experiences with 9-12 people, while an angry customer can tell up to 20 people about their negative experiences. (Safko, 2012, 8-9).

Although social media may seem like it is rather a tool for companies that mainly sell B2C, it could also play essential role for companies with business customers. B2B companies often have private information with their customers such as pricing and customer support. Accordingly a password-protected website with direct SMS text messaging could be a solution that benefits both company and its customers. (Safko, 2012, 9).

Social media not only presents a channel for communicating with external customers but it can also be used as a tool when communicating with internal customers – the employees. Workers want to feel that they are connected to the organization they work for. Social media and services like Yammer and Jott as well as Twitter when using private messaging, provide a pragmatic way to communicate and share content online with employees. (Safko, 2012, 9).

Social media is an environment in which everyone can participate, but it does not necessarily mean that everyone will. There are those that are happy to be part of the audience rather than the ones actively creating new content. For being successful also businesses need to respect their audience. Social media is the Internet’s version of audience participation – there are individuals that choose not to be on-stage performers or enthusiastic audience participants, they simply want to sit back and listen. (Dann and Dann, 2011, 347).
Plumley (2010) points out that integrating social media sites with the company's homepage is advisable. This can be done, for instance, by linking the homepage with social media postings or posting social media feeds on the homepage. A way to save time when updating the company's homepage and social media account is to use a content management system (Plumley, 2010, 209-210).

RSS, Really Simple Syndication (originally Rich Site Summary) is an XML-based data format on websites such as news pages and blogs. RSS allows users to sign up for automatic notifications whenever there is an update on the site. Users sign up for RSS feeds by clicking an RSS button, located at the site. There are various RSS formats: RSS 0.91, RSS 0.92, RSS 1.0 and RSS 2.0. The multiplicity of formats has created some issues with incompatibility. (Safko, 2012, 13 and Anderson, 2007, 11).

Businesses can use the social web, for instance, as a channel for launching new brands, building and strengthening relationships with customers, increasing revenues from existing customers and establishing new markets. Since mobile phones are becoming the number one platform for social media, also mobile commerce is becoming increasingly significant. (Wollan, Smith and Zhou, 2010, xiv-9).

From the companies’ point of view social media also involves certain challenges. Businesses need to be prepared for growing demand and able to answer the customers’ needs, while continuing to build new customer relationships. Active presence in social media requires time and resources. Social media has heightened consumer activism, which is both an opportunity and a threat. Customers communicate and spread information about their experiences with the company – in good and in bad. (Wollan, Smith and Zhou, 2010, 3-11).

Since there is no regulation in social media its content does not have to be true. The impact of social media cannot be reversed or stopped, even by legal action. The content can spread virally when published. Social media also blurs the traditional economic, geographic and demographic boundaries. Business in social media is unpredictable: instead of long reoccurring cycles, companies need to be able to make quick decisions about their strategies. (Wollan, Smith and Zhou, 2010, 5).
Customers can give valuable information to companies. At any rate, in social media there are sometimes anonymous and possibly negative comments. Customers are both recipients and publishers of the content, and it is important to consider who the anonymous comments could be from. Negative feedback could come from, for example, a competitor or an ex-employee. The trend in the Web is going from anonymity towards identity because people usually want to be recognized. Nevertheless, nameless comments appear from time to time and verifying identities can be difficult. While it is advisable to maintain unemotional and professional approach when responding to anonymous comments, there are analytical tools that help when sorting through any identity issues. (Evans, 2010, 8-9).

Evans (2010) suggests that for effective social business and use of social technology companies should exercise structured engagement. Structured engagement involves four steps: consumption, curation, creation and collaboration. Consumption means reading, watching, listening to or downloading digital content. Consumption is essential so that the next steps can happen in the first place. Curation means commenting on, sorting, filtering, reviewing or describing the content in some other way. Curation is what makes the content useful for others. For example, online book reviews often motivate others to buy books. Curation is the first step when a participant in social media is actually creating something. (Evans, 2010, 15-17).

The third step, creation, refers to content creation. Since creating content requires more effort than curation, it is important that the company provides the means for sharing content created by the participants. For instance, if there is a need to download photos, adding them should be made easy and upload sizes sufficient. Companies’ reputation is partly constructed by the quality and quantity of user-created content, therefore appropriate technology is needed. (Evans, 2010, 18).

If the three previous steps have been individual activities, collaboration is the opposite. Collaboration is a strong and comprehensive social action, natural teamwork between members of a community. Ideally collaboration amongst customers and employees would give a company competitive advantage. The four steps, engagement process, help providing a collaborative customer base. By assisting readers become creators, and
creators collaborators, customers are more inclined to engage in the social feedback process (trial, rating and sharing). (Evans, 2010, 4-20).

Dann and Dann (2011) suggest social media planning process for companies. The process consists of five steps or core questions that businesses should consider prior to creating a profile or a page in the social web. The steps are:

1. Objectives. What does the company want to achieve?
2. Tactics, positioning, timeframes and budgets. How can the objectives be achieved?
3. Market research, market feedback, frontline staff and promotional plans. How is the company communicating?
4. Target market and social media sites. Where does the conversation take place?
5. Metrics, knowledge management and decision making. What are the impacts?

The first step, objectives, includes cost-orientated objectives, sales-orientated objectives, behavioural change objectives, information dissemination objectives, promotional objectives and entertainment-oriented objectives. The second step involves planning and adhering tactics, timeframes and budgets to reach the set objectives. The third step is a benchmarking process encouraging a critical review of the current state of the company’s communications. (Dann and Dann, 2011, 348-350).

The fourth step shifts focus from internal operations into exploring the world of social media. Two approaches to consider are where in social media the potential customers are and whether a social media site is suitable for the company’s purposes. The final step is to consider the overall impact: what will happen after the company enters the social web? (Dann and Dann, 2011, 348-363).

Dann and Dann (2011) argue that Facebook has four functional levels of operation. Straight consumption refers to classic Facebook consumption: chatting, playing games and generally interacting with other users. The next level, meta collection, means
sorting out other social media activity. Facebook, for instance, is used as a platform to find Youtube videos, blogs or pictures on Flickr. The third level, *user-generated content*, means uploads by users, such as video and photo uploads as well as lower end of Facebook Pages and Groups. The last level, which is important to businesses, is *commercial content*. Commercial content can be found in Advertising, Applications, Developer Communities, as well as Facebook Pages and Groups. (Dann and Dann, 2011, 368).

Mishra (2012) blogs about collaborative social innovation. The idea is that people and organizations would together design innovative and sustainable solutions for shared value. These types of initiatives with shared purposes could focus in areas such as environment, energy, health, education and learning. Mishra attributes the increase in collaborative social innovations to three trends. Firstly, organizations are beginning to realize the significance of shared value created by social innovation solutions involving multiple stakeholders. Secondly, because of the Net organizations that are accustomed to creating large high-profile competitions are now reaching across the globe for new innovations. Thirdly, today social networks connect young innovative people and present their work, which inspires others to follow their suit. (Mishra, 2012).

In the following section, the central aspects of theoretical framework are synthesized to serve the analysis.

**2.6 Synthesis of theoretical framework**

Communication media includes, for example, writing, pictures, graphics and voice. Communication can be oral, written, formal or informal. Communication can take place within organization or outside organization. Elements of business communication, as explained by various authors, are summarised in Appendix 1. The element that was mentioned most frequently (by five authors) was communication inside organization. Communication outside organization, linear communication process as well as written, oral and formal communication, were all mentioned by three authors. The least
mentioned elements were informal communication and semiotics (mentioned by two authors).

Communication can be used for instruction, information, integration, evaluation, orientation, and direction as well as for teaching, influencing, and image projecting. Barriers to communication such as language barriers and perceptual barriers were also discussed. Communication can be studied, for example, by discourse analysis, which is concerned with conversations and dialogs of communication. Another option is to use contents analysis. Business communication serves marketing strategy by planning rather than execution. Marketing is often connected with the four P's: product, price, place and promotion.

Intercultural communication which can also be called cross-cultural communication means communication between different cultures. Intercultural communication holds different challenges, such as language barriers, cultural barriers, physical barriers and the ever-changing nature of cultures.

Web page and its contents are the central substructure for online business communication. Ways of analysing contents were introduced in section 2.5.2. Content management systems can help to organize and manage website contents. While maintaining contents as the focal point, also a few other relevant issues were introduced, such as domain name, web page measurement and web mining. Content was defined as the nucleus of human experience and communication (Berelson, 1952, 13-18). The term content analysis can be applied in many things, for instance, in quantitative analysis.

The central concepts of website’s visual facade and layout were presented in section 2.5.3 about visual design. Colours, images, organization of the website elements, textual effects and focal points all account for the effect that visual design has on viewers.

Important contents on a company’s homepage include, for example, texts holding core information and representing the company’s services and values. Apart from having the relevant contents, it is important that the contents are easily accessible and usable. Web users go to websites to search for information, and if the content does not satisfy their needs they will look for it elsewhere.
Multimodality tells us about the different modes that are used in communication. Modes include, for example, images, text and audio. Different modes are used to emphasize messages. Computerized integrated media enables us to utilise a large variety of multimodal resources. Nowadays multimodality is an essential part of the makeup of websites.

Semiotics researches texts; how communication works with language, culture and reality. Semiotics includes three areas of study: signs, codes and culture. Signs are the core units of semiotics. Codes are systems in which signs are incorporated. Codes determine how signs relate to each other.

Overall multimodality challenges the early communication models. It can be argued that digital texts and visual layering turn reception into remaking, instead of viewing communication as a linear model. In multimodality encoding and decoding of messages become a continuous semiotic chain. Multimodal approach sees meaning as the sum of a selection of modes. It can be also argued that multimodality is based on affecting the different senses. In terms to create a clear message, multimodality can be a requirement. A picture without any caption, for instance, may not be enough to communicate the full message to viewers.

Social media has shifted the power from pontification into two-way communication. Messages are no longer coming only from businesses, but can be potentially created by anyone. In social media the word of mouth can spread virally: from a single user to thousands or even millions of users. Businesses need to acknowledge that although positive messages can spread out, it is especially the negative experiences that are often shared online. Apart from using social media to communicate with customers, businesses can use social media to communicate with employees.

Even though social media offers companies advantages, there are also certain disadvantages. Being active in social media requires investing in time and resources. The growing demand must be matched by meeting the customers' needs. Once the content is added into social media it can spread virally and the effects cannot be stopped or reversed.
To succeed in social business, companies can exercise structured engagement. This comprises four steps: consumption, curation, creation and collaboration. Collaborative social innovation involves people and organizations getting together to design innovative and sustainable solutions for shared value. Areas that could benefit from these innovations are, for example, environment, energy, health, and education to name a few.
3 Data and methodology

The general aim of this study is to increase understanding of online business communication and to find out the relevant issues for companies operating on international markets. The research questions are: What are Profin’s aims in business communication? What are Profin’s current business communication activities? How could Profin’s homepage be improved? How could Profin benefit from participating in social media? Various types of data used in the research support each other, which increases the credibility of the study. To conduct the study, the case study approach was applied.

3.1 Case study

Case study research (CSR) is an inquiry focusing on understanding, describing, predicting or controlling a unit, which could be, for example, a process, an organization, a person or an industry. (Woodside, 2010, 1). Gillham (2010) defines case as a unit of human activity immersed in real world, which can be understood or studied in context. Case can be an individual or a group. Case amalgamates with its context: therefore precise boundaries can be difficult to draw. (Gillham, 2010, 1).

Case study research is a pertinent form of social science inquiry. The method can be applied when the aim is to broadly define the research topics, to cover complex or contextual multivariate circumstances, or to rely on various sources of evidence. It is possible to conduct case studies alone or in combination with other research methods such as surveys, experiments, quantitative models for analyzing archived methods, qualitative research methods and methods dealing with historical documents. (Yin, 2003, xi).
Case study aims to answer specific research questions by searching a range of different types of evidence. Multiple sources of evidence are usually required - a single source rarely suffices on its own. (Gillham, 2010, 1-2). The central feature of case study research is to focus on research issues, theory and/or empirical inquiry of the studied phenomenon (Woodside, 2010, 2). Case studies are conducted in various topics such as business and organizational issues, international affairs, education, child and youth development as well as technology development. Case study research has also been a popular method when studying business and public administration or conducting a research for use in public policy. (Yin, 2003, xi).

One of the most significant strategies for completing a case study successfully is reliance on theoretical concepts to guide data collection and design of the research. Theoretical concepts can be useful when conducting exploratory, descriptive or explanatory case studies. (Yin, 2003, 3). Case studies can be qualitative or quantitative. Quantitative methods involve counting and measuring, whereas qualitative methods are intrinsically descriptive and inferential. (Gillham, 2010, 9-10).

This research is conducted by using the qualitative method. The aim is to describe Profin’s business communication activities and answer a set of research questions. Some features of quantitative methods are also applied by including, for instance, statistical information about Profin’s Youtube videos. It can be argued that this research is a typical case study since it focuses on business and organizational issues, and includes theory as well as various types of empirical material.

3.2 The case of Profin environment

Profin Oy is a Finnish company that manufactures windows, doors and sliding doors with wooden frames. Profin’s history dates back more than 35 years. When the company was first initiated it did business under a different name (Kynkään Puu ja Puutarha Ky). Over the years Profin’s business has expanded and the product range grown. In any event, the company has maintained the same working methods as years
before and it is still run by the same family as 35 years ago, although the generation has changed. The latest generation change took place in April 2012. (Haapala, 2012b).

Aforementioned issues comprise Profin’s strengths and core values that are communicated to its customers: a family-owned northern Finnish business, long traditions, expertise, unique working methods as well as Nordic and Swiss design and quality. Profin uses a special Japanese masame sawing method in all products. Since 1989 Profin has been operating also outside Finland. It has significant markets in Japan, Russia and Scandinavia. According to Profin’s CEO, the starting point for all operations is cooperation and companionship with stakeholders such as customers and suppliers. By this cooperation Profin has been able to exploit all ideas for development that come from its clients. (Haapala, 2012b).

Profin’s management must ensure that the communication flows freely amongst the company. The management also needs to evaluate what information should be shared with the employees. Strategy days are an assembly for the management, held to plan future together, brainstorm ideas and consider how to approach different challenges. Small meetings are held frequently by different work teams. Development discussions with the employees and the management as well as training are also part of internal communication. (Kanerva, 2012).

Profin’s management has meetings with subcontractors approximately once or twice a year. The meetings are held to assess the ongoing collaboration and plan how it could be developed. Thoughts and feelings of both parties will be listened and responded to. It is also possible to distribute some part of an internal magazine, ‘Profin Insight’ to the subcontractors. (Kanerva, 2012).

Profin Oy has been co-operating closely with log house industry for a long time. This has not required investing in communication but has rather been strategic collaboration in product design. The company has begun to seek new markets in a larger customer base, mainly in construction industry but also in premium level consumer customers. In relation to this a large research has been conducted in summer 2012, dealing with different aspects of communication. (Kanerva, 2012).
3.2 Data collection and research process

This chapter focuses on the data used in the analysis. Primary data includes information concerning Profin, and comparative data information used for comparative purposes.

The primary data consists of:

- Haapala, M. (2013) e-mail communication consisting of 12 e-mails. (in text E1).
- Haapala, M. A face-to-face interview. 27 May 2013 (in text H3).

Profin has granted the right to citation for all data.
Comparative data used in the research:

Document analysis is focused on Profin’s sales and marketing communication strategy for 2012 (PS) and a release about Profin’s 35 years of history (H1). The history draws a clear picture of Profin’s background, values and customers. The strategy plan gives valuable insight about Profin’s communication, sales targets and future plans. Because of the comprehensive written data, less pressure was put towards the interview.

Primary data includes a dialog-like e-mail communication with Profin’s CEO. The e-mails date between December 13th, 2012 and May 27th, 2013 including altogether 12 e-mails that have been studied perceptively. The e-mail communication proved to be an essential way of staying in touch with Profin during the research process. E-mails included mainly questions about Profin's communication and arranging the timetables concerning the research. (E1).

A face-to-face interview with Profin’s CEO was held on May 27th, 2013. The interview, which lasted 27 minutes and 17 seconds, produced eight pages of transcribed text. The interview comprised 14 questions (Appendix 2), based on the different areas of business communication mentioned chapter 2. The face-to-face interview produced new information and helped clarifying issues regarding Profin's communication. The CEO mentioned that Profin intends to improve the current homepage. Therefore critique and analysis of the site’s contents are much needed. The interview was analysed by using theory guiding qualitative content analysis. (H3).

A significant research method is content analysis (section 4.2.1), which takes guidance from theories described in section 2.5.2. The analysis is conducted on Profin’s homepage (PH), which acts as the central data. The approach to content analysis is combination of descriptive and inferential content analysis, conducted on all content of the studied website. This research uses theory guiding analysis: the analysis is guided by theory but not entirely defined by it.

In addition to Profin's homepage the research includes also other web based data sources about Profin: four promotional videos in Youtube (Y1, Y2, Y3 and Y4). Videos are analysed by their contents, visuals, music, presenters and views. The videos represent Profin as a company and introduce its products to viewers. Detailed information about the videos is in chapter 4.5.
Some data that is not directly related to Profin has also been included in the research. This comparative data contains websites and social media pages of other window and door manufacturers, both Finnish and international. A blog named Hemma hos Oja (H4) has been included in the data because Profin has been mentioned in the blog.

The Finnish companies chosen for comparison are Pihla, including its home page (P1), Facebook profile (P2), and a Youtube video (P3), Skaala with Youtube videos (S1 and S2) as well as Tiivi with a Youtube video (T1). Different types of comparative data sources make benchmarking analysis possible and ensure credible results.
4 Analysis and results: Profin’s profile in business communication

Important issues of online business communication were discussed in the theoretical framework (chapter 2). Business communication was reviewed in connection with marketing, intercultural communication and web communication including the social web environment. The issues are now looked at in regard with company Profin.

This chapter will take a closer look at Profin’s aims and activities of business communication. The chapter includes also a discussion concerning Profin’s communication tools, a contents analysis of Profin’s homepage, problems on homepage, stakeholders in communication, barriers to communication and presence in social media.

The research questions were: What are Profin’s aims in business communication? What are Profin’s current business communication activities? How could Profin's homepage be improved? How could Profin benefit from participating in social media?

4.1 Profin’s aims and activities of business communication

Competition in the trade increases all the time, especially in international trade. Finns are no longer doing business in Finland by themselves: foreign businesses, such as Asian companies, have also entered our domestic markets. The growing competition makes identifying one's strengths and choosing the right operating channels even more important than previously. It is also necessary to differentiate further than before. To strive, a company must be aware of what is happening in the market and turn challenges into opportunities. (H3).

Profin has certain objectives regarding its image building. Image building does not happen fast. Profin has been in business for nearly 36 years. The way things are done, the products, pricing and services have built a foundation for the company’s image.
People know that Profin makes high quality products. Profin's products are viewed valuable and upscale. The image that Profin strives for is to be an innovator and a forerunner. (H3).

Profin’s communication includes the fundamental elements of business communication. Formal, written, and oral communication, are central elements in Profin’s communication. The different functions of communication, both internal and external that were identified in chapter 2.2, all play part in Profin’s communication. The functions were: instruction, integration, informing, evaluation, directive, teaching, influencing, image projecting and orientation. (Bisen, 2009, 4).

Profin's objective is to arrange small functions and events at Profin's premises in Pudasjärvi, where customers can view Profin's products and witness the production process. Well established relationships with clients enable organizing sparring groups for brainstorming ideas and gaining information about customers' desires and opinions. (PS). Profin aims to influence its customers and stakeholders through communication. The goal is to increase Profin’s recognisability in terms to meet the company’s growth target. Communication must support the company’s image of high quality and being a pioneer in its field. (E1).

Profin's commercial goal is continuous growth. The budget has been the same for some time now: 5,000,000€. Different things contribute towards reaching the set sales objectives. For instance, the focus will be increasingly on national trade, while keeping international trade strongly alongside. Communication has a significant role in reaching the targets. How customers and other stakeholders view Profin matters. An aim relating to Profin's homepage is that the page should work as an attention-grabber. It should reflect the warm, authentic materials that Profin uses: different types of wood, rather than aluminum. The homepage should represent modern look and new architecture. (H3).

Profin’s objectives include developing into even more significant Finnish actor in the international construction trade. This can be achieved through strategic choices. Profin’s business strategy emphasizes streamlining its operations to grow the production volume. In future there will be no longer direct connections with individual clients. Instead, all sales will be managed through selected retailers. Alongside with the changes in the
business strategy, Profin will maintain marketing to support its sales. In terms to achieve this, electronic channels and visual narration will be used. (PS and H1).

Profin’s strategy incorporates heightening its B2B sales and investing in an affiliate program as well as marketing and gaining new customers. Significance of the Finnish markets will also augment in near future. For a few years one of Profin’s strategic moves has been narrowing down its product range. An innovative 5 in 1 concept is a new sliding door product, designed to open new markets. Other objectives include increasing turnover and profitability. Growing markets exist, for example, in Scandinavia and Russia, as well as Germany which is tightening its regulations concerning energy efficiency of houses. (H1).

The most important thing in selling is meeting customers face-to-face. Profin has introduced its affiliate program to support collaboration, for added value and customers’ savings in total costs. The program can be customized to suit each customer and its length can vary between 1 to 3 years. Profin’s extranet pages, linked with Profin’s homepage, will be also launched to support the program. Profin’s clients participating in the affiliate program will be able to find documents such as brochures and pricing in the extranet. (PS).

Profin strives to differentiate its products and solutions. Profin’s arguments include products’ innovativeness and overall efficiency, saved square meters, easy installation, environmentally friendly products, negative carbon footprint, as well as the affiliate program. Alongside the main product ranges, Profin also manufactures customized products. The products are made according to high standards from premium raw materials. Profin aspires to deliver its products fast nationwide, and help with installation when needed. (PS).

At the moment Profin's collection is being built. The company’s new collection should be launched after summer 2013. The goal is to renew the homepage at the same time. Communications are going to be sharpened and modernized. In the last few years the only changes on the homepage have been updating some pictures and the general look of the site. Soon it is also time to update the content of the homepage. The aim is that the homepage will serve all kinds of customers from individual consumers to professional builders and architects. (H3).
Understanding the difference between business communication and marketing is important, for instance, when planning sales strategies (Samuels, 2013). Social media planning process (Dann and Dann, 2011, 348-363) is an example of an activity involving both communication and marketing. If Profin decided to pursue this process it would need to consider issues relating to both activities.

Instructive function is needed, for example, when giving instructions to employees about working methods, or giving customers instructions about product installation. Communication is also used for teaching. At Profin this function is used for training and educating workers. Employees’ orientation is closely related to instructive and teaching functions. Profin orientates its employees from factory workers to sales representatives and designers so that all employees are familiar with practices, organization culture, policies and programs. (Bisen, 2009, 4).

The integrative function is used, for instance, when showing Profin’s employees footage of the company’s products to create cohesion. A survey about the employees’ job satisfaction and Profin’s reward program are also integrative functions. When Profin’s management issues directions for employees, communication’s directive function is used. Just like any other company, also Profin benefits from issuing clear directions; this leads to better performance by the staff. (Bisen, 2009, 4).

Communication’s informative function is probably the most common communicative function and Profin is no exception. Informative function occurs in daily internal and external communication, for example, when a manager sends employees e-mails, a customer visits Profin’s homepage or a staff meeting is held. Since communication’s evaluative function is used when giving feedback, also this function is an essential part of business communication. Evaluative function is used, for instance, when Profin’s employees are given feedback about their work, or when a customer sends feedback by e-mail about their experiences regarding products or customer service. (Bisen, 2009, 4).

One function of communication is image building. Examples of Profin’s image building are Youtube videos, showing the production process of windows and sliding doors from the selection of raw materials to the finished products. Image building also takes place, for instance, in expositions, sparring sessions and brochures promoting Profin’s values, goals and progress. Communication’s influencing function is used for example in
Profin’s public relations. All presence in media is also part of influencing and persuading the audience. Marketing and advertising, both conducted through communication, also influence the audience. (Bisen, 2009, 4).

Profin uses online communication to find new customers. After finding a potential customer there are four options. The customer can be contacted by e-mail. Another possibility is to contact the customer by phone. The third possibility is to send teaser material. The last option is meeting the customer in person. In the meeting customers will be given information about Profin’s products. (PS).

Profin aims to provide the best product solutions that can be found on the market. Profin seeks to have a little more to offer to the market than competitors have and operate on premium level without being viewed too expensive. Image building happens through every day communication. Image building is about choices. One example is Profin's Youtube video in Finnish Profin ulkoliukuovet vaativaan makuun (Profin exterior sliding doors for exclusive taste) (Y4).

Laura Ruohola was chosen to represent Profin on the video. Ruohola is a presenter that has previously appeared in design programs. Ruohola was chosen over another perhaps more famous designer, because it was decided that Ruohola was more credible and would reflect Profin's image better. (H3). Profin’s Youtube video with Laura Ruohola is illustrated in figure 5.
4.2 Communication tools

There are a number of communication tools that Profin uses. Internet plays an increasingly important role in Profin’s communication strategy. Customers’ offer requests as well as a large part of customer contacts are managed by e-mail, a tool that operates through the Net. Another example of valuable online activity is presence on clients’ and associates’ websites. Significant online media include videos, cases and testimonials: they enhance the company’s credibility. A central communication tool is Profin’s homepage. (PS and H3).

An electronic newsletter is delivered by e-mail four times a year for Profin's industrial clients. The newsletter includes maximum of two pieces of news per letter. There is one

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2 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtUAYPvnSgY
general news item regarding Profin as well as a case for industrial builders and the companies’ executive level. The electronic letters are complemented by Profin Magazine, a customer publication which is printed twice a year. The A4 publication can range from 4 to 8 pages and it is posted to the all customers that are in Profin's database. (PS).

To obtain the interest of potential industrial clients, Profin collaborates with the press. Financial publications, trade magazines and customer gazettes of large corporations are important channels for distributing information. In addition to the press Profin seeks to get the attention of the TV and the radio. By continuous production of teaser stories Profin attempts to obtain the curiosity of the media on both regional and national levels as well as a selection of international media. (PS).

The purpose of Profin's case videos is to enliven and concretize presentations. Video clips will be chosen according to the interests of the target group. Profin will continue making videos in future because they are practical tools that demonstrate Profin's products to viewers. Still pictures are also part of presentation materials. In the end of client meetings clients will be given product brochures. It is also possible to provide clients the presentation materials in an electronic format (PDF) if requested. (PS and H3).

Content management systems (CMS) offer built-in tools that are used, for example, to update information, promote websites, share information about websites, bookmark websites and send messages (Plumley, 2010, 212). Profin uses a CMS to organize and update its selling tools data bank. The data in the bank includes pictures, videos, presentations and other documents and material. The CMS is operated by chosen personnel to ensure that all information is organized and up to date. Profin's sales and customer service processes are managed by selling tools data bank which is updated with the CMS. (PS).

For project managers and other persons responsible for ventures, there is a 3D design tool which helps to visualize how different products function. Presentations can be given by using laptops or tablets depending on the size of the audience. All presentations, videos and product documents, stored in the CMS are downloaded on
Profin's computers. (PS). The tool has proven to be popular among visitors on Profin's homepage. (H3).

It is important that the stakeholder information is up to date. The information should contain the name of the person, title, company name, postal address, e-mail address and a phone number. The information is saved in the same customer relationship management (CRM) system that is used by the sales department when contacting customers or whenever the contact details require updating. (PS).

Communication inside the organization is in key position when building a strong organization. Profin’s management is mainly responsible for the internal communication. Every three months there is a review meeting, lead by the manager. There is also an internal magazine ‘Profin Insight’, delivered every three months, to inform the staff about Profin’s current issues, the market and future development plans. Video clips are shown to the staff to inform them about products and show the results of their work. A survey about the employees’ job satisfaction is collected from time to time. There is also a reward program: every year the management rewards a chosen employee of the year. (PS).

An important tool for search engine advertising is Google, from which Profin purchases internet visibility. When certain search words are entered in Google, a link to Profin’s homepage appears. Profin also uses news engine and web monitor services, provided by Koodiiviidakko. Every morning these services send an e-mail that includes information about news and blogs in which Profin has been mentioned. Services help staying up to date and monitoring the company's online visibility and. (H3).

Profin’s extranet pages will be launched in near future. The pages offer a tool for communication between Profin and its customers participating in the affiliate program. Extranet pages are not public: a password is needed to access them. The pages offer customers different documents concerning the affiliate program such as pricing, pictures, videos and electronic brochures. Profin uses occasionally Skype for video conferencing. Even though Skype is not integrated with the homepage, Profin’s Russian contact’s Skype contact details can be found on the homepage. In future the homepage will have additional tools to meet the needs of designers and accounting managers. (PS). The following section focuses on a central communication tool: Profin's homepage.
4.2.1 Profin’s homepage: contents analysis

Profin’s homepage is available in Finnish, English and Russian, although the English and Russian pages are slightly narrower than the Finnish counterpart. There is also an electronic brochure in Japanese. This research concerns Profin’s English homepage. The pages in other languages may be mentioned for comparative purposes, however, they are not fully included in the study and the analysis is done purely from the point of view of an English speaking person visiting Profin’s homepage.

![Profin's homepage](image)

Figure 6. Profin's homepage.  

The main heading on Profin’s homepage is the company’s trademark (figure 6). Three small flags in the top right corner of the page show that the page is also available in Finnish and Russian. Under the trademark there are nine headings: ‘Home’, ‘Products’, ‘Production’, ‘Design’, ‘Projects’, ‘Value Estates’ and ‘Restoration’, ‘Gallery’, ‘Services’ and ‘Profin Oy’. Under each heading there are altogether 23 subheadings

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3 http://www.profin.fi/?lang=en
(figure 7). Under each of these headings there are between 0 to 6 options to choose from, altogether 23 subheadings. These links direct visitors to more specific parts of the website. By clicking ‘Home’ a visitor can return to the main page. Profin’s homepage is illustrated in figure 6.

Figure 7. The headings on Profin’s English homepage.

Profin’s home page contains information in four languages: Finnish, English, Russian and Japanese. The English and the Russian pages offer nearly the same information as the Finnish page does, however some parts of the English and Russian pages such as current news and Profin 3D design tool have not been translated, and are only available in Finnish. Information that is available in Japanese is not a website but an electronic brochure featuring Profin’s products. The contents of Profin’s English homepage are illustrated in figures 6 and 7.
The focal point on the main page is a large horizontal slideshow. The slideshow, which is bigger than any other element on the page, includes five pictures that change automatically every few seconds, or can be changed by visitors by clicking arrows in the pictures. Pictures show Profin's products in different settings: living rooms, glazed-in terraces, as well as sliding doors opening to porches and balconies. Light is a highly visible element in the pictures.

Another focal point on the page is the 3D design tool. The tool enables visitors visualize how products can potentially be used. Although the design tool is smaller than the slideshow it is still a fairly visible element. The tool is situated in the centre of the page right underneath the slideshow. Smaller focal points on the page are Profin's trademark that acts as the heading, links to other parts of the pages, promotional video as well as a list of Profin's collaborative partners.

‘Products’ page presents the products: sliding doors, windows and front doors. Five links on the right side of this page lead to more specific products: Panorama sliding doors, exterior doors, Panorama folding doors, windows and slat shutters. Under these links again, more detailed options are provided, such as pictures, technical details, glazing options and RT-cards. Figure 8 illustrates view with Panorama sliding doors on the ‘Products’ page.
Figure 8. Panorama sliding doors⁴.

‘Production’ page has links to pages concerning ‘Surface treatment’, ‘Wood as a material’, ‘Carbon footprint, ‘Materials’, ‘The way into a product’, ‘Glass facts’ and ‘CE marking’. For some reason, the main page under ‘Production’ has the information in Finnish. The same information can be found in English under a link ‘The way into a product’. The last link on the page, ‘CE marking’, which refers to products’ requirements based on EU directives, is only available in Finnish and Russian.

There are no further links to other pages on the ‘Design’ page. The page tells visitors that the company’s ideology is “based on the design and manufacturing of timeless

products”. There are two different design options for the shapes of the products’ wooden parts: Clear design and Soft design. Clear design, which represents modernity, has sharp corners. In Soft design, which represents nature and comfort, the corners are round.

The ‘Projects’ page tells visitors about Profin's 5 in 1 Building System. 5 in 1 is a new solution for constructing new or restoring old. The system consists of five elements including a sliding door, a solid window, an openable window, a balcony door, and a wall element of the customer’s choice. The page features a large picture of the product. There are no further links on the page.

Page about ‘Value estates and restauration’ has no further links to other pages. On this page a lengthy text, written by Profin's founder Martti Haapala, tells visitors about restauration projects in which Profin's products have been used. The page displays pictures of earlier projects, such as old buildings in Helsinki and Moscow. The page sketches Profin's expertise, history and combining new and old.

‘Gallery’ page has three different functions. The main page is the actual gallery, with forty photos of finished products in different settings. The other two links on the page include ‘Profin brochure’ and ‘Media’. When clicking on ‘Profin brochure’, an electronic brochure opens in a new tab. The eight pages long brochure has large pictures, advertisement of Profin's collaborators and information in Finnish, English and Russian. The information is partly the same as on the homepage, yet a lot narrower. The final link, ‘Media’, has the video 'Profin sliding doors' in the relevant language.

‘Services’ page contains five links to other pages. The first link ‘Terms and conditions’, has information about a 30 years guarantee that all Profin’s products have. The page also contains information regarding quality guarantee, installation, prescription and maintenance. Under a short text there are eleven links to installation, adjustment and maintenance instructions product-specifically. The next link on the main services page is ‘For designers’. This page contains links to RT-cards of sliding doors and other products.

The third link on the page, ‘Newsletter’ leads to a page with a short text stating that Profin’s electronic newsletter is published five times in a year. Underneath a small text
says that visitors can order the newsletter ‘here’. It is quite obvious that there should be a link but the link seems to be missing. The same Finnish page does have a link through which the newsletter can be ordered. The English page leaves a visitor confused about whether or not it is possible to get the newsletter in English. The fourth link, ‘Order/inquiry’ is only available in Finnish. There is a link however, that directs visitors to the Finnish site, on which three different order forms can be found. Again, the forms are only available in Finnish so they are not helpful to foreign customers. The final link on the page, ‘Topics’, includes topical news articles that are available only in Finnish.

The final link on services page is ‘Profin Oy’. The page has four links: ‘The story of the company’, ‘Profin studio in Espoo’, ‘Contact’ and ‘Feedback’. ‘The story of the company’ gives visitors the background of Profin in a nutshell. A signature under the text is by the CEO. The page behind the next link, ‘Profin studio in Espoo’, invites visitors to explore Profin’s products in Espoo’s studio. The page contains the studio’s street address, a contact person’s phone number and two pictures of the location. The page is illustrated in figure 9.
Profin Studio in Espoo

Come to explore our products to Profin Studio in Espoo!

Tahdenlennonkuja 1, 02240 Espoo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Markus Skondras</th>
<th>Profin Oy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tel.</td>
<td>+358 45 671 2202</td>
<td>Tel. +358 8815 3700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Profin studio in Espoo.

The ‘Contact information’ page has listed the names and contact information of Profin’s contact persons, such as e-mail addresses, phone numbers, information about availability of the staff depending on their holidays, as well as languages spoken by the staff. The page also has a link to Google maps that shows the location of Profin’s office.

5 http://www.profin.fi/profin-oy/tilastudioespoo?lang=en
in Pudasjärvi. The final page, ‘Feedback’, is an electronic feedback form, available in all three languages.

Multimodal means have been used all across Profin’s homepage to achieve the desired impact on visitors. The various different modes include text, layout, images, moving images, music and the 3D design tool. The Finnish page has two videos in Finnish, the same ones that can be found on Youtube. The English and Russian sites both have a the same video in English, that can be found in Youtube. The 3D design tool illustrates the third dimension, thus presenting a mode that is rarely found on websites.

The emphasis on Profin's homepage is on visuals. The visuals aim to reflect modernity, wood as material, warmth and new architecture. This aim is realized by using large, stylish pictures, white colour on the background and clear lines. The composition of elements is harmonious, balanced, and mostly rectilinear. It could be argued that the visuals do communicate the website's purpose efficiently. (H3 and Plumley, 2010, 50).

Colours on the homepage include white background that the pictures, captions and headers have. More space, however, is covered by light grey background with small squares: this is the overall background for the white page, which is actually a square shape in the middle of the screen. The colours of Profin's trademark are grey and yellow. These colours are repeated in headers, although some headers are black. Grey colour also appears in the 3D design tool. All photographs on the page have their own colour schemes, however, the main colours are white with black effect. Colours of the shown furniture are bright and the visible material in all pictures is wood.

Since pictures are the main focal points in many parts of Profin’s homepage, text has been kept purposefully modest. Most pages include pictures, however, there are also pages containing only text. Profin's trademark has a unique font but elsewhere the used typeface is Calibri. Longer texts have been structured into justified sections that emphasize the harmonious effect.

During the interview, Profin’s CEO mentioned that the design and layout of Profin’s homepage should represent modernity and warmth. It has been taken into consideration that the visitors on the page can be consumers, architects and retailers. The sitemap and basic material including the marketing elements and technical features has been built by
the workers of the company and proofread by an outside professional, to serve all visitors with different desires and interests. In future Profin's homepage needs to be more interactive, allowing customers to participate in the conversation more than before. Some companies have integrated Skype with their homepages. This way, customers can have an instant conversation with customer service to get answers to their questions. (H3).

Like most business websites, also Profin's homepage represents information layout. The emphasis is on message transmission: the site holds a lot of information such as product details, pictures and technical features. Nonetheless, since design is an important part of the products also aesthetics are in significant role. (Pettersson, 2002, 199-200).

Profin's homepage does not have an RSS button that would allow visitors to sign up for automatic notifications regarding updates on the page. There is, however, a feature whereby visitors can sign up for newsletters. By entering an e-mail address and a name in provided fields visitors are automatically sent a newsletter. The newsletter feature is only available in Finnish.

If the two tasks that a website should perform are communicating the purpose of the site and focus a visitor’s attention to what is important (Plumley, 2010, 52-53), then Profin's page appears to have succeeded. The attention is first drawn into the large slideshow and from there possibly into the 3D design tool, the nine main headings and the introductory video. This combination of different modes and elements communicates quickly the industry that Profin is in, and helps visitors find the desired product or service.

Profin's homepage offers detailed information about the company’s products. Despite the information available on the page, customers often inquire the same things. One thing that the homepage does not currently offer is a section for FAQ, frequently asked questions. Perhaps a visible ‘FAQ’ on the main page would direct customers to questions they have in mind, and answers could be found without having to contact the company directly. The FAQ section could include a link to the product information page. (H3).
Profin's values are well represented on the homepage. Visitors can read about the company's history and learn about the family run business, traditional methods and years of operation. Profin's environmental values are also clearly presented. The eco-friendly stance is certified by scientific studies, conducted on the company’s products. Appreciation towards old design and architecture is displayed on a page concerning value estates and restoration. The story on the page is supported by a picture collection of old buildings with custom-made Profin windows.

Profin's homepage is currently not updated as frequently as it would be advisable to. For effective communication, information should be frequently updated and readily available for the stakeholders. Profin’s current homepage was published in September 2012. The goal is to build a new homepage that serves visitors better than before. Ideas for the new homepage can be found on homepages of other window and door manufactures across the globe. Profin's current homepage has all the basic necessary material but it does not necessarily invite visitors to explore the site further for materials and structures. (H3).

Profin's homepage is an important channel for communication; it serves as a platform through which customers contact Profin. Feedback, questions, orders and requests for quotes are sent via the homepage on daily basis. The sent information is directed to e-mail of Profin's ordering system. It is also possible to track down where on the page customers have been to. The purpose of the homepage is also to arouse interest in Profin's products, because this generates additional questions and new orders. (H3).

Andersen, a window and door manufacturer from United States, has a homepage that represents customers’ needs as the centre focal point. Similarly to Profin there is a slideshow of pictures on the page, however right in the centre of the page Andersen asks a question with large capital letters: HOW CAN WE HELP YOU TODAY? Underneath the question there are six answers such as “I’m building a home” and “I want to request a product brochure”. The answers act as links that direct the visitor to the right part of the page. Andersen’s homepage is illustrated in figure 10. (H3 and A1).
Andersen’s page is an example of how to get the attention of visitors with different goals. Something similar could work for Profin, because also Profin’s audience consists of different types of customers: builders, architects, businesses and consumers. Profin’s homepage displays links to different parts of the page that visitors with varying goals may be interested in, but it could focus more clearly on the visitor. Using ‘I’ in the questions underlines the importance of the visitor and builds a personal link between the company and the customer.

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6 http://www.andersenwindows.com/
4.2.2 Profin’s homepage: problems

One of the problems at the moment on Profin’s homepage is that some of the information, such as the current news and the 3D design tool are only available in Finnish. The English and Russian pages have the same contents as the Finnish one, but all of it is not in the same language as the rest of the page. For instance, a piece of news that was only available in Finnish concerned an innovation by Profin: a corner solution patent. Foreign customers could be also keen to read about it, for instance, Japanese customers because of their interest in technical details. Profin’s 3D design tool is illustrated in figure 11. (H3).

Figure 11. Profin’s 3D design tool.\(^7\)

\(^7\) http://www.profin.fi/suunnitteluohjelma
Another language related problem occurs when returning to the main page: by clicking ‘home’ visitors get directed to the Finnish page, even if they were earlier on the English or Russian page. In terms to navigate back to page in their language, English and Russian speaking visitors have to click the flag icon again. Information that is available in Japanese is not a website but an electronic brochure.

Production page’s information is partly in Finnish. Although the same text can be found in English by clicking a link on the right side, it seems illogical that there is Finnish text on the English site in the first place. Since the English text is available this seems rather an error on the page than shortage of information available in English. The final link on production page is ‘CE marking’. This information is available in Finnish and Russian but not in English.

Profin’s homepage has no RSS button. This is not necessarily a problem, but a possibility for an improvement. An RSS button allows users to sign up for automatic notifications whenever there is an update on a website. Profin’s homepage does have, however, a feature that allows visitors to sign up for newsletters. The service is only available in Finnish though, also on the English and Russian sites.

During the face-to-face interview Profin’s CEO mentioned that regardless of what facts are put on the homepage, the customers often contact Profin with the same inquiries. This brings up the question what should be on the homepage and what should be left out. (H3). A lot of websites have an FAQ page containing frequently asked questions. By having a section for questions and answers visitors could find the desired information more easily. There could be a link from the FAQ page to pages that contain the detailed technical information. That way the FAQ page would guide visitors to the information they are looking for.

At the moment Profin’s homepage is not updated as frequently as would be desirable (H3). Frequently updated site would serve customers better and offer new information for those that visit the page regularly. Frequently updated page containing an RSS button would also send frequent automated notifications to anyone that has signed up for them.
If Profin had pages in social media, Youtube videos and the homepage could be linked with them. Absence from the social web is not necessarily a problem but there are some undeniable benefits that participating offers. For example, Pihla, which is also a window and door manufacturer, has a profile on Facebook. Pihla’s Facebook page contains a link to Pihla’s homepage, competitions that social media users can participate in, links to available vacancies, product updates and a lot of pictures. (P2).

There are a few problems on the ‘Newsletter’ page, which is under ‘Services’. First, the link is missing. Although the text on the page lets visitors assume that it is possible to order an electronic newsletter on the page there is no link. There are also a couple of mistakes in the text. The text says: ‘our electronical newsletter’, when it should probably say ‘our electronic newsletter’. In the heading the word ‘newsletter’ is spelled as two separate words, however, the correct way is to type the words together. Figure 12 illustrates the ‘Newsletter’ page. Shortages of English on ‘Services’ page continue under link ‘Order/inquiry’. Forms on the page are only available in Finnish. Since the forms have so much writing in them, filling them out by a person that does not know Finnish will prove very difficult.

Figure 12. The ‘Newsletter’ page.8

4.3 Stakeholders in communication

In connection with sales, the most important persons that Profin deals with are project managers, procurement executives and corresponding builders. Architects are also an important group. Profin emphasizes on meeting its clients in person. All sales meetings involve informing customers about the story of the company and using case materials. (PS).

It is important that communication flows upwards and downwards, inside and outside Profin to all stakeholders. Feedback and ideas on how to develop operations should flow to all directions. Important stakeholders are, for example, banks and financiers. Profin must be able to communicate with them openly and honestly. (H3).

Profin’s most important group of customers are businesses. They must get clear information concerning the products’ technical features, cost-effectiveness and installation. Another important group, architects, need to be given information about premium level products that support the visual appearance of future’s architecture. Consumers are also a growing market segment. Profin needs to gain new customers for the sliding door products, as well as for the window market. (PS)

A stakeholder group that could have increased importance are Profin's customers. By bringing the business to social media Profin could benefit from the social feedback cycle (Evans, 2010, 4-5). Customers could give Profin valuable information by rating products and sharing their experiences with others online. Customers' opinions and ideas could be used, for instance, to create new innovations and in product development.

4.4 Barriers to communication

Profin inevitably faces some barriers to communication. Barriers to communication were discussed in chapter 2.1. Physical barriers are an issue to Profin, distance being one of them. Some of Profin’s most significant customers are located in Japan and
Russia. The difficulty in arranging face-to-face meetings, delivery distances and different time zones are some of the challenges that physical barriers hold.

Europeans and Russians are culturally quite close to the Finnish. Japanese culture, however, is very different. Since Japanese customers are important to Profin, cultural barriers need to be considered and a different approach must be used. When selling to European customers large reference pictures play a key role. Basic technical information on the side is enough. In turn, Japanese customers are interested in technical details, and a small reference picture is sufficient. (H3).

Another cultural difference is in apologizing. If there is a defect in a product, apologizing once or twice is enough when the customer is European. If the customer is Japanese, however, apologies must be offered in many more occasions. Cultural differences are the most significant barriers to be aware of. If a company is not familiar with its customers’ culture, there can be big problems with communication and collaboration. (H3).

Although language often involves barriers in intercultural communication, (for example Hartley and Bruckham, 2000, 51) for Profin language has not proved to be a problem. The common language between the company and its customers is English, which all stakeholders understand sufficiently. Business meetings and communication are conducted in English and there have not been any major misunderstandings. (H3).

It is possible that Profin could be faced with perceptual barriers. Sometimes the perceived message differs from the intended message. Misunderstanding can be caused by both language barriers and perceptual barriers. It can be argued that when business is done cross-culturally, there are multiple barriers that make communication challenging for the stakeholders. (Pathi, 2008, 10).

Intercultural communication was discussed in chapter 2.4. Change is one of the challenges of intercultural communication (Hartley and Bruckham, 2000, 47). Change is also something that Profin should be aware of. Cultures change over time. Changing cultures, and in Profin’s case, also changing trends in building and design are influential. Adjusting to change is important for businesses, and perhaps even more so for businesses that have stakeholders globally. Being aware of what is happening in the
trade internationally will help Profin gain cultural competence and be seen as a trendsetter. (Peterson, 2004, 28-87).

Stereotyping (Hartley and Bruckham, 2000, 47 and Hinton, 2000, 6-8) is an issue that could affect Profin. It is advisable to be aware that stereotypes may sometimes guide our thinking. They may affect the image people have about Profin, or about Finnish businesses in general. Perhaps stereotyping can best be prepared for when acknowledging that it is a possibility. Profin could use stereotyping or perhaps more correctly generalization to gain information about customers. Doing research, for example, about businesses in Russia could give an idea of what types of products Russian customers are interested in and help to create marketing strategies. (Yzerbyt, Spears and McGarty, 2002, 2-3, and Peterson, 2004, 27).

Helpful devices that can be used to gain information about the cultures that Profin's customers present are the culture scales, mentioned in chapter 2.4 (Peterson, 2004, 27). By weighing a culture's level of equality vs. hierarchy, directness, orientation between individuality vs. group, task vs. relationship and risk vs. caution, valuable information could be gained about a culture. By using the five basic culture scales Profin could get information about a culture that it is doing business with and take the results in count in its communication.

4.5 Presence in social media

Profin’s attitude towards social media is tentative; it is possible that social media may have growing significance for the company, however, at the moment Profin remains rather inactive. The absence is explained by customers: Over 90% of Profin's customers are businesses. At the time of the interview Profin’s CEO did not feel that activity in social media would help Profin gain much. If Profin concentrated more on consumer markets presence in social media would be more desirable. In any event, social media needs to be considered critically: although it can be an efficient marketing tool, social media may sometimes also have negative impact on a business. The CEO mentions that
blogs are another story: being noted in highly considered blogs about interior design or construction brings positive visibility. (H3).

Albeit not having active profiles or pages in social media, Profin does participate by online media sharing. Four promotional videos about Profin can be found on Youtube. Two videos are in Finnish (Y1 and Y4), one in English (Y2) and one in Swedish (Y3). Videos give a starting point for connecting Profin with social media, making it possible to give some implications and suggestions for increased presence in the social web and overall higher visibility. One Finnish video, the English one and the Swedish one are exactly the same apart from narration. The videos are about Profin’s sliding doors. All videos have been published on March 24th, 2013.

The three similar videos (Y1, Y2 and Y3) depict Finnish forest. Narration explains that the forest provides material for Profin's products. Calm piano music is played on the background. The videos go through the work process showing how the wood is cut and processed into windows and sliding doors. A designer is filmed explaining the manufacturing process. It is, however, the narrator's voice in Finnish, Swedish and English that can be heard on the video.

The Finnish and the Swedish videos have a link to Profin's homepage in the commentary field. Registered Youtube users can give videos ‘thumbs up’ or ‘thumbs down’. The Finnish video has 1 ‘thumbs up’. Apart from that, there are no other comments. The three videos (Y1, Y2 and Y3) are all 2 minutes and 12 seconds long. The Finnish video has 220 views (July 17th, 2013), the English video has 88 views (July 17th, 2013), and the Swedish video has 40 views (July 17th, 2013).

In the other Finnish video (Y4), Profin ulkoliukuovet vaativaan makuun (Profin exterior sliding doors for exclusive taste) Laura Ruohola tells viewers about the products while windows and sliding doors’ functioning is shown on the film. This video also has music on the background, however this time the music is a little more fast-paced than the music on the other videos. This video has no linking to Profin's homepage, however in the commentary field there is a short description about the features of the sliding doors in Finnish. The video has 215 views and is 1 minute and 54 seconds long.
Profin’s CEO emphasizes the importance of Profin videos. Nevertheless he comments that Profin has not entered Facebook or Twitter because Profin's focus is on B2B business: there is no clear advantage in participation. Blogs however, are a form of social media that Profin is interested in. Profin views presence in blogs about building and design as good publicity. An example of a blog that mentions Profin is Hemma hos Oja (H4). The blog is written by a mother of a family that is currently building a house in Oulu. Different products and building materials are compared in the blog objectively. (H3).

A Google search brings Profin's homepage as the first result when the search word is Profin. Other links after that are not related to Profin. Facebook and Twitter were tested on 18.5.2013: when entering 'Profin' in the search fields there were no results relating to the company ‘Profin’ in either social media site. A Google search for ‘ikkunat’ (Finnish = windows) brings a link to Profin's homepage on the second search page. When searching for ‘liukuovet’, Profin can be found on the right side of the page as a promoted advertisement. When searching in English for "windows" or "sliding doors" Profin cannot be found. In fact these searches bring a number of links for Microsoft Windows and a movie named Sliding Doors, so searching for any window and sliding door manufacturer can be more confusing than doing the same searches in Finnish.

As mentioned in section 4.2.2, a window and door manufacturer Pihla has a page on Facebook (P2), and has been participating since 2012. Apart from Pihla, Finnish door and window manufacturers cannot be found on Facebook or Twitter. Youtube, however, seems to be a popular channel: not just Profin but at least also Pihla (for example, P3), Tiivi (for example, T1) and Skaala (for example, S1) have promotional footage there. The videos include directions for installation and promotional videos added by the company. There is also a variety of videos featuring products by different manufacturers, added by individuals that are renovating. One video features a Finnish musician Sipe Santapukki that has chosen to use Skaala windows in his building project (S2).

An example of a window and door manufacturer that participates actively in the social web is Andersen. Andersen, a U.S. based window and door manufacturer was mentioned during the interview (H3). Andersen can be found on Facebook (A2),
Twitter (A3), Flickr (A5) and Youtube (A7), Pinterest (A4), a photo sharing site that claims to be “a tool for collecting and organizing things you love” (PIN). There is also a blog "In our nature - Andersen on sustainability" (A6).

On Facebook Andersen has 3493 ‘likes’ by other users and 214 users have mentioned Andersen. The company has posted pictures of interns doing their work practice, Andersen’s sports team, Architect’s day and local home sales figures. (A2). Andersen’s profile in Youtube features dozens of videos, mostly about product installation, some having collected as much as over 40,000 views. Videos have also received a lot of comments as well as ‘thumbs up’ and ‘thumbs down’. (A7)

Although Profin has some presence in the social web (Youtube videos and a mention in a blog), so far it has not been participating in it very actively. There are some things that Profin could do if it decided to take a more active role. Profin could use social media to share private information with its customers, such as pricing and customer support. One option that is beneficial for both company and customers is to use a password-protected website with direct SMS text messaging. Profin could use messaging as a quick and effortless solution for communication. (Safko, 2012, 9).

It is possible to use social media for communication with not only external customers but also with internal customers. Safko (2012, 9) notes that services such as Yammer, Jott and Twitter enable private messaging and content sharing that could be used for communication within an organization. Plumley (2010, 205) mentions four categories in social media that can be used for marketing purposes: social networking, social bookmarking and news, media sharing and social content. Because of the promotional videos on Youtube, Profin already has activity in this area but it could also exploit the other areas of social media.

Safko (2012, 5-6) underlines that social media has caused a fundamental shift in power, which means that all stakeholders participate in communication. Therefore companies now need to listen first, understand and speak last. Profin has communication channels that enable listening to customers. Customers can contact Profin, for example, by e-mail or by phone. In future Profin will increasingly manage sales through retailers. When end users have questions or suggestions they can first turn to the retailer. Using social media
as a channel through which consumers could send their comments the communication chain could be shortened and messages would reach the decision makers quicker.

If Profin did have a profile in social media, Profin’s homepage could be linked with social media postings. The social media site could be used as a platform when launching new brands, building and strengthening relationships with customers, increasing revenues from existing customers and establishing new markets. (Wollan, Smith and Zhou, 2010, xiv-9). Although there are a number of positive impacts that Profin could achieve through exploiting the social web, it should be remembered that active participation requires resources and time. (Wollan, Smith and Zhou, 2010, 3-11).

To get an idea of what participating in social media would encompass for Profin, it is possible to apply social media planning process (Dann and Dann, 2011, 348-363). Social media planning process comprises five steps. By going through these steps Profin can review its objectives and consider possible outcomes. The first step poses a question that needs to be addressed to start with: what does Profin want to achieve in social media?

The next step comprises tactics, positioning, timeframes, and budgets. How can Profin reach its objectives? The third step involves assessing Profin’s current state of communication. This covers market research, market feedback, frontline staff and promotional plans. The fourth step concerns target market and social media sites. Where does the relevant conversation take place? Where are the potential customers? The final step refers to weighing the overall impacts. What is going to happen after Profin enters the social web? (Dann and Dann, 2011, 350-363).

The social web environment is often thought only from the users’ point of view, even if the user is a business. Social media not only offers a platform for social interaction but it can also be used as a channel for commercial activities such as advertising. (Dan and Dann, 2011, 368). One possibility for Profin is to map out its current advertising channels and consider the advantages and disadvantages of using paid services of social media.

Another possibility for Profin is exercising structured engagement, a model that benefits social businesses (Evans, 2010, 15-17). Although Profin's products themselves are not
digital content but actual physical products, there are plenty of digital content that are made about the products. These could be Profin's Youtube videos, readable history online, pictures of products or, for example, the 3D designing tool.

Structured engagement includes consumption, curation, creation and collaboration, as mentioned in section 2.5.4. The steps require active participation by the business and its customers. The first step, consumption, could be the act of a customer watching footage of Profin's products on Youtube. The customer would then, for example, comment on the products shown in the footage, or write a review about them in social media. For instance, there could be a web user that has purchased Profin's sliding doors, and after seeing a video about them, would be motivated to write a review. This step is curation; making the content useful for others. (Evans, 2010, 15-17).

The next step, creation, requires a little more effort than curation. Therefore Profin would provide the means of sharing content, created by the participants. If, for instance, a customer wanted to add pictures about an installed product, adding them should be made effortless. The final step, collaboration, would be the engagement process between Profin and its customers. A collaborative customer base could give Profin competitive advantage. In other words Profin would assist readers becoming creators and creators becoming collaborators. During the process Profin's customers would also engage in the social feedback process: trial, rating and sharing. (Evans, 2010, 4-20).

Collaboration could still be taken further. Collaborative social innovation (Mishra, 2012) is something that could work with Profin. As these initiatives focus in areas such as environment, energy economy and learning, with its environmental values and negative carbon footprint, Profin would be a natural participant. The idea is that organizations and individuals would together design innovative and sustainable solutions for shared value. By realising the shared value of innovative solutions that multiple stakeholders can create online, Profin could benefit from ideas coming from anywhere in the world.

Since Profin's presence in the social web is limited to a small amount of Youtube footage it is difficult to comment on what type of grapevine or user generated content can be found. If Profin's presence in social media was stronger it would probably produce more content also from the audience. So far the Youtube videos have relatively
small number of views. By linking the videos with Profin’s homepage and other social media sites the number of views could grow significantly bigger, thus increasing the audience’s awareness about Profin. After all, it was mentioned that Profin’s homepage needs to become more interactive so that customers can participate more in the conversation. (H3).
5 Discussion

Chapter 4 presented the analysis and results of the research. Theory (chapter 2) was applied to the data (chapter 3), to answer the research questions. The questions that the research aims to answer were: What are Profin’s aims in business communication? What are Profin’s current business communication activities? How could Profin's homepage be improved? How could Profin benefit from participating in social media?

Efficient communication and marketing contribute towards reaching Profin’s aims to increase revenues and continue growth. Therefore a topical study providing up-to-date information about Profin’s business communication is significant.

According to the results of this study, at the moment, Profin’s activities do not necessarily work towards reaching the goals in the best possible way. Communication solutions, such as Profin’s homepage and Youtube videos, seem to be more or less sufficient for now. Profin could, however, modernize its communications in many ways. Since Profin’s aims include increasing the company’s recognisability, exploring the possibilities provided by Internet and the social web environment is recommended. They provide a modern and cost-efficient way for heightened visibility and recognisability.

The research presented companies that operate in the same field as Profin – manufacturers of doors and windows. Examples of Profin’s competitors’ online activities were given, such as pages in Facebook and Pinterest. Ways of using social media applications efficiently can be learned from successful social businesses. Still, it goes without saying that Profin is a smaller actor than, for example, Andersen and while participating in the social web is recommended, the scale of engagement depends on the available resources and time.

This research gives readers information about the positive and negative impacts that social media can have. Different approaches are suggested for companies that do not presently participate in social media, but possibly will in future. In Profin’s case
beginning with small steps and planning the involvement carefully is advised. Structured engagement, for instance, could be a workable option.

Profin’s homepage is the single most significant channel for communication. It will continue to be that also in future. There are, however, activities that could be pursued to support the webpage, and improvements that could be done to the homepage itself. Profin’s aim is to rebuild the website and make it more interactive. When re-building the site, integrating suitable applications will allow web users to participate more than before, thus making the site more interactive. Cross-linking with any other online activity that Profin has will help customers find Profin and increase the company’s visibility.

It is difficult to estimate the extent of benefits that Profin would have from participating in social media. It depends on what applications are chosen and how much time and resources are invested. Still, the overall benefits are undeniable and without experimenting the benefits will remain unknown. It is certain that as a result of exploiting social media, Profin’s visibility and recognisability will increase. Since Profin’s competitors are already using social media as a communication tool they could already reach some customers that Profin does not.
6 Conclusion

This research reviewed business communication theories and increased the understanding of business communication. A closer look was taken at company Profin and its business communication activities. All in all Profin's communications are running rather successfully: the company's long history and sales figures are a proof of that. Nevertheless, some improvements on the web page are recommended. Engagement with the social web environment is proposed because it would help in achieving higher visibility and recognisability.

The various sources of data support each other, and with the help of theory, make it possible to give practical implications for Profin. Although the results and implications cannot be generalized, they give a qualitative, detailed picture of business communication and possibilities that the social web offers for businesses. The research also presents issues relating to intercultural communication and reveals its impacts on Profin.

Business communication and marketing are activities that are tied together. Profin’s and other companies’ daily operations involve both business communication and marketing functions. Although it is possible to distinguish the two activities from each other, it may not always be necessary. It could be argued that business communication is the executive side of marketing. At any event, both activities are fundamental part of everyday operations of companies and necessary to achieve success.

The content analysis performed on Profin’s homepage and other data gave clues about the improvements that could be done to the page. It was mentioned that Profin’s homepage offers limited amount of information in English, Russian and Japanese. With more information available on the mentioned languages there would be less confusion on behalf of Profin’s foreign customers, for example, when using the 3D design tool. It is possible that by offering news and services in also other languages customers would send less questions and inquiries.
Another language related problem concerns the 'home' button on Profin’s English and Russian homepages. The link directs them to Profin's Finnish home page, regardless of which page they were on earlier. To get back to Profin's English or Russian sites visitors have to navigate back to them by clicking an appropriate flag in the corner of the web page. An improvement to this would save visitors a few unnecessary clicks.

Profin could benefit from having an RSS button. This way, stakeholders could stay updated with small amount of effort from Profin’s side. An RSS button would support another recommendation, which is a more frequently updated homepage. Frequent updates would offer stakeholders timely information which could be sent automatically forward by the RSS.

Profin’s customers often inquire the same questions, regardless of the information that is on the homepage. One solution to this is an FAQ page, including the most common questions that customers have and answers to them. It is advisable to keep the detailed production information on the page and not remove any current information. The FAQ page would work as an onsite help for visitors. Stating some questions and answers on the main page, such as Andersen’s site does, could also decrease the amount of time that visitors spend looking for the information they want.

Participating in social media could have many positive outcomes for Profin. Social media sites could be cross-linked with each other as well as with the homepage for better accessibility and improved visibility. Social media could also provide means for sharing private information with customers such as pricing and customer support. This way the communication chain would shorten, bringing consumers and decision makers at Profin closer to each other. Communication through social media could be also used for communication inside organisation.

Social media planning process could help Profin begin its experimentation with the social web. Another possibility for Profin is exercising structured engagement. Rebuilding Profin’s homepage into a more social and interactive page is recommendable. One option is to integrate applications, such as Skype, with the homepage. Profin’s participation in social media is advised because it will produce more content from stakeholders and increase the audience’s awareness about Profin.
References


Appendix 1. Elements of business communication.

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Appendix 2. Interview with Profin’s CEO.

Questions

1. What goals does Profin have?

2. What challenges is Profin faced with?

3. What kind of process has producing content for Profin's homepage been?

4. How frequently does Profin update its homepage?

5. Can you mention things that have influenced the visual design and layout of Profin's homepage?

6. What are the online channels that customers use to contact Profin?

7. Does Profin have any other activity in the social web than four Youtube videos?

8. Are there any important blogs that have mentioned Profin?

9. 360 degrees -research was mentioned in Profin's strategy. Could you tell more about it?

10. The strategy plan and Profin's history were written in 2012. Have there been any changes in Profin's communications since then?

11. What types of barriers to communication has Profin been faced with?

12. In relation with Profin’s international customers, apart from cultural barriers, have distance and different language created challenges for Profin?

13. What are Profin's aims in image building?

14. What does Profin wish to gain from this research?