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A study of the marketing knowledge among single person businesses

BACHELOR THESIS IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose is to gain an understanding of the marketing knowledge and tools single person businesses have and use within the service sector in southern Sweden.

Background: Previous research on single person businesses in Sweden and their marketing knowledge and usage of marketing tools is very scarce. Many small firms suffer from resource poverty and this is often a reason for why they market their firms in certain ways. By asking single person business owners why, how and what they do to market their firms the authors will find a general pattern and a deeper understanding. During a pre-study conducted to capture the essence of the issue before starting the research, it was found that there existed several marketing knowledge gaps. It is therefore of interest to study the marketing knowledge among single person business owners in Sweden.

Method: To meet the purpose a qualitative research approach was chosen. The qualitative data was collected through six in-depth interviews with single person business owners. The answers from the interviews generated a picture of the usage of marketing knowledge and tools among single person business owners in Sweden.

Conclusion: The result of this study showed that all of the single person business owners thought that since their firms were small businesses, well developed marketing strategies was more of a luxury than a necessity. It was clear that they instead used effectual reasoning when marketing their firms. Concerning knowledge, the results showed that a mixture of education and work experience is the optimal combination. It was also clear that service firms usually find difficulties with intangibility and all of the interviewees knew that they have to use a special approach when marketing services. Through the authors' findings, it is hard to tell if there is an optimal marketing strategy since most of the interviewees do not perform any follow-ups and therefore do not know what works and what does not.

Kandidatuppsats inom företagsekonomi

Titel: En studie om marknadsföringskunskap bland enmansföretag

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Datum: Juni 2009

Nyckelord: Marknadsföring, enmansföretag, kunskap, marknadsföringsverktyg, promotion.

Sammanfattning

Syfte: Syftet är att erhålla en insikt i den marknadsföringskunskap och de verktyg som enmansföretag använder sig av inom servicesektorn i södra Sverige.

Bakgrund: Tidigare undersökningar av enmansföretag i Sverige och deras marknadsföringskunskap samt användandet av marknadsföringsverktyg är väldigt knapp. Många småföretag lider av underskott av resurser och detta är ofta en orsak till varför de marknadsför sig på ett visst sätt. Genom att fråga enmansföretagare varför, hur och vad de gör för att marknadsföra sina företag, kommer författarna att finna ett generellt mönster och få en djupare förståelse. Genom en förstudie, genomförd för att fånga essensen av problemet innan själva undersökningen, upptäckte författarna att det existerade ett flertal tomrum inom marknadsföringskunskap. Det är därför av intresse att studera marknadsföringskunskapen bland enmansföretagare i Sverige

Metod: För att besvara syftet valdes en kvalitativ undersökningsmetod. Den kvalitativa datan samlades upp under sex djupgående intervjuer med enmansföretagare. Resultaten från intervjuerna genererade en bild för användningen av marknadsföringskunskap och verktyg bland enmansföretagare i Sverige.

Slutsats: Resultatet av denna studie visade att alla ensamföretagare tyckte att eftersom deras företag var småföretag, så var välutvecklade marknadsföringsstrategier mer en lyx än en nödvändighet. Det visade sig att ensamföretagarna använde sig av begreppet verkningsfullt resonemang när de marknadsförde sina företag. Angående kunskap, visade resultatet att en mix av utbildning och arbetslivserfarenhet är den optimala kombinationen. Det visade sig också att serviceföretag vanligtvis stöter på svårigheter med att tjänster är abstrakta och alla som blev intervjuade visste att de var tvungna att använda sig av speciella metoder för att marknadsföra tjänster. Genom resultatet är det svårt att säga om det finns en optimal marknadsföringsstrategi eftersom de flesta som intervjuades inte följer upp sina strategier och på så sätt inte vet vad som fungerar eller inte.

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1 Introduction

In this section the authors introduce the reader to the research area as well as a discussion of the problem area. This will be followed by the purpose along with the research questions. Included are also delimitations and definitions that will enable the reader to follow the reasoning throughout the thesis.

1.1 Background

In the beginning of this project, the authors found that very little research has been conducted on single person businesses and their knowledge of marketing when they market their firms. Therefore, in an attempt to capture the essence of this issue the authors started off by conducting a pre-study. By doing this the authors found examples on some of the problems and issues that single person businesses face when trying to market their companies.

In this pre-study the authors spoke to a single person business owner called Robert who runs a riding- and horse training firm. When he was asked what marketing was for him, he mentioned things such as his homepage, advertisement and word-of-mouth from his students. It was noticed that everything he mentioned had to do with promotion and that he did not consider for example price and location as marketing within his company.

The authors tried to find out how Robert was thinking when he chose the marketing tools he is using today, if he had many different tools and strategies to choose from or if he had chosen the first ones he could think of. The authors realized during the conversation that Robert did not really know how he chose the tools he used and there was not really a plan behind his strategy, neither was there any thought of making a follow-up to see how the strategy was working.

When the authors in the end mentioned the things he left out, he admitted that he did not have a detailed marketing plan for his firm and that he definitely lacked experience in the field of marketing. Robert was asked if he could mention two things that could help him to market his company in a better way. He answered more money and/or time to learn about marketing strategies.

In January 2008 there were 672, 319 single person businesses registered in Sweden, this means that they make up 74.7 % of the Swedish business market that in total contains 900, 025 firms (ekonomifakta, 2009). This figure shows that they are quite a large part of the Swedish enterprise confederation, but it seems that they face difficulties in being competitive enough in their marketing to survive the competition against the large companies (institutet för tillväxtpolitiska studier, 2008). In total 60.9 % of the 74.7 % single person businesses are active within the service sector (ekonomifakta, 2009).

For small companies, understanding and knowledge of the marketplace can help reduce risk and add an understanding of the customer needs. In addition, marketing practice is very specific due to the situation and it is dependent on numerous factors such as; the growth stage of the company, the nature of the served markets, and the quality of management. Therefore sophisticated marketing strategies often have little use for the small business manager. (Kenny and Dyson, 1989)

In their article “*A small business is not a little big business*” Welsh and White (1981) describe the importance of realizing that a small business is very different from a large one. Small companies are often active within highly fragmented industries and this makes it very hard to stand out enough for the customers to discover them and choose to purchase their products or services.

Stanworth and Gray (1991) says that the major difference between a small and a large firm is that in the small firm one person is directly involved in all the decisions, and often have to take decisions by themselves. In addition to this, they mention the fact that in the large firms the chief executives always have a number of people who specialize in for example, finance, marketing, customer relations etc. But in the small firms, the owner him- or herself has to be the one with all the control and needs to be the specialist in all the different areas of the firm, a task which is very hard to handle. Planning for the future, with for example marketing, need to be forced into the time that is left after all the day-to-day activities are completed. (Stanworth and Gray, 1991)

Most of the research the authors have found deal with small businesses and sole proprietors not single person businesses, the authors will look carefully at the theory to see if it is applicable to single person businesses since there is actually a quite large difference between a small company, a sole proprietor and single person businesses (see definitions for explanation). In addition, the authors have an own definition of a sole proprietor who owns a company and works in it but has no employees – single person business (owner).

1.2 Problem Discussion

Based on the pre-study, it seems that single person businesses face various difficulties when marketing their businesses. In order for them to realize why these difficulties occur, the authors will investigate what marketing strategies and tools single person businesses in Sweden are using today, and what knowledge they actually have about marketing.

Surely, as mentioned earlier, different firms in different businesses cannot have the same marketing strategies since their products vary a lot, especially if they sell services or actual products (Mann, Pharr, Robinson, & Weinrauch, 1991). Therefore the authors chose to study a field which is not much researched; marketing of single person businesses within the service industry.

When sole proprietorship firms are being launched a common problem is how to market them. Most of these entrepreneurs do not have either enough money or expertise to be able to compete with larger and already established firms. (Mann et al., 1991)

The lack of resources is referred to as “resource poverty” and can be a cause of business failure or hardships. It can be described as a shortage of capital, poor business expertise, bad management skills, bad location and insufficient market demand. (Scarborough and Zimmerman, 1987)

To get around the problem of resource poverty, small companies need to use low-cost marketing. However, this is an unclear concept since what is considered low-cost to one firm might not mean the same to another, for example low human resources, lack of time or financial resources. One might define the concept as a strategy that cost little compared to how much money that is gained from it due to the increased sales. Since companies have limited resources they have to use for example bootstrapping. That is a concept where they make the best out of what they have access to at present time, since they cannot always afford to use expensive help from outside. (Mann et al., 1991)

Since many small firms suffer from limited resources, they cannot spend too much money on the marketing because they have to focus on other parts of the organization as well e.g. production costs. Thus most of small business owners find the main problems to be getting advertisement space, affording help with marketing from the outside, expanding into new markets and acquire new customers. Other problems companies face when lacking financial resources is that they are not able to perform marketing research except from secondary sources. Smaller firms tend to do research from magazines and trade materials but hardly ever use surveys, personal interviews or focus groups. (Mann et al., 1991)

Another problem of resource poverty is the shortage of business expertise. This represents the limitations of knowledge among small businesses when performing different work tasks. Small businesses can suffer from this kind of resource poverty because they do not have the internal knowledge as they do not have many employees and experts within the different areas. (Cohn and Lindberg, 1972)

A third problem of resource poverty is the lack of time. This is the time constraint that corresponds to the time available after the regular job tasks have been done in the small businesses. (Cohn and Lindberg, 1972) The reason why smaller businesses suffer from having less time to perform marketing is due to fewer people working in them. In a small business the owner usually has to do everything by him- or herself and is considered more of a generalist who knows a little bit about everything. (Stanworth and Gray, 1991)

So, how do the single person businesses market their services, and how do they handle possible resource poverty?

By asking single person businesses how, why and what they do to market themselves, and what knowledge they have about marketing, the authors aim to find a general pattern that can work for other firms within the same industries. The authors will also investigate if they have tried things that did not work, or if they for example have a great web page but the customers do not find it, and if so - why?

Business owners agree that educators have to recognize the problems that small companies are facing and not only focusing on solving marketing issues that larger companies have. If researchers would focus on finding feasible marketing strategies for small businesses it could help solving several problems that they are facing every day. (Mann et al., 1991)

1.3 Purpose

Our purpose is to gain an understanding of the marketing knowledge and tools single person businesses have and use within the service sector in southern Sweden.

1.4 Research questions

In order to meet the purpose the authors chose two research questions to structure their research.

- What knowledge do the owners of single person businesses have when it comes to marketing their services?
- How do the owners of single person businesses in Sweden market their services?

1.5 Delimitations

Firstly this thesis is limited to only concerning single person businesses within the service sector. Due to the time limit the authors chose to only look for respondents in three cities in Sweden, Jönköping, Malmö and Borås.

1.6 Definitions

In this section the authors will define some of the abbreviations and words that will be used frequently in the thesis, this is done so that the reader is able to easily follow the reasoning's. For some of these words there are different meanings, and here the ones the authors intend to use are stated.

- **Marketing** - is everything a person does to promote his or her business. It starts at the very beginning and stays equally important during the whole life span of the company. Marketing is what makes your potential customers aware of your existence, and hopefully interested in purchasing your specific product or service (Kotler, Wong, Saunders and Armstrong, 2005).
- **Sole proprietor** – this is the simplest way of business ownership with only one owner who is responsible for all debt. The owner has the power to take on any legal business activity whenever he or she wants. A sole proprietorship can hire as many employees as it wants to as long as it sticks to having only one owner. (Tillväxtverket, 2008)
- **Single person business** - is a firm owned by one person who works in the firm all by themselves, i.e. they do not have any employees (the authors own definition).
- **Small businesses** - Small enterprise – is a firm that has between 10 and 49 employees with an annual turn-over below seven million Euros or a balance-sheet total below five million Euros. (Europa - The European Union On-line, 2003)
- **Resource poverty** - The lack of resources in companies is referred to as “resource poverty” and can be a cause for business failure. It can be described as a shortage of capital, poor business expertise, bad management skills, bad location and insufficient market demand. (Scarborough and Zimmerman, 1987)

1.7 Benefit from this project

The result of this project will be useful for owners of single person businesses in the service sector, because they can see what marketing tools other people in the same situation have used and their reasons for using these. The result will also show what marketing knowledge that lies behind the choice of strategies and tools, and in addition identify the importance level of marketing knowledge for single person businesses.

2 Theoretical Framework

In this section the authors present and discuss the needed theory to answer our purpose. The discussed theories deal with research within the field of marketing for small businesses and sole proprietors.

2.1 Introduction to the following theory

To be able to meet the purpose, the authors researched different theoretical frameworks within the area of marketing. The first section shows how small businesses deal with marketing and how they can overcome obstacles due to their small sizes. The next section gives a picture of the marketing management process which divides the marketing process into steps. After this, marketing knowledge is described which shows how knowledge can affect marketing for companies. The next section deals with casual and effectual reasoning which debates whether one should plan ahead with their marketing or not. Following part is about service marketing which shows how services are being marketed differently compared to products. The final section gives examples on marketing tools businesses can use to market their firms and stay competitive in the market. These theories will help the authors when analyzing the empirical findings in order to find an answer to the purpose.

2.2 Marketing for small businesses

Research on marketing of single person businesses is scarce and therefore the authors will look at the theory of marketing in the context of small firms and sole proprietors. In the pre-study the authors got a picture of the different dilemmas single person business owners face and the knowledge they possess about marketing. In the theory part there will be information that is intended for small companies but that partly also is applicable to single person businesses. In the analysis this theory will be applied on the single person businesses to help the authors in reaching the purpose.

Many newly started companies fail because of a lack of marketing or weakly developed strategies (Hogarth-Scott, Watson, & Wilson, 1996). The goal for all firms might not be to grow but they all have to be able to adapt to changes in the business environment and in customer needs (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996). By finding the right way to market their businesses, they can manage to keep up with those changes (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996). Many business owners identify marketing as promotion and sales and it is often seen as a secondary requirement for the firm due to limited resources (Patten, 1989). In larger businesses, people working in different departments are specialists and experts at what they are doing. (Stanworth and Gray, 1991)

When marketing small businesses, one has to be careful to understand what is meant by a small firm. A critical mistake is to look at a small firm as a little big business which will give a false picture of the firm. A small and a large business cannot use the same type of marketing as they might have different kinds of goals, resources and abilities. Small businesses are sometimes described in many different ways based on for example number of employees, revenue or type of business. It all depends on who is doing the research and for what purpose. (Carson, 1990)

David Carson (1990) defines a small business as an enterprise where the managers often are the owners, the capital is held by an individual or a small group, the business operations is set to a local area, and the size is considerably smaller than the biggest competitors in the market.

There are many causes that affect a firm's marketing performances which can be explained by the contingency approach. This approach assumes that there are no optimal marketing strategies for businesses as they vary among different environments and firm sizes. Some researchers say that marketing small businesses is so different from marketing large corporations that they have to apply totally different strategies. (Kirby and Siu, 1998)

According to previous research done on marketing among newly started small businesses, the firms apply marketing at some level even when they do not have any education in marketing. The difference between how different companies use marketing is the level of commitment. Most of the companies valued a good customer orientation where the goal was to satisfy the needs of their customers. Even though many of the newly started small businesses wanted to focus on customers, only a few had done market research and knew about purchasing behavior. For most firms, word of mouth seemed to be a good way for marketing communications compared to other forms such as advertising. The reason for this is that newly started businesses need to use low-cost marketing and word of mouth happens to be both free and effective. Other examples of low-cost marketing tools are flyers, billboards, business cards which all are easy ways to reach out to customers. (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996)

A thing that separates different firms is that some have the intention to grow and others do not. With different goals they evidently have to market themselves in different ways to reach what they are aiming for. For sole proprietorship type of firms, basic knowledge of marketing might be sufficient since the goals with their firm is often just to make a decent living from the profit. Their main focus is instead to get an understanding of the market in order to find feasible business opportunities. An advantage small businesses should use more is that they are much closer to the customer which makes it easier to make contact with new people and listen to their needs and wants. (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996)

The theory about marketing small firms will help the authors in understanding the situation of single person businesses and what difficulties they face when conducting marketing for their firm. It also shows the clear difference between a small and a large firm which is good for the authors when conducting the interviews, because the authors will better understand the scarce resources single person business has.

2.3 The Marketing Management Process

The marketing management process is something every single person business owner could engage in to become more successful in marketing their companies. In this process there are three stages to work with. (Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., 1999)

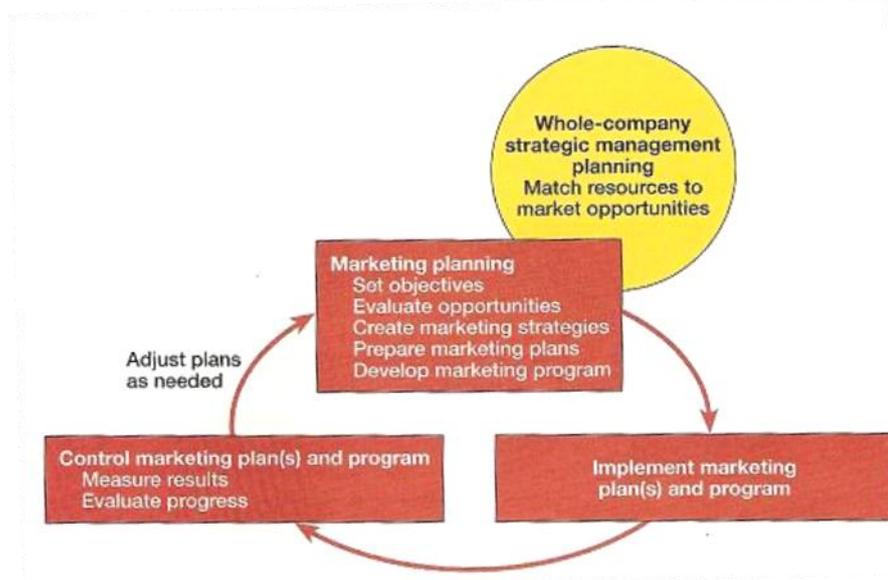


Figure 1 The marketing management process. Source: Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E. (1999) pg. 45.

Stage 1

The marketing planning is the first stage, here the objectives for the marketing are set, the opportunities available are evaluated, the creation of marketing strategies are conducted, marketing plans are prepared and a marketing program that fits this particular firm is developed. (Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., 1999)

In this stage there are two interrelated parts, the target market and the marketing mix. The target market is the chosen group of customers that a company wants to attract. The marketing mix is controllable variables that a company chooses to use in order to satisfy the target group. (Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., 1999)

The marketing plan can be summarized by describing it as a written document that includes:

- i) What marketing mix the firm will offer, to whom and for how long.
- ii) What resources that will be needed and at which rate.
- iii) What results are expected from this strategy.

(Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., 1999)

Stage 2

The second stage is the **implementation of the marketing plans and programs**. This is where the firm tries the marketing tools and strategies towards the customers. For example, launches a website, advertising in newspapers, set the price level and delivers the products in a specific way (packaging, service etc). (Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., 1999)

Stage 3

The third stage is the **control of the marketing plans and programs**. This is where the results from the implementation of the second stage are measured and evaluated. Through continuous evaluation and follow-ups, the sole proprietor can see which tools and strategies that are working well and worth spending money on. On the other hand, one can also see what methods that are not working and why, and by this no money is wasted on these methods. This stage is really important since markets are dynamic which means that competitors, customers needs and the environment is changing all the time and it is of great importance to keep up with these changes to be successful. (Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., 1999)

The authors' focus here is to see if the single person business owners have conducted a plan before carrying out the marketing strategies, in other words, to see if they had a specific reason for using the marketing tools they used. The authors are also interested to see how the single person business owners implemented their tools and strategies and if they made any follow-ups on their marketing.

2.4 Marketing knowledge

Knowledge is a very broad concept and can be hard to define, but an old definition by Aristotle says that knowledge is that we know something and that what we know 'holds true'. (Gronhaug, K. 2002)

This project the concern the marketing knowledge within four elements:

- i) **Theories/models,**
- ii) **Concepts**
- iii) **Methods/ techniques**
- iv) **Facts**

(Gronhaug, K. 2002).

Theories and models

The first element, theories/models, refers to common demonstrations often used to explain and describe phenomena, in addition to predict outcome and development. (Gronhaug, K. 2002)

Numerous concepts and theories can be found within marketing, examples of these are cognitive dissonance that is used to understand and explain the consumer's pre- and post purchase behaviors, Porters five-force model for understanding marketing competition and the Boston Consulting Group-matrix used to confine the company's product portfolio to be used as a basis for future profit and investment decisions. (Gronhaug, K. 2002)

Concepts

The second element, concepts, is the foundation of any model or theory and implies that a person categorizes and captures the reality with a concept in mind. Thus, two persons can interpret the same concept very differently depending on how the concept is used by the actor. Even though the concept is presented in the same environment, but due to the different view of the 'reality' between the persons, it can be perceived differently. (Gronhaug, K. 2002)

Methods and techniques

The third element, Methods/Techniques, consists of the tools used to carry out the marketing strategy, like advertising, market research etc. (Gronhaug, K. 2002).

Facts

The fourth element, facts, can be seen as the outcomes of the methods and techniques used. Facts show for example if the methods did work as expected and if they were applied in a correct way. (Gronhaug, K. 2002).

Summary

In order for a person to be able to use these elements and get positive results from applying them, there are three steps that they need to go through (Gronhaug, K. 2002).

Satisfactory knowledge use involves:

- a) Correct **identification** of problem
- b) Correct **choice** of tools
- c) Correct **use** of chosen tools

(Gronhaug, K. 2002)

Earlier research has shown that there are reasons why some people succeed well when using their knowledge of marketing and why others fail. Often one can recognize a distinction between the levels of insight within persons, differing from the ability to understand, remember and really applying the knowledge. In the business life useful knowledge should be connected to adequate applications, and since companies are parts of constantly changing environments, people working with the marketing issues also need knowledge about the actual company and market context to succeed with the marketing strategies. (Gronhaug, K. 2002)

The theory about knowledge marketing will help the authors in the process of understanding how much knowledge the single person business owners have and what difference the amount of knowledge makes. The authors will also use this theory to understand how the interviewees have dealt with marketing dilemmas and how they found solutions to them.

2.5 Casual or effectual reasoning?

When planning for their businesses, entrepreneurs often use either casual or effectual reasoning (Sarasvathy, 2001). There are some huge differences between these two:

Casual reasoning starts with pre-decided goals and a given set of resources. With those resources one tries to find the absolute best way (it can be in terms of money, time and quality etc.) to reach the goals. Some examples of casual reasoning is to find the best advertising agency, or selecting the target market that has the highest potential of profit return in marketing. (Sarasvathy, 2001)

Effectual reasoning on the other hand, starts only with a specific set of resources and by what these resources can be used for, develops goals over time. Often these goals are shaped by people whom the entrepreneur interact with, e.g. friends, family or business colleagues. (Sarasvathy, 2001)

The same entrepreneur can use both effectual and casual reasoning depending on what is best suited for that specific situation (Sarasvathy, 2001). Although Sarasvathy (2001) have seen evidence that many entrepreneurs rather uses effectual reasoning than casual reasoning in the start-up and early phases of a new business.

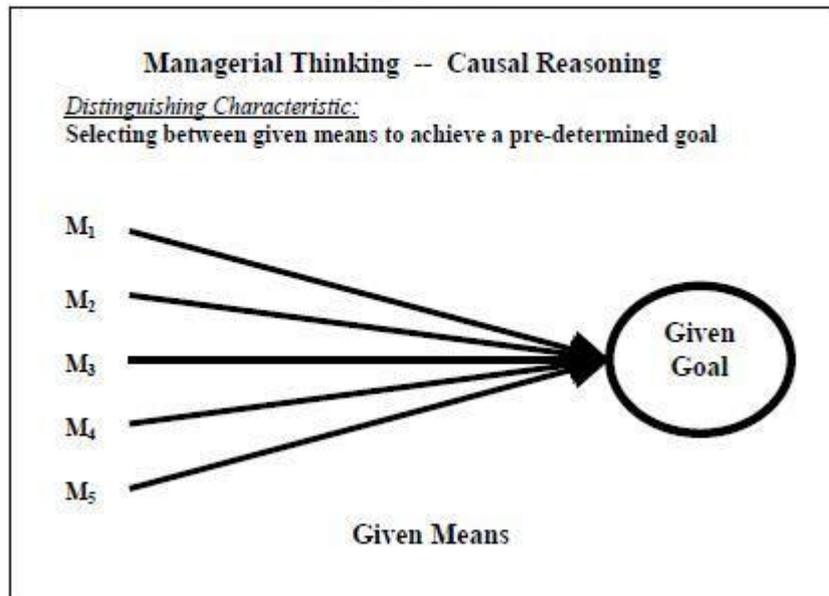


Fig 2 Causal Reasoning (Sarasvathy, 2001. pg. 3)

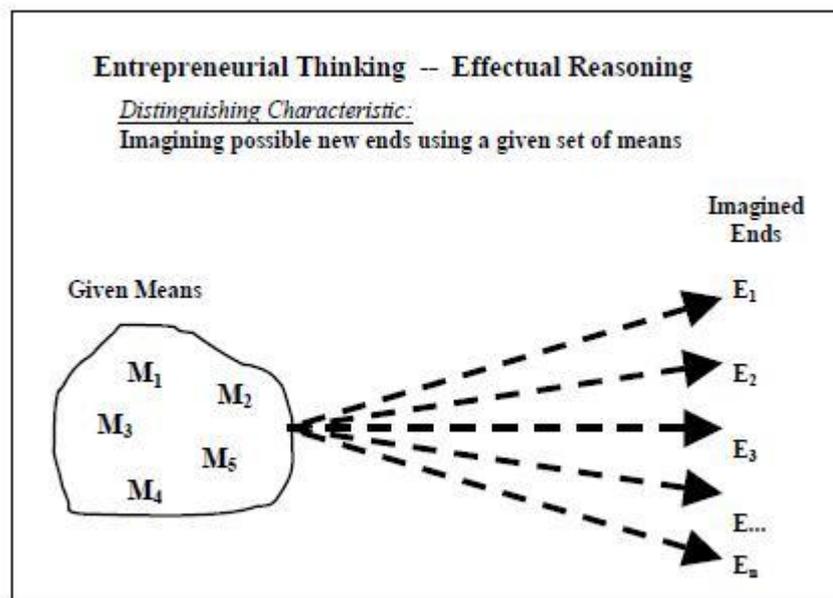


Fig 3 Effectual Reasoning (Sarasvathy, 2001. pg. 3)

Sarasvathy (2001) describes these two illustrations with two examples. In the first picture (**Casual reasoning**) one can imagine a chef who is handed a recipe to use when cooking dinner. The chef is then allowed to shop the ingredients him- or herself and later the chef cooks the meal in his or her own kitchen (where he or she knows well were all the tools are located). (Sarasvathy, 2001)

The second picture (**Effectual reasoning**) we can imagine a chef who is not having a recipe and is instead shown to a kitchen in which he or she has never been before and is told to cook a dinner. In order for the chef to do this, he or she has to find out what equipment and ingredients are available in this kitchen, and use creativity to complete a dinner. One difference between the two ways of reasoning is that effectual reasoning involves risk-taking, creativity, salesmanship and impulsiveness. (Sarasvathy, 2001)

Another difference is that within casual reasoning people focus a lot on the expected returns, whereas in effectual reasoning entrepreneurs focus on the affordable loss. This affordable loss principle is a good example of how entrepreneurs can reach their target market with tiny amounts of resources like money, time and knowledge. (Sarasvathy, 2001)

Most entrepreneurs have three categories of resources to start from:

- i) **Who they are** – their tastes, traits and abilities
 - ii) **What they know** – their training, experience, education, and expertise
 - iii) **Whom they know** – their social network and professional network
- (Sarasvathy, 2001)

During effectual reasoning the entrepreneurs utilize these resources in different combinations to create opportunities and meet imagined goals, without any planning or structure. During causal reasoning the entrepreneurs plan their strategies and steps cautiously and this will eventually lead to implementation of the plans. (Sarasvathy, 2001)

The theory on causal or effectual reasoning will aid the authors in understanding why some business owners may not always plan their next move, and also why they can use certain marketing tools without being concerned of the loss if the tools do not work. This theory will be useful in the analysis since it is a bit contrary to the marketing management process theory. In addition, it will help the authors to understand why entrepreneurs sometimes do not plan and work according to pre-determined goals.

2.6 Marketing within a service firm

When marketing a service one has to act different from when marketing a product. A service is inseparable which means that it is produced and consumed at the same time while a product is consumed after it has been produced. When marketing **products** people often refer to the four Ps of the marketing mix which are product, place, price and promotion (Kotler et al., 2005) but when marketing a **service** these four are not enough according to Grönroos (2007). Three more factors have been introduced to the marketing mix, which are people, processes and physical evidence. Even public relations and politics have been added to the list. This gives the reflection that the four Ps model by Kotler et al. (2005) gives a too narrow focus on only internal variables and fails to notice the process variables which also are a part of the marketing planning process. On the other hand, making the list longer will not help making the marketing mix definition better and more reliable as all variables cannot fit in with every situation and thus it becomes less useful. (Grönroos, 2007)

A reason why it can be hard to market a service is because it is intangible and the value is thus hard to measure because people cannot see what they are getting until the service has come to its end. A service cannot be tried before it is being purchased because it is an experience to the customer which cannot be seen in a physical way. An experience of a service is very subjective which contributes to making it harder to put a consistent value to it. As a result, it is being suggested that people should try to make services more tangible by adding concrete, physical evidence e.g. bank cards. (Grönroos, 2007)

Another problem is the heterogeneity of a service which means that the entity and quality might vary between different customers, producers and times. Since services often are performed by humans, the performances might alter from day to day which makes it difficult to keep a consistent level of quality. The same thing will occur if a customer goes back to get the same service again but different employees will deliver the service. Services are also perishable which means that they cannot be stored, which means that if a service is not sold at a certain time, it transfers into lost revenue. If an airplane seat is empty, the revenue for that seat might be lost forever and cannot be recovered. (Bessom & Jackson, 1975)

By looking closer at the theory on specific marketing issues in a service firm the authors can easier understand why a service firm is so different to market than a firm selling products. This also shows that higher demands are being set on these single person businesses and the ways they deliver and market their services.

2.7 Marketing tools

There are many different tools which single person businesses can use to market their companies. No tool is more right or wrong than another but they can all be applied differently depending on the kind of business form and strategies that are being used. In the following paragraphs, examples of tools that are commonly being used by companies today will be described.

The theory about the marketing tools will help the authors' gain an understanding of what different kinds of tools and strategies firms can use when marketing themselves. This knowledge will come to use when analyzing the tools and strategies the single person business owners use.

2.7.1 Promotional tools

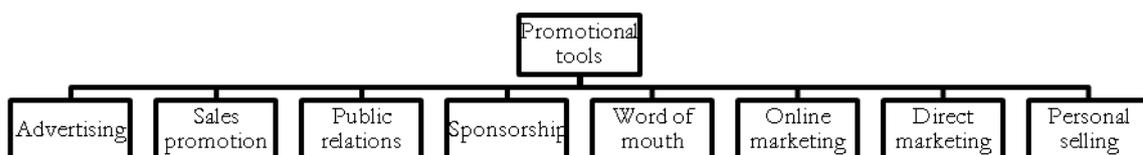


Figure 4: The promotional tools. Source: authors own illustration.

Advertising: Advertising is a way for an organization to communicate its products and services to their target market through mediums like newspapers, magazines, radio, billboards, TV, etc. It notifies people and other businesses about new and existing products as well as where to purchase them. The main idea is to persuade people to buy products of specific brands or at least change their opinion towards different brands. Another function of advertisement is to remind consumers about their products so that they do not buy products from competitors' brands. Since companies do not have the time and money to talk one-on-one with every potential customer, advertising works as mass communication that reaches a lot of people in an easier way. (Johnson & Lee, 1999)

Sales promotion: Sales promotion is an encouragement by a firm to get consumers and other businesses to make purchases. This can for instance be made through discounts, free gifts, and sales force competition. Usually this is carried out as a short term strategy to increase sales and raise awareness. After the sales promotion, the amount of sales will drop back to normal level but if it was successful it will show results even in the long run. However, studies have shown that the long-term effects of most price promotions have turned out to be neutral which means that sales has not got either up or down afterwards. (Jobber, 2007)

Public relations: Public relation is a way of non-personal communication between organizations and the public to create mutual awareness of the business. Since public relations is wide ranging and reaches many different groups, it creates an atmosphere that is easier to perform marketing in. Examples of public relations are seminars, publicity, lobbying, publications and corporate advertising. (Jobber, 2005)

Even if both public relations and advertising are being spread with the same media, the firms do not pay for publicity. Nonetheless, publicity is not to be considered free advertisement. Even though the companies do not have to pay for advertisement space, they still have to pay for people to prepare the news releases and push different media people to make them public. (Dibb, Simkin, Pride & Ferrell, 2001)

Sponsorship: Sponsorship is a business relationship between two parties where one is offering funds to the other in return for rights that can be used for promotional advantage. This advantage gives the sponsoring company increased reputation and awareness sponsors have a wide variety of activities and individuals to select between including for example sport tournaments, fairs, buildings, shows and community activities. (Dibb et al., 2001)

Word of mouth (WOM): Arndt (1967) defined WOM as an “oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or service”. Several years later, Stern (1994) wrote that WOM is the exchange of direct, in real life spoken messages between a source and a recipient and that WOM messages vanishes as soon as it is said, given that it occurs in a spontaneous manner. WOM seem to be more effective than advertising when a company wants to raise awareness of a new product or service and get the customers to make the decision of trying it (Sheth, 1971). Day (1971) also found in his study that WOM was nine times more effective in changing neutral predispositions into positive attitudes than advertising, and he says that it is caused by source reliability and the flexibility of interpersonal communication.

An important attribute of WOM is that it can affect the customers’ decisions and buying behavior either positively (Richins, 1983) or negatively (Bolfing, 1989). Arndt (1967) found that negative WOM has a more powerful affect than positive WOM. Negative WOM emerges when a customer becomes dissatisfied with a company, service, product or brand. Research (Technical Assistance Research Program, 1979) has shown it is possible that a customer who is dissatisfied tells twice as many people about his or her negative experience as a satisfied customer.

Online marketing: Today smaller firms find the internet as a good method to communicate with customers and suppliers in an affordable way (Lynn, Maltz, Jurkat & Hammer, 1999). Gogan (1997) indicates that two additional benefits of the internet are the global reach and the extremely low variable costs, which makes it an appropriate marketing tool for the sole proprietor. Lynn et al. (1999) says that one way many firms today make use of the internet (within marketing) is through websites.

To have a website means gaining a direct contact between a customer and a company (Melody, Raghu & Shang Huei-Min, 2000). In order to get customers to visit their specific website, they can use advertising online. Advertising on the internet is quickly becoming a practical alternative to conventional media (Dreze & Zufryden, 1998), given that the number of people using the Internet in Sweden was approximately 7.3 million in 2008 (Internet world statistics, 2009).

Direct marketing: Direct marketing is a way for companies to directly communicate their products and services by not using an intermediary. This form of communication will give an immediate response which makes it possible to evaluate the usefulness of the marketing in a quantitative way. Ways of using direct marketing are among others direct mail, telemarketing, direct response advertising and mobile marketing. (Jobber, 2007)

This allows the firms to target their marketing more narrowly to single companies instead of using mass marketing and to get in touch with carefully selected customers more effectively. In the long run this leads to strong relationships between businesses and customers. (Kotler et al., 2005)

Personal selling: Personal selling is a marketing tool that includes face-to-face interactions where the seller takes contact with the customers. Since this tool allows an interaction between the seller and the buyer, the seller will find it easier to make his or her offer more suitable to the customers by collecting information about their needs and wants. On the other hand, this kind of marketing is very expensive since the seller has to travel a lot in order to sell his or her products and to keep the relationship. Thus, many companies today have chosen to reduce their sales forces and move the business to where there is a higher concentration of customers. (Jobber, 2007)

2.7.2 Pricing methods

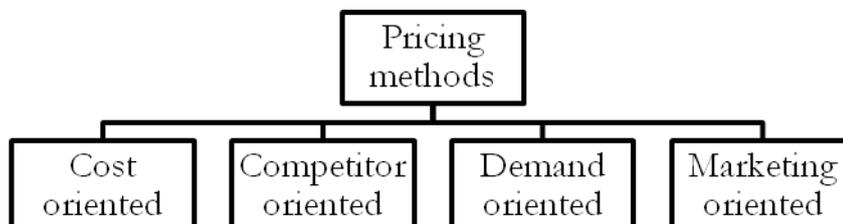


Figure 5. Pricing methods Source: Authors own illustration.

Cost-oriented pricing: In cost-oriented pricing, the price is based on the cost of the products or services after deciding the profit margin. The aspects of supply and demand are usually not a part of this strategy since they do not play into roll concerning the costs. The cost-oriented pricing method can later be divided into two sub-methods, cost plus and mark-up pricing. (Dibb, 2001)

Cost plus pricing works in a way that the seller indentifies the cost and then add a certain amount or percentage of that cost to set the price. This method is appropriate when it is hard to calculate cost such as for custom made equipment where the cost can vary a lot. (Dibb, 2001)

In the other method, mark-up pricing, the price is set by adding a percentage to the cost which is the same for all products within the same category. (Dibb, 2001)

Competitor-oriented pricing: In competitor-oriented pricing, the prices are set according to the competitors prices instead of their own costs and revenues and this is mainly used when the competitors are offering almost homogenous products or services. However, it can be used together with the cost-oriented pricing method in order to set prices that generate a profit. (Dibb, 2001) This pricing method can be divided in to two parts, the going-rate pricing and the competitive bidding. The going-rate applies to situations where there is no product differentiation and the seller will have to go with the going rate of the product. The competitive bidding applies when companies are competing to get a contract and have to bid lower than each other to offer the lowest price. (Jobber, 2007)

Demand-oriented pricing: With this method, companies look at the demand for the product or service and then set a price according to it. This will give a higher price for high-demand products and lower price for low-demand products. To use this method, companies need to be able to approximate how much people are going to purchase at different prices. After this approximation, they will sell the products or services at the price which generates the highest profit. (Jobber, 2007)

Marketing-oriented pricing: The marketing-oriented strategy is a more complex method which takes a lot more factors into account such as marketing strategy, competition, value to customer, price-quality relationships, explicability, costs product line pricing, negotiating margins, political factors and effect on distributors/retailers. (Dibb, 2001)

2.7.3 Place

The place is where the product is being sold and through what channel. Even if a service is intangible, it still has to be performed or delivered somewhere. Often companies put too little consideration into the distribution channels which could give them competitive advantages if they use them in the right way. Many companies can for example cut costs by cutting the distribution line and start selling directly to end customers. When it comes to services they are usually delivered directly to the end consumer or through an agent since they cannot be stored. Therefore the roles of wholesalers, retailers and other retailers do not come into play when dealing with services. (Dibb, 2001)

The place is the main way to make products and services accessible and available. Thus geographical location is important since products and services have to be easily accessible to customers. (Dibb, 2001)

2.7.4 Product

According to Dibb (2001), a product is something that is offered to a market that brings value and satisfies a customer's need or want. These products can be both tangible and intangible e.g. services. However, many firms today are offering both as they offer services along with the products they are selling.

When buying a product, the consumer is really purchasing the benefit and satisfaction they assume the product will offer. This is especially true when it comes to services since they are intangible and therefore hard to value in advance. There are generally two kinds of products which are classified as consumer products and industrial products. Consumer products are things that are meant to satisfy personal and family needs while industrial products are for use in companies' operations. (Dibb, 2001)

When marketing a product the marketer needs to find out what the core product is. This is what the consumer really is buying when he or she get hold of a product. In addition, the product of the marketing mix also includes packaging, accessories, warranties and branding. (Dibb, 2001)

3 Method

In this chapter the authors will describe how they conducted the different parts of the investigation. This section will therefore include a discussion of why the qualitative approach was chosen, how the firms were chosen and how the interviews were conducted.

3.1 Research Approach

In order for the authors to meet the purpose of this research they decided to start off by making the pre-study to see if the perception about the lack of single person business owners marketing knowledge really existed.

The pre-study was made by a phone interview with a friend of the authors who they knew was a single person business owner. The interviewee was not at all prepared, so he did not have any time to think through his answers before the interview was conducted. The single person business owner was told before the interview started that he would be anonymous in the thesis.

During the pre-study interview the authors asked the single person business owner qualitative questions like; what is marketing for you. Have you conducted any marketing plan for your company? The answers from the questions generated a picture of how single person businesses actually think before conducting marketing strategies and how little they might know about the concept of marketing.

The goal of this project is to understand how single person businesses owners handle the marketing issues they are facing and how much marketing knowledge they have. Therefore the authors chose to make a qualitative study, which is according to Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2007) about understanding a phenomenon, exploring issues and with help of this – answer posted questions. By doing a qualitative research instead of a quantitative one, the authors will not be using either numbers or statistics to show the result. The result will be generated from comparing the theory and the in-depth interviews (with the different single person business owners in Sweden).

3.2 Data Collection

In this project the authors have used both primary and secondary data. The primary data have been collected through interviews as will be explained in section 3.2.1. The secondary data have been collected mostly in form of earlier research published in academic journals and other literature, found both on the internet and in different libraries in Sweden. The secondary data have been useful to guide the research questions and help to reach the purpose.

Most of the primary data collection took place in late April and the beginning of May 2009, during this collection the authors made six interviews with different single person business in Sweden. The secondary data was collected in the period from February to April 2009.

The interviews were conducted the following dates:

Hélène 2009-04-15

Inger 2009-04-22

Janet 2009-04-23

Niclas 2009-04-30

Jonatan 2009-04-30

Charlie 2009-05-05

3.2.1 Interview Methods

In this project the authors decided to use in-depth interviews with six single person businesses owners that have firms within the service sector in Sweden. This was done in order to see what their marketing knowledge looks like and how they are marketing their companies today, if they are successful in doing so and if there are specific reasons of why they use the marketing tools they use.

In order for the authors to meet the purpose it is needed to perform qualitative interviews with these single person business owners. When conducting interviews, one can choose from three methods: structured, semi-structured and in-depth. Structured interviews are often like questionnaires based on standardized and predetermined set of questions, usually with pre-coded answers. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to have a set of themes and questions that may vary depending on the informer. Some questions may be more structured and others may be open-ended, this also gives room for asking additional questions. In-depth interviews are very informal, here the interviewer does not have any pre-written set of questions, and instead it is more like a conversation about the aspect of interest. In the in-depth interview case the person conducting the interview is not leading the informer in one way or another. (Saunders et al., 2007)

In-depth interviews should help the authors in reaching the purpose. This type of interview will allow the authors to gain more information from the people they interview, because it will give a richer understanding of how these entrepreneurs use marketing and how much knowledge they have within this field. The non-structured layout will give the informants the possibility to answer some questions with their own words (Saunders et al., 2007).

The single person businesses that participated in the interviews were working in three areas of Sweden; Jönköping, Borås and Malmö. The reason why the authors chose these places was mostly because they visit them from time to time and thus they knew people who lived there and this made it easy to find interviewees there. To save time, the interviews were divided so that at least one of the authors was present during the interview, and the interviews usually lasted for about 35-60 min. Three interviews were conducted during telephone meetings and three were face-to-face interviews. The interviews were conducted in Swedish, so the answers will be translated into English before they are presented in this paper.

3.2.1.1 The interview questions (see appendix 1)

Prior to conducting the six interviews the authors made two pre-interviews (with single person business owners, one male and one female) to test our set of questions. The authors wanted to see how the people being interviewed interpret the questions and if there were questions they did not understand. The result from the pre-interviews showed that the questions needed some modifications and that some of them should be changed to better suit the purpose. It was also noticeable that there were two questions missing, one about education and the other about work experience, these were needed to get a correct picture of the amount of knowledge the single person business owners had.

After redoing the interview questions, it was developed into a total of five different set of questions which in different ways will help the authors reach the purpose. See explanations of the different sets below:

The first set of questions (see appendix 1) that was asked was general questions about the owner and the firm. These were questions like; when was the firm founded? What are the main activities in your firm? Do you work full-time with your firm? etc. These questions were meant to give the authors a general understanding about the firm and the owner.

The second set of questions were related to general marketing issues, such as what marketing is to them, what thoughts they had about marketing when planning to market their company, if they faced any marketing dilemmas in the beginning and if they made a marketing plan with goals etc. before implementing any marketing strategies.

The third set of questions was all about the implementation of the chosen marketing strategies. Here we asked questions like; what tools/strategies have you chosen and why? How did you choose these? How they implemented the strategies and if they used any kind of help during the process.

The fourth set was about control, e.g. whether the marketing they have conducted has worked or not, if they are making any continuous follow-up on how the marketing strategy worked, and if they had tried something that did not work for their firm.

The fifth set was oriented towards marketing knowledge, education and working-life experience. The interviewees were asked about their education to see if there were differences between them in education level and knowledge. They were also asked about their previous working-life experience, to see if they had worked in other companies before starting their own firms. The authors also asked questions about if the interviewees had any earlier knowledge and/or experience within marketing, if they have gathered any new marketing knowledge during their time as sole proprietors and/or if they use any outside help when it comes to marketing.

The authors aim to meet the purpose by using the answers from different single person businesses i.e. to gain an understanding of the marketing knowledge single person businesses within the service sector in Sweden have when marketing their firm towards the end customer.

3.3 Data analysis

The meaning of the qualitative research is to find results that answer to the purpose. However, the process cannot end after collecting all the data because the authors needed to analyze and interpret it to be able to make it mean something. The hard part is to make sense of all the data collected and find significant patterns which are the analysis of the research. There are no rules or formulas on how to perfectly analyze the data and the authors can only use their full intellect to fairly represent the data collected. On the other hand, there are guidelines for how to do an analysis but they might have to be modified from case to case as each purpose and qualitative study is not like any other. The analysis is thus depending on the human factors which can be considered both a weakness and strength as skills, intellect, training, discipline and creativity come into play. (Patton, 1990)

For the qualitative research, the description is the first part of the analysis which answers the basic descriptive questions such as what and how. This must be separated from the interpretation part that includes a more analytical framework. This part puts the different answers from the interviews into patterns and answers the why-questions. By presenting the descriptive data first, the readers are allowed to make own interpretations before reading the author's. (Patton, 1990)

When putting together the analysis a cross-interview analysis will be used, which means that the authors will connect answers from the different interviewees. This will help when answering the purpose as well as reaching a conclusion to the thesis. (Patton, 1990)

3.4 Sample Selection

The authors chose to only interview single person business owners that work within the service sector, because no earlier research was conducted on the marketing knowledge of single person businesses in the service sector. First the authors tried to get in contact with single person business owners that were randomly chosen by looking at a list of companies in three cities. The authors found a list of 10 possible interviewees and called them to ask for meetings, but it turned out that none of them wanted to participate. Some blamed lack of time and others thought that it could harm their business (even though the authors said that they would be anonymous in the thesis). Three of them answered that since they did not know that much about marketing they would not be able to contribute, the authors told them that this was not true, but they still did not want to participate. Since you cannot force anyone to participate the authors found another way of getting enough participants.

The authors assembled a list of people they knew or their parents knew that were owners of single person businesses, and called them to see if they were interested to contribute to the thesis. The authors managed to get six out of eleven to agree on participating, in total three male and three females.

One of the participants, Inger, is no longer active within her firm, but the authors thought that she was a good sample anyway because of her experience and it could also be interesting to see the reasons behind her firm no longer being active.

Since the authors had personal connections to the interviewees, it made it easier to get hold of them and to make them agree on being interviewed. As mentioned earlier, the single person business owners work in the three areas of Jönköping, Malmö and Borås. To receive an even gender distribution, the authors interviewed three male and three female single person business owners. The authors managed to collect samples from the CAM-industry, the telemarketing industry, the sports industry, 'administrative tasks industry' and design/fashion industry. If it is found that the results are approximately the same, no matter the industry, the conclusion and results will be valid to more firms and in that way generate a broader understanding of this issue and a larger contribution.

3.5 Credibility of research findings

3.5.1 Reliability

Reliability shows if the data collection methods used in one research will give the same result if done in a similar way on another occasion. (Saunders et al, 2003)

A threat to reliability is participant bias, this is when the interviewees say things they think others want them to say (Saunders et al, 2003). In this research, there might be a bias since the authors knew all of the interviewees personally and this might affected their answers in mainly two ways. Either, they answered the way they thought the authors wanted them to answer because they felt empathy with the authors work. Or, they took the extra time and effort to answer as honest and correct as possible (for example that they did not have any knowledge) because they found it harder to lie to people they knew.

A second threat may have been observer error (Saunders et al, 2003), since it was two authors conducting interviews there could have been two ways of posing the interview questions (Saunders et al, 2003). But to limit this threat, the authors had together written an exact manuscript of the questions before calling the participants. Since both authors read the questions directly from the manuscript, it is known that all participants got the exact same questions asked to them.

A third threat to this research may be observer bias, which means that different people interpret the same answer in different ways (Saunders et al, 2003). Since the authors made three interviews per telephone and since both authors were not present at every face-to-face interview there might be the case that the person interviewing have understood an answer in one way were as the other author would have understood it differently. To avoid this as far as possible, the authors made three interviews together before conducting the other three. The authors also discussed every question carefully before making the interviews. It would have been optimal if the authors could have done all interviews together but due to lack of time this was not possible.

3.5.2 Validity

Validity is concerned with the relationship that is found between several variables, if it is a true relationship or not. In qualitative studies, like this one, the validity shows if the result is correct, if it can be trusted. In quantitative studies, validity is more useful to see if the result is representative for a population and if the researcher has drawn the right conclusions. (Saunders et al, 2003)

There are some threats and confirmations to validity in this project;

- The economic state of the country – as Sweden is now currently in a recession the owners of single person businesses probably face hard times economically and therefore they do not spend much money on marketing. But on the other hand, many of the interviewees have owned their companies for some years now and Sweden has only been in a recession for a little over a year so this might not be a serious threat to validity.
- Translation – Due to the fact that the authors have gathered theory from both English and Swedish literature, and in addition conducted the interviews in Swedish and then translated them into English, there might be minor translation errors which may affect the validity.
- Test of interview questions – to increase the validity of the empirical findings the authors made a set of interview questions which were tested on two interviewees before conducting the real interviews. This pre-test showed that the authors had to change some of the questions to easier meet the purpose.

3.5.3 Generalisability

Generalisability (external validity) shows whether the result from the research is valid in other situations as well. A threat to generalisability can be that there are too few respondents in a research to actually make a representative sample for the whole country. The respondents may also have too similar characteristics or work in the same setting etc. if this is the case, the research result will hold true for other people with the exact same conditions. (Saunders et al, 2003)

To increase the generalisability of this project the authors have interviewed six different single person business owners, and the only thing they have in common is the size of their firm and the fact that they work within the service sector. Otherwise they are working with different services (except the two telemarketers), have different ages, working-life experiences and live in three different places (Jönköping, Malmö and Borås).

The findings from this project will reach high external validity when looking at single person businesses within the service sector in the towns of Jönköping, Malmö and Borås.

4 Empirical findings

In this section the authors will present the empirical findings, i.e. what result the interviews generated.

4.1 Interview with H el ene

H el ene is 58 years old and works as a complementary and alternative medicine therapist (CAM). She founded the company in 1998 and is still today running it all by herself. The main activities in her firm are complementary and alternative medicine (reflexology, reiki-healing and “on-site massages”). Above this, she is also selling alternative medicine to customers.

H el ene is only working part-time with her company, which means that she has 4-5 clients per week. Earlier she worked more in her own firm but today she has another job as well since she does not have as many clients anymore.

H el ene was asked if she finds that her firm is suffering from any kind of resource poverty and she mentioned that she does not have enough money to use the expensive marketing tools because each treatment only pays around 350-400 SEK. H el ene said that because her company is so small and her main goal is not to make it grow, she does not consider it worth to spend a lot of money on marketing. H el ene mostly relies on the word of mouth spread through her present customers.

Marketing (general)

The authors asked H el ene if she could tell them what marketing is for her and she said that it is to be seen and make customers aware of her services and the existence of her firm. In addition she told us that she considers marketing research to be an important part of marketing a firm. She has done some research by asking customers how they found her particular business or from where they heard about it.

When she first started thinking about marketing for her company, she decided to go to her friend’s seminars (who also owns a CAM firm) where H el ene got the chance to tell people about her firm and what she had to offer. The reason she did this was that it worked as free marketing and was directed towards people who already were showing interest in different CAM methods (her target market). When she later attended a “company start-up” course she was told to print out flyers to hand out to people. Thus the focus after the start-up was to go to seminars and hand out her flyers and it was also a cheap way as she did not have much money in the beginning.

When designing her marketing strategy she had the dilemma concerning attracting customers to her business. Another problem was to create a good brochure which has a lot of information but still was interesting and attractive. She also needed to print business cards which were going to look professional. To solve the dilemma with attracting customers she started out with presentations at her friend’s seminars to introduce her business. Later on she also attended fairs, and this time she asked for help from a professional to make attractive brochures to hand out during the fairs.

H el ene chose to set her prices according to competitors in the same area so that she had approximately the same prices as the other CAM firms in the south of Sweden.

Hélène told the authors that she does not have a specific marketing plan for her firm because it is a small scale business with limited resources and no direct intentions to grow. At the present time she is only using the yellow pages and word of mouth as her marketing tools. Her main goal is basically to attract new customers and to be seen on the market.

When the authors asked Hélène to describe more what marketing strategies she is using for her company she answered that today she uses the Yellow pages in Sweden because she considers this to be a good way to reach out to new customers. Furthermore she mentions that since she, as a therapist, is a member of a union for therapists in Sweden (Kroppsterapeuternas förbund) she is getting advertisement through their homepage. She is also selling alternative medicine to her clients and the brand she is representing has put her name on their webpage as a reseller. Hélène told us that she was conducting more marketing strategies when she just started her company given that she at the time had no clients at all. At that time she handed out brochures, talked about her firm at fairs, and held presentations at seminars which dealt with CAM. Nowadays she mostly relies on word of mouth which is spread through clients who already have been given treatments from her. It is mostly through this method that she gets her new customers today.

When the authors asked her why she chose these methods, she said that it is far too expensive to advertise in papers, given that she does not get much out of it. Thus she relies heavily on free marketing such as word of mouth. The reason she chose to be on the yellow pages is because she figured that she needs to be listed somewhere so people can find her. Hélène was asked why she uses this specific amount of tools and she said that these were the ones she knew how to use and found suitable for her firm.

Implementation

She said that she put her strategies to work by contacting people that put her firm on their web pages as well as on the yellow pages. The help she needed with the implementations in the beginning was to create a brochure that would attract new clients.

Hélène was asked her if she thinks that she could have market her business in a better way if she would have had more knowledge within marketing. She said that she would have created a web page if she knew how to because she did not want to spend the money on having someone else doing it for her. At the same time she said that she does not think that knowledge is the major restraint for her limited marketing. She mentioned that with more money she could have gotten more help and also chose other more expensive marketing strategies.

Control

On the question whether her marketing strategies have worked she responds that they have given her many customers throughout the years. She said that in the beginning many people came from the seminars but the yellow pages have also shown good results throughout the years. Other than that, word of mouth is the strategy that has worked the best as her customers are telling their friends who are telling their friends and so on.

She also mentioned that she does follow-ups on the different marketing strategies which she has been using. She thinks it is interesting to see what is working and whether different strategies are feasible or not.

The authors then asked her if she has used a strategy which did not work out for her and she said that she tried to advertise in a paper once but it failed. She said that she did not get any customers through this way and therefore never used it again. She does not really believe in advertisements in papers unless you use it a lot to raise people's awareness, as it is really expensive.

Knowledge about marketing

Hélène has both graduated from high school and college, where she majored in laboratory technique. Hélène has a total of approximately 40 years of work experience, she has worked within several large medicine companies but she had never had any work related directly to marketing. Therefore, when Hélène was asked if she had any knowledge of marketing before she started her company, and she answered that her knowledge then was very limited. She got some basic tips at the start-up course but she did not know more than that she needed to be seen.

On the other hand she said that she has gained some knowledge over the years as she has tried different strategies. She has also talked to other people that have been in the same situation as her and gotten ideas from them. A new way that she has met other people in the same situation is through “mingle meetings” where people mingle around and introduce each other and their businesses.

Finally the authors asked Hélène if she gets help with the marketing of her business and she said that she brought in help from the outside to make the brochures and to take pictures for them. Other than that she has done everything herself since she runs a small company with limited resources and no loans.

4.2 Interview with Inger

Inger is 45 years old and works as a telemarketer. She founded the company in 2001 but ended it in 2008 due to lack of time (two jobs). The main activities in her firm was telemarketing, she was only calling business-to-business for her clients and her purpose with calling was not to sell different products, it was to find out who was responsible for the marketing in the company. Thanks to that, her clients saved time and were sure to talk to the right person about marketing offers.

Inger was only working part-time with her company because she had a small child at the same time and then it suited her to work at another company before lunch and then pick up her child and go home to work with her own company. But when her child became old enough, Inger went to work for the other company full-time and because of that she did not have any time left for her own company.

During the start-up of her company she admitted that she lacked money because she had to do some investments. Sometimes she also lacked time because the child wanted her attention.

Marketing (general)

When the authors asked Inger what marketing was for her she said it was to present her company to the outer world, and to make sure the customers see her company and recognize her existence.

When Inger started her company she realized that she needed some help with how to plan her marketing, so she contacted some colleagues from other jobs she had before and talked to them. She also discussed a lot with her close friends and parents to get some suggestions on how to conduct the marketing. She knew at the time that she had to find the right kind of customers to focus on and to find a way of contacting them successfully. Inger said that if she had planned to work full-time and make a living from this company she would have been more serious with the marketing from the beginning, and maybe hired a marketing firm to help her out.

Her largest dilemma in the process of designing her marketing strategy was, as mentioned before, to find the right target market for her firm. To solve her dilemma she contacted others who had experience in the field of telemarketing between B2B and they gave her some useful information. At the time Inger wanted to do some marketing research, but as she did not have much knowledge about how to conduct market research she contacted some firms how were willing to do it for her. The only problem was that they were very expensive and in the end she could not afford it.

Inger did not write a marketing plan for her company, and she mostly just sat down and thought of different ways of attracting customers. She told the authors that the primary reason of why she did not make a proper marketing plan was lack of time and too much stress to take time and sit down and really make a detailed plan. Inger said that at that moment it felt like a waste of time, but she can see now that it might have helped her. Her main goal with her marketing was to attract new customers and to get enough jobs to earn a little money each month.

The authors asked Inger what marketing tools she has used in her company and she answered word-of-mouth, brochures and sometimes she called companies to offer them her services. On the question why she chose these specific tools, she answered that she chose them because they were cheap and she knew how to use them and they were the first ones that came to her mind. Inger also said that she did not know about any more tools that were available for her at the time being due to lack of financial and knowledge resources.

Implementation

Inger implemented her marketing strategy by printing the brochures at a company where she knew the boss so she got a good price. She also asked some friends to speak well about her and her firm to their colleagues at work – this was to start a good word-of-mouth rumor.

Inger thought that more knowledge about marketing would not really have made such a big difference for her company, on the other hand she mentioned that larger financial resources to spend on marketing would have made a clear difference.

Control

Inger thinks that the marketing she conducted in her firm was successful since she had enough customers for the amount of time she worked each day with the firm. But if she would have wanted to work full-time she probably needed to market her firm in a different manner.

Inger have made follow-ups on all her marketing, mostly because she was curious to see if it worked. For example, she asked all her new customers how they found her company.

Advertising was a marketing tool Inger did not use at all because she thought it was too expensive and in order for her to reach the right customers she would have been forced to have lots of ads in many different business newspapers and for that she definitely did not have enough money.

Knowledge

The education Inger had ended before high school, since at that time in Sweden, anyone could get a job so Inger started to work for a middle sized company instead of further educating herself. Inger has approximately 28 years of work experience and throughout the years, Inger has worked at several companies, both really small ones and middle sized ones. She has had many different roles but never anything to do with marketing.

Therefore Inger said that did not really have any previous marketing knowledge before starting her company. During the years as a sole proprietor Inger tried to gather information and knowledge about marketing through talking to her parents (who were entrepreneurs) and friends. She also read some literature about marketing but felt that her company was too small and too focused on one special kind of telemarketing, to be able to use the advices the book contained.

4.3 Interview with Niclas

Niclas is 35 years old and works as a personal trainer. He founded his company in 2001 and is today working full-time; he is both training people at sport centers in groups and one by one.

The authors asked Niclas if he suffers from any resource poverty, and he mentioned that more time would be valuable since he spends time driving between different sport centers.

Marketing (general)

The authors asked Niclas what marketing was for him and he said that marketing is mostly about conveying information about your business and hopefully make potential customers identify and willing to purchase your services. Before he started to market his company, Niclas focused on three things; finding the right customers to target, and where to be seen. Niclas wanted to conduct market research in the area where he wanted to work, but it turned out that this was too expensive for him at that moment so he skipped that step. Although the market research did not work out, he early decided that internet was an important marketing tool for his company.

Niclas basically had two dilemmas before starting to market his company; how to get a nice website and how to make a budget for the marketing part of the company. Since Niclas did not have knowledge in either economy or marketing he decided to talk to friends and family and see if they could help him. Niclas also told the authors that he finds it hard to market a service firm because he has no product to show the customers in advance.

He told us that he was really lucky because he found a person who made his website almost for free and this person taught Niclas how he should update it and how he could see the number of visitors etc. When it came to the dilemma with the economy, Niclas contacted different organizations, like Almi företagspartner, and they helped him to make a small budget for his marketing. They also told him how he could get things cheaper and what he should focus on first.

Niclas never made an own marketing plan, the only plan he had was from the meeting with Almi företagspartner, but that was only suitable during the start-up phase and he admitted that it would have been very useful to have a plan that included at least a couple of months. In addition, Niclas mentioned that he is not a very organized person and therefore a plan could have helped him to stay on the right track and get things done.

The goals Niclas had with marketing his company was mostly to get lots of customers, a larger profit and to create an image around his brand. To reach these goals Niclas have used a website, business cards, posters that he put up in the common rooms of several sport-centers, word-of-mouth, demonstrations and he has been visiting health fairs to talk to people about exercise and training. He chose these specific tools because he considered them to be the ones that he could get for the amount of money he could afford to spend. He also considers internet to be a good way of reaching new customers in many areas.

Niclas was asked why he chose this specific amount of tools and he answered that this was the ones he knew about and most people used them. It was also easy because he had friends who have used all of them and they could help him when needed.

Implementation

Since Niclas did not have any knowledge within web design he needed help with the website. He asked a friend to make the design for the posters and business cards. Niclas said that he would never have been able to use so many different marketing tools if it was not for his contacts that helped him out a lot.

Niclas believes that his marketing would have given a better result if he had more knowledge of his own in the beginning, then he could have saved money and time when doing it all by himself. Then Niclas made a pause and said, but on the other hand, doing everything by myself would also take a lot of time.

Control

Niclas was asked if he thinks that the marketing he has conducted have been successful and he said yes, mostly. He mentioned that he could have made more variations on posters etc. if he had more money, but on the other hand, he has a small scale business and the amount of customers he can train in a day is limited.

On the question about follow-ups on the marketing, Niclas admitted that the only tool he actually has followed is the web site, he explained that it is easy to see how many visitors he has every day since a statistics program was included when he purchased the space on the web server. He wished that he could follow the posters and the word-of-mouth tools to see if they bring new customers or not, but yet he has not found a way to do so.

Niclas thought of advertising in different fitness magazines to reach the right customers, but after calculating on this Niclas realized that it would be too expensive, because he would need to advertise frequently and in many magazines. Maybe he will do this in the future if he can afford it.

Knowledge about marketing

Niclas went to high school but did not want to study any more after his graduation. Niclas has a total of 17 years of work experience. During these years he worked at several different companies, mostly within the hotel and restaurant business and the telemarketing industry. Niclas moved to USA for 1.5 years and there he worked for a sport center. He said that therefore it became natural for him to start his own business when he moved back to Sweden.

The only marketing knowledge Niclas has before starting his company was the things he learned in the USA, although not all of them are useful in Sweden due to cultural differences. On the other hand, he has gained knowledge during the time that he has owned this firm, since each time he faced a dilemma or struggled in some way, he talked to different people who advised him on how to act. Niclas said that this has been very useful and he has learned a lot from other peoples experiences. In addition, Niclas looked at different marketing strategies of his competitors to see how they market themselves. If he found things he liked, he copied the strategy and if he found things he did not like, he knew what to stay away from.

Niclas have had some help to market his firm, and this has played an important role in the success of his company.

He revealed that in the beginning he had some friends who wrote good things about his firm on different sport-related websites so they kind of started a good rumor about Niclas.

4.4 Interview with Janet

Janet is 29 years old and she owns a clothing design firm. The company was founded in 2005 and Janet mostly designs special events clothing, like ballroom dresses, wedding dresses, ice-skate and horseback riding competition outfits etc. Janet is working full-time with her company and has done so since the start-up.

Janet was asked if her company suffers from any specific resource poverty, she answered that more money is always welcome but she is not in a desperate need right now. She also mentioned that she would like to hire a person who could work extra in the future because sometimes she feels that the time she has is not enough. Due to the recession in Sweden right now she does not dare to hire any personnel because she cannot guarantee how much work she can provide for them.

Marketing (General)

When the authors asked what marketing was for Janet she said that it has to do with both her and her company. She considers it to be important how she behaves towards her customers as well as making sure her company is visible to the correct group of people.

In the process of planning for her newly started firm Janet spent some time thinking about how to market her firm in the best way. She knew she had to target four very different groups of customers, but since her financial resources were quite small she decided to focus on two and see if she could catch the others' attention later on. Janet also calculated her budget to see what kind of marketing she could afford.

Janet also considered price to be a part of her marketing strategy, she raised her prices as the demand for her designs increased. In the beginning she had a low price to attract new customers, but now she can sell her designs at quite high prices because most customers have bought her designs before and they know what they get.

One of the dilemmas Janet faced in the beginning was how to spend the right amount of money on the right marketing tool. For example, she wanted to have a website but knew that in order for customers to find her website she was forced to promote it somewhere. In order to solve the dilemmas Janet faced she used her personal contacts, she called a few friends who she knew had different useful knowledge to contribute with. In turn, this led to a new, wonderful website almost for free, nice business cards and some free word-of-mouth advertising. She also made deals with some other firms so that if they linked from their website to her website she did the same so they both gained from it.

Janet was asked if she made a marketing plan for her company before starting to use different marketing tools. It turned out that Janet had not made a serious marketing plan; she said that this is something she really regrets today because she thinks that it could have helped her to raise awareness among her customers faster if she had played her marketing cards a bit differently. Janet admits that she was a bit too focused on keeping down the costs during the first year, if she had taken a small loan and spent it on promotion it would probably have been worth the money.

The goal she has with her marketing is mostly to gain customer awareness and to make sure the right people know that her company exists. Of course she wants to gain new customers frequently and she also tries to attract the old customers to return to her on a regular basis.

marketing tools Janet is using today are her website, business cards, posters, word of mouth and small scale sponsorships. She chose these because she had friends who previously had used them and knew how to use them correctly. They are all quite cheap ways to market a firm and that was of course a contributing reason for using them. The authors asked Janet why she used this number of tools, and her answer was that these were the ones she knew how to use and she did not think she could afford any more tools.

Implementation

Janet got help from a friend who was skilled in web design to create and launch her website; she got all the help for free and only had to pay for the server. She designed her own posters and business cards and printed them at home with help of her own computer.

Janet says that of course she could have done things better if she had more knowledge and experience, but she felt that this worked as well and she is not sure more knowledge would have paid off at this moment because her company is still small scale.

Control

Janet has only made follow-ups on her website since there is an automatic daily statistics program that gives her all information she needs about when and how many times people visit her website. Janet said that she finds it hard to make follow-ups on the other marketing tools because it is hard to measure in numbers, but she likes all of her tools so she will definitely keep them all even if some might work better than others.

Knowledge about marketing

Janet has graduated from both high school and college, where she has a degree in economics and design. Janet has a total of 6 years of working experience. She started her own company 6 years after her graduation, but still she says that she does not have any previous marketing knowledge from other companies.

The only marketing knowledge Janet had before starting her company was from a marketing course in high school, although she told us that she does not remember very much from that course. She has not hired any professional marketing help for her firm because she simply cannot afford it. During her time as a sole proprietor Janet has gathered knowledge from talking to her friends and customers, she feels that she knows a lot more today than when she started her business and yes, she would have done some things differently if she will start another firm.

4.5 Interview with Jonatan

Jonatan is 25 years old and owns a telemarketing company, he founded the company in 2005 and since then he has been working full-time with his company. Mostly he sells different phone-options to private persons.

When Jonatan was asked if his company was suffering from any resource poverty he said that it is always easier if one have many resources, but since his company does not have either large fixed- or variable costs, he does not consider resource poverty as a daily hardship.

Marketing (general)

The authors asked Jonatan what marketing is for him, and he answered that he agrees with Alfred Herrausen who once said that "what we think, we have to tell and convey. What we convey, we have to do. And what we do, we have to be - we have to stand for it and live thereafter."

Jonatan also said that for him, marketing is a process that involves all different parts of a company, but of course marketing is most important on those parts that are visible to the outer world. Jonatan told us that for his company, the marketing directed towards the outside world (such as newspapers and other media) is not the most important, what is more important is the way in which he succeeds to transmit the services he sells towards the customers.

Since Jonatan works mostly with selling services via cold calling, he does not really market his company in the traditional manner. On the other hand, he does everything he can to avoid getting the bad reputations that are common within the telemarketing industry. Jonatan told us that in order to avoid this, he is very careful to act professionally and serious all the time.

Jonatan had one dilemma before he started to market his company, how the bad reputation of the industry would affect his company and what he could do to make sure customers would understand that his company was serious and worth their trust. At the time, Jonatan did not have the knowledge or the tools to solve this dilemma. Instead he did his best to keep up a proper business manner and eventually more and more customers started to trust him. Jonatan mentioned that he has some trouble when marketing his services because he cannot show the customer in advance what they will get when purchasing his services.

When the authors asked Jonatan if he made a plan before marketing his company, he answered both yes and no. He started very seriously with writing a marketing plan, but as he was doing so he realized that he did not really have a product to market and therefore he ended his plan before it was finished.

When it came to goals with the marketing, Jonatan told us that his primer goal is to keep the customers he has and attract new ones.

The authors asked what marketing strategies and tools Jonatan used and he mostly used direct marketing – calling potential customers and informing them about his company. He also has business cards and a website. He chose these tools because they suited his company best and they were quite cheap and easy to perform and keep up to date. He said that the main reason why he chose this amount of tools was that he could not come up any more at the time, but when he sees new tools that other uses he always consider using them in his company but often he finds that they do not suit his marketing strategy.

Implementation

When implementing his marketing tools Jonatan did almost everything himself, he designed the business cards and found a company that could print them. For the website, he had a friend who he paid some money to help him design and update it. Jonatan told us that when he faced problems he asked around among his friends and they helped him to find suitable solutions.

Control

He tried to send out direct marketing, such as brochures and flyers that contained information about the services he later would call the customer to sell. Unfortunately this did not work as well as he had hoped and therefore he stopped using this tool. Jonatan has made follow-ups on all the marketing by looking at sales figures and website visitor-statistics.

Knowledge about marketing

Jonatan had graduated from high school and is now attending his last year in college, he majors in industrial economy. Jonatan worked two of years before he started college, then he worked mostly in Norway at different stores. In addition, he started another company together with a friend at the same time, but that did not go as planned and therefore he discontinued his work within that firm. Jonatan says that he has gathered some knowledge about marketing from his education and previous work-life experience.

Jonatan does not think that more knowledge would have helped him when marketing his company. He did have some previous marketing knowledge, both from high school and from college. He has also been careful to always follow-up his own work to see how he could improve. Jonatan says that he has learned a lot about how to market a service firm during his time as a sole proprietor, because during the courses in school they mostly learned techniques on how to market products.

4.6 Interview with Charlie

Charlie is 21 years old and runs his own company since the summer of 2007. The main activities of his firm is to help larger companies with administrative tasks in order to save them money and time. A few examples of tasks that he helps out with include paying bills, scheduling appointments, writing letters, planning events and some shopping.

Charlie is a full time business student which means that he is only doing this on his free time off school and during the summer break.

Charlie was asked if he considered his firm to suffer from resource poverty and he said that skills and money are the two factors that he would like to improve. Since he does not make a lot of money on this business as he is attending school simultaneously, an improvement of his marketing skills would help him find new creative and inexpensive strategies. On the other hand, he mentioned that skills are something that you learn as time goes by. He is learning from other people as well as from his own experience to become better at marketing his business.

Marketing (general)

The authors asked Charlie what marketing is to him and his response was that marketing is pitching an idea and hoping that someone will buy it. He said that it includes persuading people both consciously and subconsciously to buy your products or services. Marketing is to make people aware of your business and tell them what you are offering.

When he first started thinking about marketing for his company he focused on building relationships, for example he got some free marketing when his first customers spread good word of mouth to other prospective clients. In addition, when he was done working with one client he asked them if they knew anyone who also was in need for help and many times it worked. He said that this strategy has given him most of his clients and since it is for free, so even if it fails, no cost has been wasted.

Before he started with marketing his dilemma was to get in touch with his future clients. He mentioned that it is hard to find people that need the help because they are not exactly advertising that they need the administrative help that he is offering. A second dilemma is since he had never met any of the people before and most of them were in the ages of fifty and sixty, he felt it was hard to know how to approach them. He said it is hard to know how to make a good impression on someone whose age is about three times your own age.

To solve this dilemma he talked to people who had been in the same situation as himself and asked for advice from them. These business mentors helped him to get him on the right track and he started using scripts when he called people to see if they were interested in what he had to offer. He said that this way he would be able to keep a consistency when offering his business to clients and not get lost because of nervousness.

Charlie said that he does not have a specific marketing plan because he runs such a small company and he thinks that trying to build relationships and using word of mouth is not really things that need a major plan. However, he said, he has smaller plans which reach about three months into the future which shows his goals and how to reach the clients. His goals are basically to get new clients for his business and to increase the awareness among companies.

On the question what marketing strategies he is using for his company, he said that he mainly uses cold calling and emailing in order to get new clients. This means that he is contacting people that he has never spoken to before and so they are not expecting to be contacted. Besides that, he walks from business to business and tries to sell his ideas and help different firms. Since all of his customers come and go, and do not keep him for longer periods, he constantly has to keep up the selling of his ideas. Thus, the focus of the marketing does not change much with time and he has to keep finding new customers. Another way he market himself is by business cards. On one side of the cards he has all the contact information while he on the other side has an empty to do list for the clients to fill in. That way he get to know what they want him to do for them and he can plan the tasks that need to be done. Above this he also has a webpage with information on what he has to offer and how to contact him.

The authors asked Charlie why he chose the strategies that he did and he said that it was all because of the resource poverty. With more money and skills he would have been able to use larger and more creative strategies. He chose these strategies because he knew how to use them by himself and did not need to spend too much money on them. Charlie said that he would like to use a larger number of tools but these were the ones he knew about and that he will gather more knowledge about marketing tools when he finds time in the future.

Implementation

He said he put his strategies to work by calling and visiting business people. He also means that he is doing marketing at the same time as he is working as he creates good relationships which might result in a good word of mouth. He also said that he got some help from others who had been in the same situation as himself. Experience taught him along the way but when he came across obstacles he asks for help to be able to move on smoothly.

When Charlie was asked if he thinks that he could have done a better job marketing his business with better knowledge he said yes, definitely. He meant that it is pretty obvious that with more knowledge it can only become better since no strategies are perfect. With more knowledge he said that he could have created more creative marketing ideas which could have resulted in a higher interest in his business.

Control

The authors asked Charlie if he thinks that his marketing strategies have worked and he answered that he has not had any problems finding clients. Instead he has been busy with many clients at all times when he has been looking for work.

When the authors asked if he does follow-ups on the different marketing strategies he said that he really never thought of it. Charlie said that when he looks for work he either gets it or not and then move on. He considered himself too naive to think about it and when looking back he somewhat realized that maybe he could have done better if he researched what went wrong the times he did not get the job. He mentioned that maybe it was because he used marketing strategies that did not cost any money that he did not do any follow-ups. He could just move on to the next client without losing any money. Therefore he has really not had any strategies which cost too much that he had to drop.

Knowledge about marketing

Charlie has graduated from high school and is still attending college, he majors in entrepreneurship. Since Charlie is still young he has not had any full-time jobs other than during the summers. During the summer jobs he has only worked a few weeks and therefore he does not think that he really has gathered any knowledge about marketing through his summer jobs. Charlie has a total of 1.5 years of working experience if his summer jobs are counted as one.

Charlie was asked if he had any knowledge about marketing before he started his firm which he said all came from the marketing classes at school. However, in his opinion the classes did not help at all and he means that you can only learn true marketing by doing and not from reading a textbook.

During the years that he has had his company he has gained experience by learning from his mistakes and listening to other people's advices. He has also been reading blogs and articles on the internet on how to do marketing and through that learned from real cases instead of theories from textbooks.

Finally the authors asked if he brings in help when marketing his business and he said that he does it all the time. He means that you cannot stop learning about new methods and it is always great to get fresh ideas and have someone to discuss about them with. He does not hire people to do marketing for him, but he rather asks friends and family for advice on how to move on and improve his own skills.

5 Analysis and Result

In this section the authors will present the analysis of the empirical findings which was conducted with the help of the theoretical framework.

5.1 Marketing small businesses

When looking at the empirical findings from the interviews it is clear that a very small business (like the single person firms) is in many ways different from a large firm, especially when it comes to marketing strategies and tools.

Almost everyone (except Jonatan) had weakly developed marketing strategies, they had not made any plans on how to conduct their marketing and they all admitted that they would have been better off if they had planned more carefully. If a business owner spends more time on planning they can find more suitable ways of marketing their firms and thus they will be more adaptable to changes (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996).

Another interesting finding was that all of the single person businesses interviewed mostly mentioned promotion when the authors asked them what marketing was for them and their company. According to Pattern (1989) it is very common that small business owners refer to marketing as sales and/or promotion and since they often have a lack of financial resources they see marketing as a luxury.

Not one of the single person business owners answered that place was parts of their marketing. This is quite strange since at least Niclas, who drives between towns to meet his clients, should see that as a benefit for his customers and an important argument in his marketing.

Two of the single person business owners (Inger and H el ene) mentioned market research as an aid to plan their marketing. Hogarth-Scott et al. (1996) found in their research that business owners are applying marketing at different levels without being aware of it because they lack marketing knowledge. Hogarth-Scott et al. (1996) continues by saying that marketing knowledge is something business owners gains by commitment and interest, and therefore many newly started businesses miss this because they focus too much on existing customers and not enough on how to gain new customers. This applies well to at least two of the single person business owners (Inger and H el ene) who both work part-time with their companies and therefore are not really looking for new customers frequently. These two women obviously have different goals with their firms than the others who work full-time, and through this one can understand that with different goals, different kinds of marketing is suitable to reach the goals (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996).

Inger took advantage of the fact that in a small firm you are closer to each customer (Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996) and therefore can do some research about your marketing, for example she asked new customers how they found or where they heard of her company and through this she got a picture of what marketing tools that worked for her firm.

Every one of the interviewees mentioned that their firm experience resource poverty of some kind, either it was in (one or several) the fields of finance, knowledge, time or human resources.

The theory on marketing small businesses shows that it is different to market a large firm, than a small firm, mostly due to resource poverty. We can see that all of the single person business owners have their own tricks to market their firms even when suffering from resource poverty. Some have taken the advantage of being close to the customer and others have asked their contact network to get the knowledge needed.

5.2 The Marketing management process

One purpose with the interviews was to see if the single person business owners followed the marketing management process when marketing their companies. (Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., 1999)

The marketing planning stage is the first of three stages and none of the single person business owners fully conducted all different steps in this stage. If they would have used the different tools of this step correctly, it would have given them several benefits. For one, they would have evaluated their opportunities which would have helped them to spend their resources on the right kind of marketing. Second, if they had accomplished a serious marketing plan for their firm they could have worked more towards goals and budgets for their marketing. Third, if they had followed the first two steps, they could have developed a marketing program that exactly fit their firm's needs and resources. (Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., 1999)

Almost everyone, except Jonatan and Charlie, failed to see some of the elements in this first stage. At least Charlie made small plans over a couple of months to help him see how to attract more customers and what to focus on. Jonatan tried to make a serious plan but gave up because he found it hard to market services. H el ene let the size of her firm be the thing that determined that no marketing plan was needed.

Inger answered that her lack of time was what determined the non-existence of her marketing plan. Janet, on the other hand, thought that she had made a mistake by not making a plan in the beginning; she felt that it could have helped her in becoming more focused and successful in her marketing. On the other hand, almost all of the interviewees said that their most important focus in the start-up process was to figure out their target market.

The second stage of the market management process is the implementation of the marketing plans and programs (Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., 1999). All of the single person businesses had more or less jumped directly into this stage; they have used several marketing tools, such as websites, posters, business cards, word-of-mouth, fairs etc. Sometimes it seemed as if they did not really know why they had chosen the tools, and often times they chose tools that were easy for them to use instead of tools that would have benefited the company the most. There were times when they faced dilemmas with the implementation of tools, to solve these problems they mostly talked to friends and family. If they had worked through the first stage in a correct manner they would probably have had fewer dilemmas or at least dealt with them earlier so that their implementation would have continued smoother. On the other hand, working through the problems surely taught them a lot for the future.

The third stage of the market management process is the control of the marketing plans and programs (Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., 1999). In this section the results were a bit spread. Everyone that had a website also checked statistics on visitors and referers etc. Very few of the other marketing tools were followed and controlled, mostly because the single person business owners did not know how to keep control of them. It is slightly concerning because this can mean that they might be spending money on marketing tools that are not working well enough. On the other hand, none of the single person business owners have spent any large amount of money on marketing so therefore it may not be as serious financially. Perreault, Jr, W.D. and McCarthy, J.E., (1999) claim that working through this stage is very important also because of the fact that most markets change constantly and for these single person business owners to keep up with the competition they need to have control over what marketing strategies and tools that are working at the moment and which ones that worked well last year.

By applying the theory on the market management process and the results from the interviews we can see that no one of the single person business owners really followed the whole process from stage one, via stage two, to stage three, and then back to stage one again (it is a continuous process). Instead, they only followed parts of the process, some in reverse and others according to the model.

5.3 Marketing knowledge

The first element of marketing knowledge is according to Gronhaug, K. (2002) theories/models. During the interviews it seemed as no one of the single person business owners really had any knowledge about the different theories and models that they could use when planning their marketing. It would probably have been useful for some of the interviewees (Charlie and Janet) to have used for example Porters five force model (Gronhaug, K., 2002) to understand their competition better so they knew where and how to target their potential customers. The second element, concepts, is linked to the first element and therefore none of the interviewees had used this one either.

On the other hand, everyone had used the third element, method/techniques (or tools). Where they had gathered knowledge about these methods and techniques were a bit uncertain. They had not used either element one or two to help them.

Many of the interviewees mentioned that they got their knowledge from talking to friends and other people they knew, others went to seminars and used different literature to gain new knowledge.

The fourth element, facts, was used by five of the six interviewees. Even if they did not apply this element on all their marketing methods and techniques, they still used it when possible, for example by looking at their website statistics. Four of the single person business owners said that they would like to use this element on every marketing tool they use, but due to lack of knowledge on how to use it they were not able to make follow-ups.

According to Gronhaug, K. (2002) satisfactory knowledge within marketing involves three steps:

- a) Correct **identification** of problem
- b) Correct **choice** of tools
- c) Correct **use** of chosen tools

(Gronhaug, K. 2002)

During the interviews the authors asked questions to see if the single person business owners used these three steps. It turned out that more or less everyone did use them. H el ene, for example, followed these three steps. First, she identified two dilemmas when planning her marketing strategies; how to attract customers to her business and how to create good business brochures to hand out. Second, she figured out that she could use her business network to make nice brochures and attend a friend's seminar to market her own business. Obviously she used these chosen tools in the correct way because she got very nice brochures and many new customers.

It is always hard to say which way is the *correct* way to identify a problem, choose tools and use them to solve the problem. However, if the ways in which the single person business owners dealt with their dilemmas and found solutions, did work for them, it is very hard to claim that they are wrong. Although, if they had more knowledge they would maybe have less problems to begin with, and they could have found the solutions to the problems faster. It is also possible that they would have chosen a completely different set of tools that would have suited both the single person business owners and their firm better.

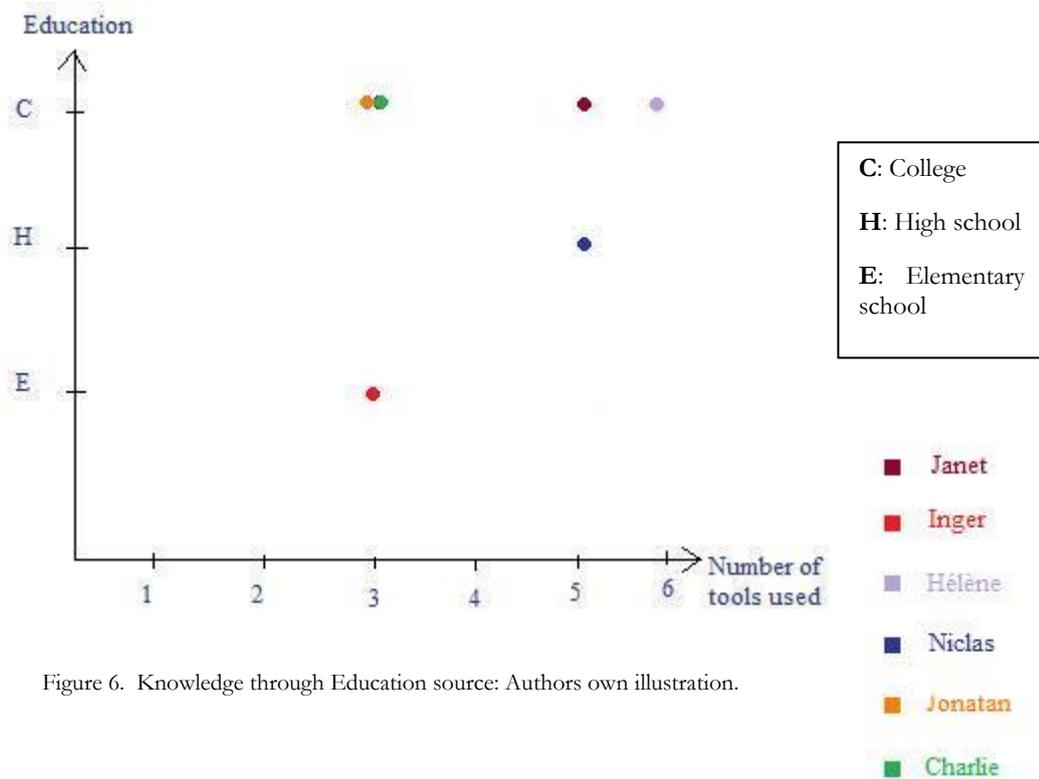


Figure 6. Knowledge through Education source: Authors own illustration.

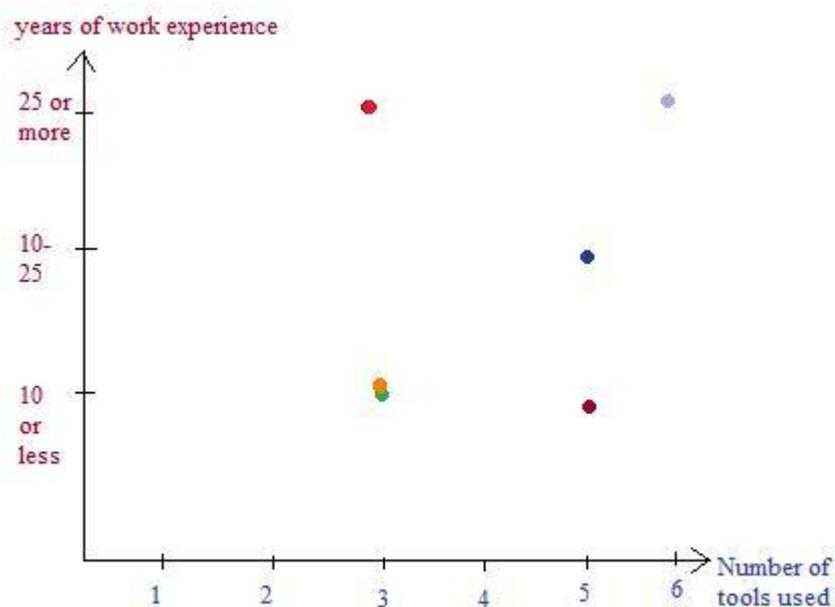


Figure 7. Knowledge through work experience source: Authors own illustration.

Gronhaug, K. (2002) claims that even if two people have the same knowledge, one of them might be a lot better than the other at marketing his or her firm. The explanation of this can be that they have different levels of insight. This includes things like, the ability to understand, remember and apply this information in the correct way in the right setting. (Gronhaug, K. 2002)

As you can see in the chart above, all the single person business owners have different amount of knowledge and work experience, but still they have all succeeded in marketing their businesses according to their goals.

An explanation to this is that they all know the setting in which their business belongs very well and therefore they are able to figure out ways that work for their specific company.

In the charts, we can see that Jonatan and Charlie have the same position in both education and work experience. This could be the reason why they use the same amount of tools.

Inger has many years of work experience, but not in the field of marketing. She does not have any higher education, so this combined with the work experience might be the reason for why she only uses three tools. Janet uses five tools and so does Niclas. Janet has a college degree and she had some marketing classes at school, Niclas has never studied at college but has more years of work experience than Janet. According to this particular sample of business owners it seems that work experience and education uncombined gives the same result. According to the information gained through the interviews, it seems that the best position to have when finding tools to market your firm with, is one with many years of work experience and a college degree. If we look at the charts we see that H el ene has both many years of work experience and a college degree, she is also the one who uses the largest number of different marketing tools.

Of course it is hard to claim that more tools generate better marketing, for some companies it could be very useful with two or three marketing tools and a fourth might be unnecessary because it would not make any difference. However, in this project all of the single person business owners answered that they used the amount of marketing tools they did, because they lacked knowledge about additional ones. Two of them said that they would like to use more tools if they knew how and if they could afford it.

This shows that they connect tools with large costs, i.e. they lack knowledge on how to find cheap ways to market their firms.

When applying the theory of marketing knowledge on the interviews it is obvious that the interviewees have different background and therefore different amounts of knowledge. Some gained their knowledge through studying at high school and college and others gained it through working many years at other companies. A few had both sources of knowledge, and it was clear from this research that knowledge from studying and working is the ultimate combination.

5.4 Casual or effectual reasoning?

From the interviews it is clear that every one of the single person business owners mostly use effectual reasoning. They all started with the resources they had; their previous knowledge, network and money, and used these to create goals for their marketing. Many of them shaped their goals as Sarasvathy (2001) said that most entrepreneurs do – by interacting with family, friends and other people in their network. According to Sarasvathy (2001) many entrepreneurs use effectual reasoning in the start-up phase and then later changes and uses casual reasoning. This seems to hold for the single person business owners, all of them used effectual reasoning in the beginning, and some seemed to use both effectual and casual reasoning. Jonatan started off by using casual reasoning when he started to carefully plan the marketing for his company but then he faced a problem and he changed totally into effectual reasoning to get through the problem.

Sarasvathy (2001) claims that entrepreneurs have three kinds of resources. First - who they are, second – what they know, and third – whom they know. Sarasvathy (2001) also say that these resources can be used in combinations to create opportunities and even to meet goals, and this is done without any planning. The interviewees have all used these resources in different ways to create marketing opportunities and goals.

Janet started with an interest that she developed into a business, she had some previous knowledge from school and she made sure she got the help she needed from her family and friends. Inger made no marketing plan at all but still used all her resources without knowing that she did. Inger had some previous knowledge from working at other firms, but she did not make a plan for marketing her company. Instead she told us that she spoke to people she knew and got ideas and suggestions from them on how to conduct a good marketing strategy.

If we look at the affordable loss principle it is obvious that it is used by several of the single person business owners. Many of the interviewees were not afraid of trying new marketing tools, Jonatan for example, tried to use brochures as direct marketing before he called the customers to offer his services, but this did not work out the way he hoped. Niclas have used a lot of different tools which are all quite cheap and easy to use. The only tool he mentioned that he thought was too expensive was advertising, he was afraid to spend money on advertisements since it will cost a lot and he was not sure he could afford it if it did not generate many new customers. The tools the single person business owners choose for their marketing is often used in a small scale and they are cheap. This is in accordance with the affordable loss principle (Sarasvathy, 2001) that implies that if a tool does not involve a large investment it can be used without taking a serious financial risk.

The theory on casual or effectual reasoning showed that planning everything carefully is not always the best option for a small business. It shows that the spontaneous ways to market a firm used by the single person business owners can work very well depending on the situation. In addition, it showed how the three largest personal resources were used by the interviewees to create opportunities and goals for their marketing.

5.5 Service marketing

All of our interviewees were single person business owners who were all running service based firms. Only two of our interviewees (Jonatan and Niclas) mentioned that they had difficulties with marketing their services. Other problems were tied to resource poverty which is not only troubling service firms but product based firms as well.

When it comes to intangibility all of the firms had to make sure that they inform the potential customers in detail about their services since there are no products to be seen. Jonatan and Niclas mentioned that they had difficulties marketing their services because customers cannot see the services as if they would have been products. The authors found out that the different interviewees had different ways of solving this problem of intangibility. Some used brochures and posters while a common technique seemed to be cold calling people. The latter way let them get in touch with the potential clients and talk to them to make sure that the right messages was conveyed. Grönroos (2007) suggests a solution to this through having business people trying to make the intangible more tangible by adding physical evidence to the services. Examples of that being done among our interviewees are Hélène and Inger who are using brochures and Charlie using business cards with to-do lists on the back for the clients to fill out.

Heterogeneity, explained by Bessom and Jackson (1975) is another problem for service firms which mean that it is hard to reproduce the exact same service experience over and over. Therefore it is important to perform follow-ups like H el ene, Jonatan and Inger have done with their marketing in order to keep a good consistency of the quality. If the customers are not happy with the results, they have a chance to change the service to make them satisfied the next time they come back. Without asking customers for feedback it can be difficult to know how they perceived the service and marketing strategies.

Services are also perishable which means that they cannot be stored according to Bessom and Jackson (1975). Therefore people selling services need to be looking for customers consistently and marketing can be more risky in case it would fail. Charlie, Jonatan and Inger use cold calling frequently to have clients to work for but if they use word of mouth as well that might help them take some work off their shoulders. This is more vital if they are working full-time with their business as this might be the only source of income. Charlie, for instance, is only doing this to make some extra money next to his studies and to gain experience which means he does not have as much pressure to reach certain profits. Janet, Jonatan and Niclas on the other hand are trying to make a living out of their business so therefore the marketing of their firms is more important since they have no other income.

After analyzing the issues service firms are facing, the authors found that firms mainly have problems with the intangibility of services. They solve this problem by better trying to inform customers about their services.

5.6 Promotional tools

Advertising

Most of the interviewees had not tried advertising as a promotional tool. Some had thought of the idea but they all argued that it is too expensive, especially for small businesses. H el ene was the only one that actually used it through putting an advertisement in a paper but she did not get any customers from it. She meant that there are so many advertisements everywhere that it is really hard to stand out and raise awareness. Since this tool is considered expensive to the single person businesses that were asked, it is understandable that none of them are using it today.

Sales promotion

None of the people that the authors interviewed mentioned that they are using sales promotion as a tool in their marketing. It can be a good way for a service firm to attract customers by offering discounts in order to create new customer relationships. By letting customers try out the services at a cheaper price, they can create their own valuation about it and decide whether they want to continue doing business. A reason why none of the single person business owners are using it might be because some may think that they are losing profit if they give out too much discount and therefore focus on other promotional tools instead. According to Jobber (2007) sales usually stays about the same after the promotions which means that this might not be one of the most effective tools and therefore people are not using it.

Public relations

Only one (H el ene) of the business owners the authors asked had used public relations in some way and not even to a great extent. H el ene had been talking about her business at a friend's seminar and through that gotten free publicity to people of her target audience. The reason why many small businesses do not use it might be that it is hard to get space in papers and such for publicity.

They are in need of either good contacts within the media industry or a good and interesting story to publish. These small businesses have to be doing something unique to get the attention needed to be publicized. Dibb et al. (2001) mention that publicity is not to be considered free advertisements and they still have to convince media to make their stories public.

Sponsorship

When having a small business with a tight budget it can be hard to find money to spend on sponsorship, at least to a larger extent. Among our interviewees, only Janet had used this tool even though it was smaller scale sponsorships. She felt confident with this since she had a friend who had used it before and could lead her on the right track. It may not be easy to find a sponsorship at a location where the target audience will see it and to a price that fits the budget which explains why only one single person business used this tool.

Word of mouth

Almost every one of the interviewees the authors talked to mentioned that they were using word of mouth. They are all using this marketing tool because it is free and works by itself. Word of mouth is spread by itself as customers are happy or unhappy with a business. Day (1971) show in his study that word of mouth can be very effective as it shows reliability when it is spread from customers who speak of own experience. A big risk with word of mouth is that the bad word can spread easily and quickly if a customer is dissatisfied. Most of the authors' interviewees do not consider this something to be concerned about since it is free and there is really not much they can do to influence it except for trying to start a good rumor.

Online marketing

Almost all of the interviewees the authors interviewed used some form of online marketing. The most common way was to have a webpage which is easy and cheap to set up. A great benefit is that the companies can get a direct contact between them and the customers (Melody et al., 2000) to tell them more of what they have to offer. Since most of the people the authors talked to have financial constraints, online marketing is great because it saves them a lot of money and with just basic knowledge they can run and update a website by themselves.

Internet is a great way to find customers since almost everyone in Sweden has it today and people are using it on a daily basis. It is probably one of the largest media but, since it is so big there is a lot of competition as well which makes it harder for small companies to be visible.

Direct marketing

Most of the businesses the authors spoke to use direct marketing in some way. The most common way is to hand out brochures and to cold-call people to offer their services. Through this method it is easier to reach their target markets since they will be dealing with them directly according to Kotler et al. (2005). To call people is a good way for small businesses to market themselves since it does not cost much. Even though it takes more time, it might still be worth it considering the chances of misunderstandings are very low since there are no intermediaries between the seller and potential customer (Jobber, 2007). A problem in single person businesses concerning the resource poverty is that they often also lack time since the business owner is responsible for all duties. Therefore they most likely cannot rely on the direct marketing alone but have to use other methods in addition.

Personal selling

Only one person (Charlie) of the people the authors interviewed was using personal selling. Charlie mentioned how he occasionally goes from business to business to offer his services. Through this way he interacts with business people face to face and can in an easier way explain how he can make work life easier for his potential clients.

Through this method one can make his or her offers more suitable to the customers by gathering information about their needs and wants (Jobber, 2007). It takes a lot of time and money to travel around selling the services or products which makes it more appropriate for smaller and local businesses which only operate within a certain area. This might therefore not be the best choice for single person businesses since most of them lack both time and money.

When analyzing the responses from the interviewees the authors found out that almost all of the tools that were presented in the theory had been used in one way or another. Some were used more frequently and with more success such as word of mouth, online marketing and direct marketing. The reason why tools like advertising, personal selling and sponsorship were used only to some degree was because of different kinds of resource poverty among the single person businesses.

5.7 Price

When interviewing the single people businesses, only two business owners (Hélène and Janet) mentioned price when they planned the marketing strategies for their firms. Hélène used the competitor-oriented pricing method to set her prices close to the competitors' prices. The reason she wanted to deal with the prices at an early stage was to be sure she was not losing customers because of too high prices or losing profit because of too low prices. She was using what Jobber (2007) refers to as the going-rate pricing as she looked what other firms on the market charged for the same service and through that she would get an idea of where to set her own prices. Janet on the other hand was using the demand-oriented pricing method which according to Jobber (2007) adjust the prices to the demand. She started out with a low price to attract new customers but as time went by and people heard of her services, she could increase her prices along with the demand to make a higher profit.

All the others were focusing on their promotion to attract new customers to their businesses which is just a small part of marketing.

5.8 Place

None of our interviewees mentioned place or location as a part of their marketing strategies. Dibb (2001) says that even if a service is intangible it has to be delivered somewhere. Therefore geographical location is important in order to make the services accessible to customers. This should especially apply to Niclas who travels between different cities to serve his customers. It should certainly also be relevant to the rest of the interviewees as they have to place their business where there is a demand for the services they are offering.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the marketing knowledge and tools single person businesses have and use within the service sector in Sweden. The purpose is fulfilled by answering the following two research questions.

What knowledge do the owners of single person businesses have when it comes to marketing their services?

The result of this research showed that the single person business owners have different backgrounds and therefore different amounts of knowledge and levels of insight in marketing. Some gained their knowledge through studying at high school and college, and others gained it through working many years at other companies. It was clear from this research that knowledge from studying and working is the ultimate combination.

All of the single person business owners thought that since their firms were so small scale businesses that well developed marketing strategies was more of a luxury than a necessity.

Instead of planning their marketing, the single person business owners used effectual reasoning and started to implement their marketing tools at a very early stage. Even though this shows a lack of knowledge in the planning process, the theory on effectual reasoning shows that planning everything carefully is not always the best option for a small business. The single person business owners conducted very little follow-ups on their marketing tools. Even though we can see a second lack of knowledge here, it is covered by their usage of the affordable loss principle.

Many of the single person business owners used the three steps which showed that they have the minimum level of satisfactory marketing knowledge; this is why they have managed to market their firm even if they have some knowledge gaps. However, if they had more knowledge they would have been better off, i.e. facing less dilemmas and being less affected by their resource poverty.

How do the owners of single person businesses in Sweden market their services?

Most of the single person business owners viewed marketing as just promotion, only two of them added price as part of their marketing concept.

When analyzing the responses from the interviewees the authors found out that almost all of the promotional tools presented in the theory had been used in one way or another. Some were used more often and with more success such as word of mouth, online marketing and direct marketing. The reason why tools like advertising, personal selling and sponsorship were used only to some degree was due to different kinds of resource poverty among the single person businesses. Resource poverty made them use their own ideas, such as being closer to the customer and use networking to get the help needed.

Service firms often find problems with intangibility, which means that it is hard to show the customers in advance what they will get when buying a service. All of the interviewees were aware that they have to act differently compared to if they were marketing products.

According to the contingency approach there are no optimal marketing strategies as they differ between different environments and firm sizes. (Kirby & Siu, 1998) Through the authors' findings, it is hard to tell if there is an optimal marketing strategy since most of the interviewees do not perform any follow-ups and therefore do not know what works and what does not. The only interviewees who do this are the ones with web pages as they get statistics on how many people that visit their web pages.

Everyone used word of mouth and considered it to be efficient, but on the other hand there is no proof that this was the most efficient one there is. When it comes to other strategies, the interviewees mentioned different ones which they put their focus on. This could be evidence that different strategies work differently depending on the firms and what their businesses are.

7 Discussion

The authors found it interesting that the single person business owners were not aware of the marketing they really use, such as; how they deliver the services, that they themselves are a part of marketing (how they behave, appearance), that their geographical location could be used for marketing etc.

It was also obvious that they were all very focused around promotion, even the interviewees who had marketing knowledge from school was still mostly mentioning promotion when asked what marketing was for them. This could be explained by the fact that promotion is nearly the only part of a company's marketing that is visible to the outside world.

Another interesting finding was that even if the single person business owners did not conduct any follow-ups (except on the websites) they were not really aware that they in fact used the concept of affordable loss. Many of them were focused around the costs of marketing and they tried their best to keep the costs down, still they did not try to find and use all the very cheap marketing strategies – like for example bootstrapping. This is mostly due to a lack of knowledge, and the authors really believe that the single person business owners could be a lot more successful with their marketing if they developed a combination of knowledge from both education and work experience.

7.1 Critique of investigation

One weakness of this study can be that the sample size was too small to actually represent a whole country. On the other hand, the sample had an even gender distribution which gives a strength to the result.

The authors asked single person business owners that they personally knew; this could be a weakness if the interviewees answer what they think the authors wanted them to answer. On the contrary, the interviewees might have been more honest in their answers and not afraid to admit knowledge gaps etc. since the interviewers were people they knew.

If the sample of single person business owners only had contained owners who worked full-time in their companies, all interviewees might have been more oriented towards marketing issues since they try to make a living out of the profit. In other words, marketing the firms should have been more important to those who worked full-time and were dependent on their firms' survival.

It could also have been useful to look at the size of the firms financially, to have an even spread so that they had approximately the same amount of money to spend on marketing. In addition, it could have contributed to the result if the marketing budget of each business owner was known. The one problem that might occur with a question like that is that most of the interviewees would not have been able to answer since they never planned for their marketing, and thus did not have a marketing budget.

The result of this study is mostly applicable to single person businesses in the service sector in the south of Sweden. To have a larger sample containing businesses located in the middle and north of Sweden would have given a more applicable result. On the other hand, the sample used in this study contained many different kinds of service firms which give the result an increased validity.

When conducting the interviews, they should have been made face to face and both authors should have been present to avoid observer error and observer bias. However, both authors had an exact manuscript of the questions and two pre-interviews were conducted to test the questions and the interview methods.

7.2 Suggestions for future research

During the study in the field of marketing within single person businesses in Sweden, the authors came across limitations which opens up for future research within the same subject. The authors will therefore give a few suggestions on how to further research the topic.

For further studies it would be interesting to see if the results that the authors found out also apply to service firms in other parts of Sweden. The reason is because the authors were limited to smaller areas of the country in this research due to time constraints. A further research would increase the generalisability which shows whether the results are valid in other situations too.

In order to improve the reliability as well, the authors suggest doing research on more service firms and within different business sectors. Through that, research could tell whether single person business owners' marketing knowledge is different depending on what industry they are in. Since the authors interviewed a limited number of six firms, there are chances that different information can be found if interviewing more single person businesses. By also looking at different sizes of single person businesses research can be done to see whether the size will influence the results at all.

To further investigate in marketing knowledge, one suggestion is to go beyond single person businesses and look at sole proprietorships as well as small and medium enterprises. It would be interesting to see if they are facing the same problems and whether they use the same tools and strategies as the authors found among single person business owners. Another aspect is to look at the marketing knowledge between smaller and larger firms to try to find differences and whether people in all kinds of business forms look at marketing the same way.

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9 Appendix 1

Interview

Sex:

Age:

Kind of company:

When did you found the company?

Which are your primer activities in the company?

Do you work full-time in your company?

Do you consider your company to suffer from any kind of resource poverty?

Marketing (general)

What is marketing for you?

What were your thoughts on marketing for your company in the start-up phase?

What parts did you focus on?

Did you have any marketing dilemmas before starting to market your company? If yes, what were the dilemmas?

Did you know the "tools" and strategies that was needed to solve this dilemma? If yes, how did you know this?

Did you conduct a marketing plan before marketing you company?

If yes, how did you do it and why and what did it contain?

If no, why not?

What goals do you have with your marketing?

What marketing tools and strategies did you use?

Why did you use these specific ones? How did you chose them?

Why did you use this specific number of tools?

Implementation

How have you implemented the tools and strategies you chose?

Did you know how to implement them or did you use help from somewhere?

Do you think the process of marketing your company would have proceeded in a better way if you had more knowledge about marketing?

If yes, in what ways?

If no, why?

Do you think that the process of marketing your company has worked well?

In what ways did, or did it not work?

Control

Do you make continuous follow-ups on the results from the different tools and strategies you have used?

If yes, what made you do this?

If no, why not

Has there been a tool or a strategy that has not worked well enough to be worth the costs?

Have you excluded or not used that tool or strategy?

Knowledge

Can you describe your education?

Have you worked at other companies before?

Did you have any previous knowledge about marketing (before starting this company)?

Have you gathered knowledge during the years of owning your present company?

If yes, in what way? (literature, seminars, experience)

Do you use any help when marketing your company?