How to create a marketing communication strategy?

Master's Thesis within Business Administration

Title:	How to create a marketing communication strategy?
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Abstract

Introduction: The brand and its values must be communicated both internally and externally. In order to attract new customers and maintain existing service companies have to create effective marketing communication strategy. In order to create strategy companies must find their core value of brand and from this communicate with customer through different channels. The rapid growth of digital media opened new possibilities for service companies to communicate with customers, but many service companies have difficulties to position themselves and take advantage of the digital media.

Problem: In today's hard competitive and fast changing business environment it is not enough to a have a good product or service to be successful in market, (Kotler, 2009). Companies first must create a well thought plan on how to reach customers and through which channels, and it is often much more difficult to implement than it seems. The gap in communication between customer and company usually arise in message, because of misinterpretation in decoding of the message or because company choose less effective communication channel.

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and analyze what kind of difficulties Vålådalen Fjällstation may face in their attempts to create integrated marketing communication strategy and through which communication channels company can more effectively communicate with their customers.

Method: The empirical data was collected through a study for Vålådalens Fjällstation and by case study of four communication agencies in Jönköping. The outcome of the interviews was analyzed together with the frame of reference.

Conclusion: The authors come to the conclusion that the company must find core value of the brand before they create communication strategy. It can serve as a basis in choice of communication channels, in designing message and convey of experience. It requires a well-planned strategy in which company has figured out the real purpose for each communication channel. This study points out that most of SME service companies need to be consistent, unique and creative when implementing marketing communication strategy. Many companies do not use social media effectively, because they did not thought out real purpose for it and often do not reach desired group of customers. In some cases social media can even contribute negatively to the brand if company do not thought out clear purpose with use of social media. Internal branding built through employees and stable and engaged management contribute to build effective integrated communication strategy.

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background

Vålådalen Fjällstation is a mountain lodge that has existed for many years. The facility has difficulties to attract new customers. Owner of the company expressed the desire that authors of this thesis should investigate how Vålådalens Fjällstation can attract new customers. The authors performed a number of observations with the company's management and made a trip to Vålådalen. After several interviews conducted with management of the company the authors got an overview of company situation. In lack of time authors made delimitation and decided to study how Vålådalen Fjällstation can create effective communication strategy. The reason was that the authors noticed that that management opinions what kinds of approach to use in order to attract new customers were very different. The authors also noticed that the differences in managements view about on which group of customers the company should try to attract more of were also divided. According Proctor & Kitchen (2002) successful communication strategies requires more creative thinking allied to an integrated approach to all communication activities. The authors found that a high level of creativity in communications has a potential to enchance the communication being done.

According to Dahlén (2010) the brand and its values must be communicated both internally and externally. Delivering the brand promise to customers employees act as brand champions in communications with customer (Dahlén, Lane & Smith, 2010). Brand is shorthand to the emotional connection with customers and brand do begins at home. After conducted study at the company the authors believe that the management of Vålådalen Fjällstation could gain competitive advantage if they create a communication strategy together with employees. Previous research proved that intangible brand characteristics are much more difficult for competitors to copy then the operational components of a service brand experience; because it is an only matter of time before competing companies introduces the same or even better operational components (Mosley, 2007). In other words engaged and satisfied employees who also understand what the company stand for may contribute to build a both strong brand and effective marketing communication.

According to Mosley (2007) if we study the most successful service brands we can realize that the most obvious point of similarity is the stress they place in delivering distinctive brand experience. He took a Joseph Michellis study of the Starbucks as an example where the most important aspect in their emotional bond to customers is through personal investment of Starbucks partners, employees. The observation has been confirmed even by Starbucks founder Howard Shultz who claimed:
'The *most important component of our brand is the employee. The people have created the magic. The people have created the experience.*'

Howard Shultz statement can be linked to Vålådalen Fjällstation, because regardless of service company's size and type of service offered, employees and management play a major role in creating the experience.

From the customer's point of view, in service companies brand message and employees are probably the most important aspects of the service. They represent the service firm, because from the customer's perspective, they are the firm and employees provide a core part of the brand message and therefore they determine whether the brand can deliver the promise (Lovelock&Wirtz, 2007).

After having defined the desired audience response the company must develop an effective message. The message should include attention, interest, desire and action. In practice most of messages do not take customer from awareness to purchase. According to Kotler (2009) AIDA model suggests the desirable qualities of a good message. In putting the message together the company must decide *what to say* in message content and *how to say it* in message structure and format (Kotler,2009). There are many different models for designing an effective message, and most of them have aim to explain how to attract customer from attention to action. In fact that authors write about a SME service company, the most appropriate model for designing a message can be models like AIDA, because it is easy to understand and can serve as an indication how to create a message. According to the management of Vålådalen Fjällstation the company has difficulties to create an appropriate message.

This study is done on behalf of Vålådalens Fjällstation with a focus to investigate how company can increase the number of new customers and to investigate potential problems that company may face in their attempts to attract new customers. Focus in this research is a case study at several marketing communication agencies in order to help Vålådalen Fjällstation to create an effective communication strategy. The author's ambition was to get suggestions and ideas from experts in the field on how to create effective communication strategy and also to share own experiences about possible challenges in implementation of strategy. There are several reasons why the authors choose that particular research method. The authors thought that combining literature with interviews with experts in the field could give an opportunity to compare the researched subject from different directions, both theoretical and practical.

The main focus in the literature was mostly in how to create an effective marketing communication strategy through different communication channels and how to create a message that can attract new customers and create long term relationship. There are a number of literatures about Swedish mountain tourism and communication strategy but there is lack of research of the SME companies in mountain tourism with focus on designing a message and communication strategy, therefore the authors of this thesis see the need for the current study to address the lack of research.

1.2   Problem discussion

Vålådalen Fjällstation is a mountain lodge that has existed for many years and is a well-known name in the business. The facility has been driven for most of time by nonprofit organizations and the last six years it has been driven by entrepreneur Jonas Ågren who has tried to improve the facility standards in order to attract more customers. Jonas Ågren has invested in the facility in hope of reversing the negative economic trend. But although large investments the company is still in deficit. At first the authors and the

owner of the company agreed to make market research in order to attract new customers from Norway because the facility is only one hour drive fromTronheim area. After conducted several interviews with management of the company and after visiting the facility the authors decided to create integrated marketing communication strategy instead. There were several reasons for changing research subject. The main reason was that the authors recognized major differences in management's view on how the company should communicate with customers and what core values they should highlight in message. According to both several marketing theories and respondents from communication companies the first thing a company should do is to find a core value of the company and make a long term marketing communication strategy plan. In other words, before Vålådalen Fjällstation makes any market research in Norway they must create communication strategy and find core value of the brand. Otherwise there is maybe considerable risk that market research for Norway may not give desirable results. That's was a reason for changing research subject because the authors felt that that can be more beneficial and useful for the company.

Kotler (2009) argues that companies first must create a well thought plan on how to reach customers and through which channels and it is often much more difficult to implement than it seems. This statement was also confirmed by CEO of Vålådalen Fjällstation although earlier attempts to attract new customers through various channels it did not have the desired results. According Proctor & Kitchen (2002) successful communication strategies requires more creative thinking allied to an integrated approach to all communication activities. In fact that the authors find that level of creativity in communication activities at Vålådalen Fjällstation has a huge potential to enhance.

According to Kotler (2009) in the most of small companies managers think that only large corporations need planning with formal plans, goals and designing a message. The authors of this thesis confirmed that management of Vålådalen also has similar opinions that SME service companies do not have a need for strategic planning.

Most of SME companies argue that it takes unnecessary long time to prepare and write a strategic plan and marketplace changes too fast and therefore they argue that a plan may not be useful for the company (Kotler, 2009).According to Kotler strategic planning may often be more useful for small companies than larger ones. Because sound planning helps the company to anticipate and respond quickly to environmental changes and prepare for sudden developments. In order to create a well-organized structure in a company with engaged employees, the company need a stable business leadership. The authors felt that Vålådalens Fjällstation are not aware of necessity and importance to create a strategic communication plan, because of their opinion that it is more appropriate for larger companies.

After the authors studied the company they got the opinion that the company should try to find a core brand value by asking themselves basic question such us "who we are and how customers can recognize our message?". The mission statement is the statement of the firm's purpose and what it wants to accomplish (Kotler, 2009). That is why it can be very useful to start with asking themselves some basic question about the company's purpose before developing any communication plan. The company should ask what business are we in, what are our customers, what are we in business for and what makes us special? These questions sound very simple but are sometimes very difficult to answer. According Kotler (2009) asking these basic questions are a sign of strength, not uncertainty. Maybe that is way most of companies never answer these question because

sometimes it is hard to realize and understand owns strengths and weaknesses. That is why the authors believe that it is crucial for the company to make a deeper self-analysis in order to create effective communication strategy.

The authors found different opinions between management members about mission and perception of core brand value of Vålådalens Fjällstation. Sartain & Schumann (2006) stated that leaders must live up to company's values and also share the same kind of values and messages. If the employees and brand does not connect with leadership of a business a huge communication gap may arise. Because of the fact that the differences in opinions were clearly obvious, the authors considered that a part of communication strategy should be to build an internal brand.

After creating a well-defined mission statement the company can design a message. The gap in communication between customer and company usually arise in message, because there is risk for misinterpretation in decoding of the message. That is particularly common in transformational messages which must connect to customer emotions to be effective (Dahlén, Lange & Smith, 2010). According Proctor & Kitchen (2002) it is no longer enough to assume that customers can decode inside-out messages. Instead, messages deployed have to be based on outside- in approaches. In other words messages should be created to say what customers want to hear, not what company want to say. The facility has been a well-known place for elite athletes, but in recent years the company wants to attract new kind of customers groups, like families, WHOPS (Wealthy healthy old people) and Dinks (Double income no kids). The authors of this thesis pointed out that the current message design of Vålådalen Fjällstation is not as effective as desired and do not reach desired audience. Management of the company also claimed that company does not take advantage of the social media on the Web. Jones (2010) claimed that negative impact of social media is not always immediately recognized. There may be much or too little information, or simply the wrong the wrong type of information for the purpose to which it is being put. Respondents from communication agencies also claimed that the need for strategically planning for use of digital media is huge, otherwise the brand and reputation of the company may be hurt and damaged.

It is crucial for firms to understand the importance of managing expectations they suppose deliver that customers want because negative word of mouth is often much stronger and have a greater impact on company (Solomon, 2010). The authors argue that company's need to realize importance its ability to handle criticism and to avoid a communications gap between customers and the company.

In order to attract new customers the authors stated that a firm needs to create an integrated marketing communication strategy plan. Integrated marketing communication contains several advantages like cutting communication costs and increasing employee's motivation. In order to help Vålådalen Fjällstation with this the authors created a marketing communication strategy model with several stages. Those stages are: 1) find core value of the brand, 2) build internal brand, 3) create marketing communication strategy and message, 4) choose appropriate communication channels, 5) build external brand and 6) evaluate results of the performed process. The model is inspired by both literature and the performed case study at communication companies.

The brand message strategy is divided into both rational and hedonic types of needs. Rational types of needs are often referred to informational motivation while hedonic types of needs referred to transformational motivations where emotions and symbols are

important (Dahlén, Lange & Smith, 2010). The authors of the study choose to focus on how to design an emotional message in hedonic types of needs because in tourism industry hedonic needs usually tend to have more significance in customers purchase decision process. Although we got a deeper understanding of mountain tourism in Åre area by management and employees of Vålådalen Fjällstation, we cannot see them as representative from all industry of mountain tourism in Åre. The authors also pointed out that this thesis is not representative for all SME service companies in mountain tourism, but believe that same parts of the thesis may be suitable and useful for them.

The authors have the ambition to shed some light on how important it is to design an effective message through different channels in order to create communication strategy. It is also author's ambition that this research will be regarded as a contribution to the continuing research within the field of the marketing communication in SME service companies.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and analyze what kind of difficulties Vålådalen Fjällstation may face in their attempts to create integrated marketing communication strategy and through which communication channels the company can more effectively communicate in order to attract new customers.

1.4 Research questions

The research questions for this thesis are:

- How can Vålådalen Fjällstation create an integrated marketing communication strategy?

- What kind of difficulties may the company experience in their efforts to create an effective message and how to minimize the risk of disappearing in media noise?

- What kinds of communications channels are more suitable than others for the company?

2 Frame of Reference

Frame of reference carries out the discussion around the concept of creating a sustainable IMC strategy and pros and cons of the subject. Discussion is followed by theories of brand, customer behavior, CRM, media planning and social media. The design of the frame of reference enables the authors to; based on theory, make propositions and suggestions in order to create integrated marketing communication strategy.

2.1 Integrated Marketing Communication

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) can provide a method for every company to gain several advantages over their competition. Integrating the communication being done with customers will make sure that the messages sent out are being coherent even if it is within advertising, personal selling or PR. The strategic aspect of having management setting what the message utilized by a company also means that it will represent the strategic goals that management has with marketing. For Vålådalens Fjällstation adopting IMC would mean that they would have to deal with their different views on what the brand itself represents and what their goals are. This moves us to a more strategic view on communication is supported by Holm (2006) and Fill (2005). Holm (2006) argues for IMC to be more strategic compared to the more tactical choices that are done when communications are left to advertising, sales or PR. While Vålådalens Fjällstation can be seen as currently being semi-integrated by having such few people involved with marketing decisions, the different views on what the brand represents speaks of that what is being communicated is not fully integrated. Fill (2005) views IMC as being able to overcome this as the strategic and planned communication that IMC provides will be more coherent and meaningful for the target audience.

But what advantages and disadvantages would there be for Vålådalens Fjällstation to adapt to IMC? Fill (2005) presents several advantages and disadvantages to IMC;

Advantages of IMC

- Provides opportunities to cut communication costs
- Has the potential to produce synergistic and more effective communications
- Can deliver competitive advantage through clearer positioning
- Encourages coordinated brand development with internal and external participants
- Provides for increased employee participation and motivation
- Has the potential to cause management to review its communication strategy
- Requires a change in culture and fosters a customer focus
- Provides a benchmark for the development of communication activities
- Can cut the number of agencies supporting a brand

Disadvantages of IMC

- Encourages centralisation and formal/bureaucratic procedures
- Can require increased management time seeking agreement from all involved parties
- Suggests uniformity and a single message
- Tendency to standardisation might negate or dilute creative opportunities
- Global brands restricted in terms of local adaptation
- Normally requires cultural change from employees and encourages resistance
- Has the potential to severely damage a brand's reputation if incorrectly managed
- Can lead to situation there single agency network has access to all sources of communications

The advantages of IMC presented by Fill (2005) might not all materialize for a smaller company such as Vålådalens Fjällstation but what is interesting is that it can give them competitive advantage, coordination between external and internal participants, cut communication cost and involve management in the communication strategy. All of these which would have great benefit for Vålådalens Fjällstation in their communication as they are facing competition that have an upper hand in budget and as such can reach their audience in more media vehicles. The big disadvantage for Vålådalens Fjällstation is the limited staff and management. Jones (2010) claimed that most of entrepreneurial companies handle with limited staff and resources, and it requires a high degree of creativity and flexibility to maximize utility of available resources. The fact that most of management team already having dual roles within the company it may prove hard for management to also have time to deal with marketing issues as well. That is way a need of creativity is overwhelming.

Ouwersloot & Duncan (2008) also sees that IMC has an ability to overcome media clutter with the fine-tuned and co-ordinated message strategies that are used with IMC. Any ability to overcome media clutter is highly advantageous for Vålådalens Fjällstation as it is hard to be standout and make oneself heard over everyone else that are competing for the audience attention. Hutton (1996) stated that in practice the lack of integration is generally a function of poor communication or lack of cooperation, rather than any philosophical disagreement about whether marketing communications should or not should be integrated.

There is also a connection between IMC, brand identity and brand equity (Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan & McDonald, 2005). Brand identity strategy is a step toward building a strong and well recognized brand, this by building an initial relationship between the company and the customer. But the effect of this initial relationship is limited by the complexity of communications. The conceptual framework developed by Madhavaram, et al. (2005) suggests that the IMC strategy should come from the brand identity strategy and that they together develops the brand equity for a firm. As such when adapting to IMC, the company have to take brand identity in consideration while adopting it.

2.1.1　Communication channels

With IMC having been introduced as a concept, it is also important to understand how and where communication is being done. Communications channels explains the where and how of marketing communication. Marketing calls for more than just developing a good product, pricing it attractively and making it available to target customers. Companies must also communicate with current and prospective customer, and what they communicate should not be left to chance (Kotler, Wong, Saunders and Armstrong, 2005). This is combined with that marketing communications is moving away from managing customer transactions to managing customer relationships and from passive to interactive and multichannel marketing communications (Dahlén et al., 2010) sets the outcome for this part. The communication is done through two broad types of communication channels, personal and non-personal (Kotler et al., 2005). Personal selling channel uses face-to-face activities done by people that represent the company in order to inform, persuade or remind an individual to take action (Fill, 2005). Non-personal selling channel utilizes different media vehicles without personal contacts or feedback but with the same objective as personal selling (Kotler et al., 2005).

2.1.2　Media planning

Media planning deals with planning how communication in the non-personal communication channel should be carried out. IMC as well has a great effect on the media planning as communication strategies for both personal and non-personal communication channels should have been developed with IMC.

Media planning is the process of finding and choosing the most cost-effective means of delivering communications between prospect and existing customers (Dahlén, et al., 2010).This is something that can be found to be useful for a small company as Vålådalens Fjällstation. With the limited resources available they have to make sure that they reach the target audience in the most cost effective way possible with the right message. Modern day media clutter also poses a problem as it means that companies might not be able to reach the target audience with their message, unless the company is using the correct media tools. Media also has an important role as it creates "bridges" between the company and the customer, creating contact points where consumers and companies can interact (Ouwersloot & Duncan, 2008).

Media planning can be done with a four step process as described by Ouversloot & Duncan (2008). The first step identifies the media target, sets the media objective, determines the media strategies and finally schedules the media placements. The first step, identifying the media targets uses the marketing plan as its guide on who the brand's audience is it is up to the media planner to choose the communication vehicle that suits the profile of the target audience. The second step defines what the company wants to accomplish with the delivery of their brand message. Media objectives convey what the company wants the customer to feel, think and do about the brand. It also describes how the customer will be exposed to brand messages so that the message has an opportunity to impact on the customers thinking, feeling and doing. The third step determining me-

dia strategies explains how the objectives will be reached. For each media objective that the company has there should be one or more strategy for how to reach it and these strategies describes the media mix, or more exactly what media should be used and to what degree it should be use. The final step is to determine the media schedule, which is how the customer should be exposed to the messages that the company delivers. This four step process is something that Vålådalens Fjällstation could find to be useful as it involves them to set identify what segment to target, set objectives and strategies to reach the target. By having this type of planning Vålådalens Fjällstation will be able to communicate with customers in a more efficient way and be able to better make prospective customers aware of Vålådalens Fjällstation.

Media planning also encompasses several concepts that can be used as tools for achieving the set objectives and evaluation metrics (Dahlén, et al., 2010);

- Frequency: The number of possible exposures to a media vehicle.
- Reach: The number of people expected to be exposed to the advertising.
- Weight: Measured in gross rating points or television rating points, can be seen as an expression of the penetration of target audience.
- Opportunities to see: The probability that the target audience is being exposed to the message.
- Media Vehicles: The individual carrier within a media medium.
- Share of voice: The measure of how the company should be heard compared to its competition.
- Ratings: Refers to how many homes with TVs that are tuned in to a program.
- Salience: The impact of several factors affects the customer relevance and relevant media ratings.
- Cost: Used to compare different media, usually through cost per thousand.

The concepts from Dahlén, et al. are useful in the selection of what media vehicle to use to reach the target audience. By applying the concepts Vålådalens Fjällstation can use the most cost effective method available and still be able to communicate their message to the target audience. And by doing this they may be able to overcome the media clutter more effective. This as the message will only be communicated in media vehicles where the target audience is expected to be exposed to it.

2.1.3   Social media and internet marketing

With the development of internet it has become easier for companies to communicate with their consumers and for consumers to communicate with each other, especially after the rise of social media or Web 2.0 as a tool for communication. But what is social media and what can the company do with it to better communicate with their customers. Mangold & Faulds (2009) views social media as having a hybrid role in the promotion mix used to both talk with the customer and that the customers can communicate with each other. This second role is unique for social media and something that no other promotion tool can do.

The drawback with social media is that companies cannot control the information that is exchanged through social media. This according to Constantinides & Fountain (2008) is something that market managers should not ignore as the impact of this information is still important to consider, but instead they think companies should include social media in the regular promotion mix so that standard marketing practices and theories can be applied. Including social media in the promotion mix would also mean that it could be a part of the IMC and as well make it easier for marketing managers to understand and use social media. Manigold & Faulds (2009) sees social media as a new challenge for marketers and that it should be approached in both a passive and active way as a part of the overall marketing strategy. Manigold & Faulds (2009) continues with claiming that social media are here to stay and that marketers should learn to communicate with a now more empowered customer than before that are not as sensitive to push-marketing as previously.

Service companies try to build bonds with consumers, in order to keep in touch with consumers in form of viral marketing or social media and giving them the reason to maintain the bond with company over time (Solomon, 2010). Many market communicators claim that it is much harder to build bonds with consumers than it seems. According to respondents from Vålådalen Fjällstation it is very difficult to build a long term relationship with customers and main reason for that is that the company may not use appropriate communication channel.

In the most industries there are many competitors and in today's digital world there are many different communication channels to choose. In other words customers receive a lot of information and that's way they are selective about what they are pay attention to. Customer's sensor capacity is limited, and that is way customers make perceptual selectivity in order to avoid being overwhelmed by *advertising clutter*, (Solomon, 2010).
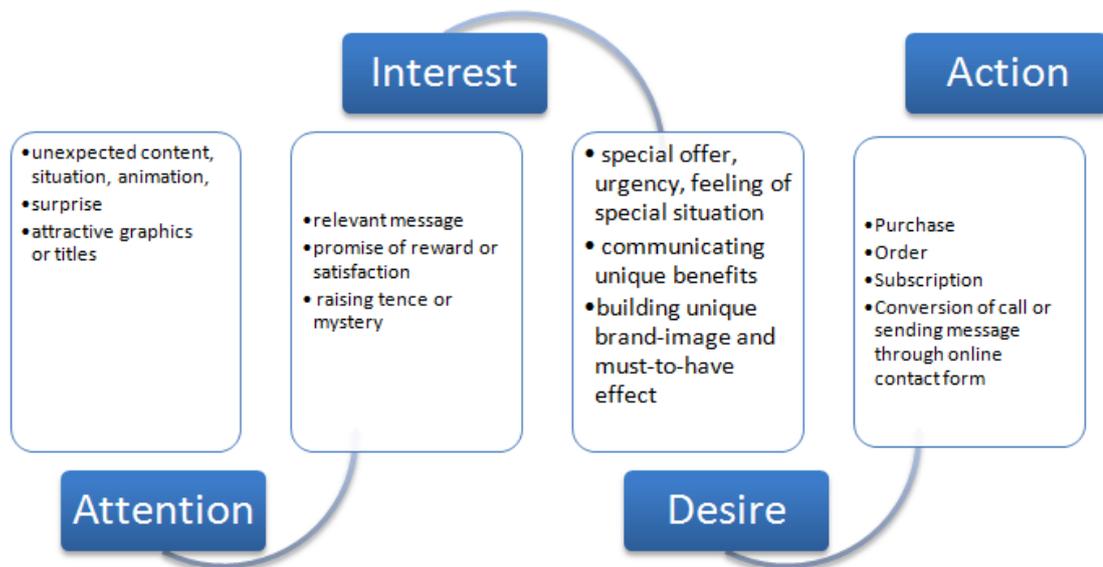

Figure 2-1   AIDA model in internet marketing, Vit Horky

Most of service companies claim that they must to shake consumers in these days to make them notice, because many people are weary of the difficulty of finding advertis-

ing –free moments in their life (Solomon, 2007). Respondents from communication companies also agreed that service companies must show high degree of creativity in order to make customer notice them. Figure 2 show also that experts agreed that companies have to use attractive graphics and pictures in order to awake emotions. Respondents from communication companies also agreed that in order to get attention many companies have to stretch the limits. According to Dobele (2005) "*successful viral marketing campaigns are comprised of an engaging message that involves imagination, fun and intrigue, encourages ease of use and visibility, targets credible source and leverages combinations of technology*". Helena Nordström (Market Director at Destination Jönköping) stated that communicators must always keep in mind that campaigns have to be fun and/or raise mystery. According to Helena many marketers put a focus in fun and mystery part, but message must be also relevant in order to take customer all way to purchase.

2.2   Brand identity

Brand identity means how the company would like customers to see its brand, and it is not always the same as what a company is. Brand identity is strategically and looks to the future (Solomon, 2010). Brand identity is the cumulative impressions and representations of the potential and current users, opinion leaders, word of mouth and "what resides in the minds of consumers" (Dahlén, Lange & Smith, 2010). According to Dahlén(2010) brand identity is the product of the different perspectives of the brand in the thought, deed and through experience. Image results from decoding and interpretation of communication between customers, employees, opinion leaders and competitors. The components of the brand identity are corporate brand image, customer brand image and company brand.

 Brand identities are very closely intertwined with the customer identities and brands can elicit deep emotional engagement from customers, (Solomon, 2010). According to Solomon even brands we do not like can be very important to us, because we often define ourselves in opposition to what we do not like.

Brand begins at home. The first step in creation of a successful communication strategy in a service company is to build a brand identity with the help of your employees and managers. It is usually huge challenges for managers to create a brand identity and in the same time both employees and customer must understand what the brand is all about (Sartain & Schumann, 2006). There are several reasons to why it is important for SME tourism companies like Vålådalen Fjällstation to build a strong brand identity. According to Hankinson (2003) brands are conceptualized as *communicators* and brand identity can be used by an organization to communicate its positioning relative to the competitive set. In destination branding it is crucial that the company combine imaginative marketing supported by investment in the facilities and key services in order to deliver the experience (Hankinson, 2003). According to management of Vålådalen Fjällstation they have invested a lot of money in the facility and in event sponsorship. The question is if the investments made were enough or if marketing strategy were right and appropriate for the company?

2.3   Internal Branding

The brand and its values must be communicated internally in order to easier deliver the brand promise. Delivering the brand promise requires the complicity of customer facing employees who act as brand representatives in communication with customers (Dahlén, Lange & Smith, 2010). According to Dahlén the idea with internal branding is that employees do the right things when they know what the brand is supposed to deliver and that employees can add value to the brand.

According to both management of the company and Gransjö (2001) mountain tourism industry in Åre most of companies thinks that product they offer is complex and is difficult to assess.

Whole industry is characterized by low wages, long working hours and strong seasonal variations (Gransjö, 2001). That is way it is more difficult to build a strong internal branding in service companies in tourism industry in Åre. It may be difficult, but with management who creates a pleasant work environment and well defined goals employees can make a difference. It can break the spin cycle by creating a credible communication experience with employees, incorporating a range of media and message (Sartain & Schumann, 2006). According to Sartain management must live the brand promise and avoid any gaps between them and employees, they must know *how* they communicate and *what* they communicate.

2.4   Consumer behavior

Understanding customer behavior is good business (Solomon, 2010)

After developing a brand identity and communication strategy the company faces the biggest challenge; to make customer to buy a product or service that satisfies their needs and hopefully make their own place in the customer's perceptional map. That is why they must understand customer behavior. The market segmentation shows to whom we are sending a message because market is divided into different categories like demographics, geographic, psychographic and behavioral category (Solomon, 2010). In other words, company must define which are their potential customer's age, social class, place they live and lifestyle in order to create an effective message. Buyer purchase decision involves different stages where their attitudes towards a product are important. People who travel often can more easily decide to book a trip than them who are used to stay at home during vacations. Customer behavior refers to the process of searching information about a product in the direction of a purchase decision. This process encompasses the stages of searching for, purchasing using, evaluating and disposing of products and services (Moutinho, 2007). According to Moutinho (2007) the tourism buying decisions have an additional unique aspect, it is investment with no tangible rate of return and the purchase is often planned and prepared through savings made over a longer time. In other words tourism buying decision often requires high involvement in cus-

tomers buying decision process. In tourism industry experiences are classified as primary source of communication, while mass communication can be classified as secondary source (Moutinho, 2007).

According to Moutinho (2007): "*communication is the determinant of how much of vacation behavior and an advertisement is intended to communicate, allowing the acquisition of knowledge ,the formation of change of product image, the arousal of needs and wants, the creation of interest in a product and inducement to action*".

Companies have to be creative in their attempts to design a message that gets customer attention in today's media noise and it requires a high degree of innovation. In other word service companies have to be aware of that customers travel habits have changed over a time and is more difficult to predict travel habits than it was before.

2.4.1 AIDA Model

The AIDA model is a sequential model that explains that consumers upon receiving a message go through the stages of attention, interest, desire and action (Ouwersloot & Duncan, 2008). The model itself was developed first designed to show the stages that a salesperson must take a prospect through in a personal selling process (Fill, 2005). Later it has been realized that attention are more likely to come from the recognition of a consumer need rather than that the consumer are passive until they receive the message (Varey, 2002). Even so this model has been adopted as a basic framework for how persuasive communication and advertising works (Fill, 2005). One can say that the AIDA model is a framework on what the communication should achieve.

Attention
- Cognitive stage where attention must be attracted.
- First step in the communication process.

Interest
- First affective stage.
- Appropiate communication means are used to trigger interest.

Desire
- Second affective stage.
- Develops a desire to the product offered

Action
- Conative Stage
- To get the consumer to take action and purchase the product offered
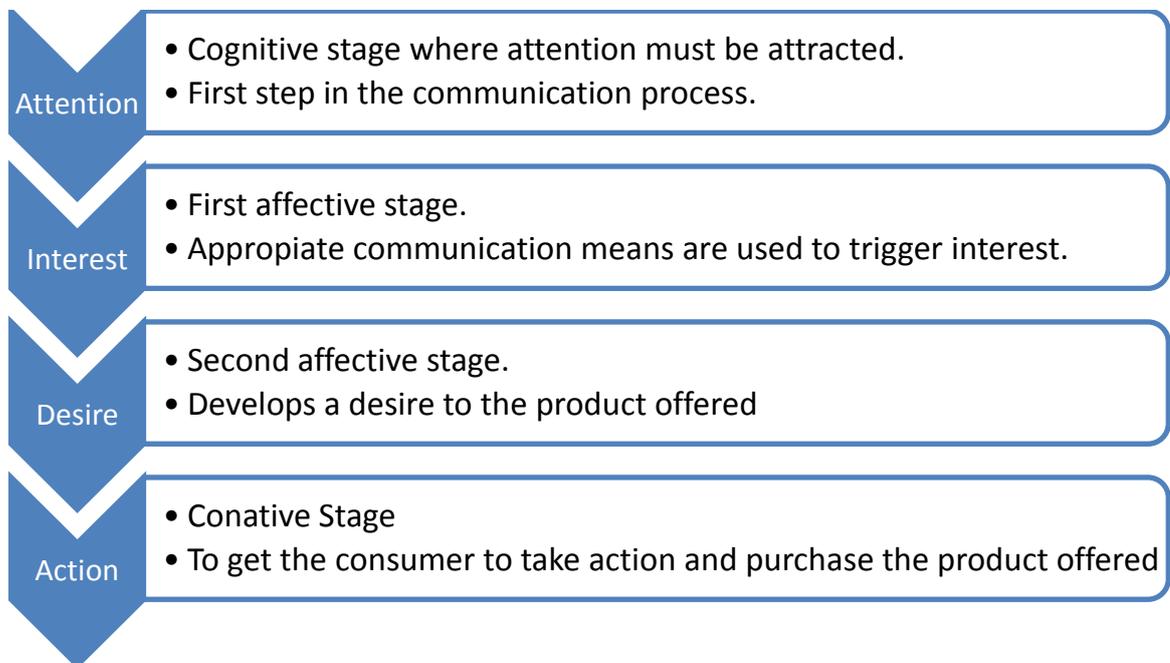
Figure 2-2 AIDA-model by authors

2.4.2   Message

In order to get customer attention service companies have to develop an effective message. Ideally, the message should get customers Attention, hold Interest, arouse Desire and Action, a framework known as AIDA model. In practice, few messages can take consumers all the way from awareness to purchase, but AIDA model suggest the desirable qualities of a good and effective message (Kotler, 2009).

According to Kotler (2009) when marketing communicator put message together they must decide *what* to say (*message content*) and *how* to say it (*message structure and format*).

In message content marketing the communicator has to figure out what kind of appeal a company should put more focus on. In tourism industry it is usually more common to focus on an emotional appeal rather than the rational. Emotional appeal attempt to stir up either positive or negative emotions that can motivate a purchase (Kotler, 2009). According to Kotler the communicator must decide *how* to say it. There are several ways how to say it in message structure, either to draw a conclusion or to leave it to the audience. Drawing a conclusion are usually more effective when customer is less motivated or may have difficulties to make the appropriate conclusion, while recent research suggest that the audience are likely to be interested in the product, it is more effective to ask the question in order to stimulate and motivate customer to think about company and let them to come to their own conclusion, (Kotler, 2009).

In order to capture the customer attention, processing and conviction service companies have to show a high degree of advertisement creativity. That is why communicator also needs a strong message format. In order to design an effective message communicator must use eye catching imagery and headlines, colors, message size and contrast (Dahlén, Lange & Smith 2010). According to Dahlén (2010) all efforts behind a well thought-out positioning and message designs are useless if people do not focus on the advertisement. In other words customers must think that advertisement is so interesting that they pay attention to the content of the message. There are several tools for grabbing attention, learning and conviction. It depends on what kind of product or service the company offer.

According to Kotler (2009) the communicator increases the chances of grabbing attention, learning and conviction if the following factors are taken into consideration:

- The message interests the target group
- The message must reinforce or help to justify the buyers recent to purchase decision, if you plan to travel next month, it is likely that you notice or your attention will be quickly drown to ads from travel agencies, this phenomena is called cognitive dissonance
- The message must have a practical value for customers, for example it is a waste of time and money to advertise a destinations known for its young audience and parties in financial magazines
- The message must communicate new information about the company
- The message must be presented in such a way as to make impact. That can be achieved by paying attention to message formats who contain creative advertisement

According to Bengt Bengtsson (Marketing Coordinator in Vålådalen Fjällstation) the company did not take advantage of highlighting the genuine nature around the company in the message.

For high-involvement product or services the customer usually requires higher information content. This hard sell approach relies on the logically, rational arguments, (Dahlén, Lange & Smith, 2010). According to Dahlén there are not only creative advertisements who can contribute to successful and effective communications with customers but also opinion leaders that can act as an intermediary in communications and to help with the decoding process. The company have tried to use the elite athletes in skiing to act as opinion leaders in order to attract more customers, but apparently it did not gave desired results. The question is if it was right strategy to use elite athletes to act as opinion leaders or if athletes used right communication channels.

2.5 Customer Relationship Management

The origins of CRM can be traced back to the management concept of the relationship marketing that is an integrated effort to identify, build up and maintain a network with individual customers for mutual benefits of both sides (Bueren, 2002).

Smart companies capture customer's information at every possible *touch point*. These touch points include customers purchases, website visit, satisfaction surveys, in other words every contact between customer and company (Kotler, 2009). It is a huge challenge for companies to deal with information and take advantage from it. In order to manage it more effectively many service companies use CRM to manage detailed information about costumers. CRM consist of sophisticated software and analytical tools that integrate costumer's information from all sources and apply results in order to build stronger customer relationship (Kotler, 2009). The definition of CRM varies because companies may pay different levels of attention to the components of CRM. The basic components can be described as:

- Data collection and management
- Computer –aided sales support
- Customer analysis and profiling
- Consumer information and service (Palmer,2011)

In other words it is difficult to obtain and manage all information about customers and that is why most companies manage only the most needed components of CSM.

According to Bueren (2002) "*CRM processes typically require not only transactional data, which can be collected stored in relational databases. But also a significant amount of knowledge*".

Relations marketing is not effective in all situations, although CRM system are reducing the value threshold at which it becomes appropriate especially in low involvement purchase process (Kotler,2009). In fact that tourism buying decision considered as high involvement purchase process it reinforces arguments for Vålådalen Fjällstation to invest in CRM software. According to Kotler (2009) when companies CRM works well the

benefits of CRM can far outweigh the cost and risks. Companies can use CRM to pinpoint high-value customers, target them more effectively, cross-sell the company's product and create offers tailored to specific customer requirements.

In fact that Vålådalen Fjällstation do not use any customer database the authors stated that investment in CRMs software is indispensable and useful. CRM allow company to gain advantage in order to build stronger customer relationship. It can also contribute to understand why previous efforts to attract new customers did not give desired results. In other words it can help company to better understand customer behavior and with CRM the company can build stronger customer relationship through viral marketing. In the beginning the company can focus mostly to target customers more effectively and to try to create offers adjusted to specific customer requirements.

Buhalis (2001) argue that innovative marketing led by research and using new technologies will be the only way to manage and market competitive destinations in the future for the benefit of their stakeholder.

2.6 Integrated marketing communication strategy model

Identifing the core value of its brand

Build internal brand

Create marketing communication strategy and message

Build external brand

Evaluating results

Integrated marketing communication
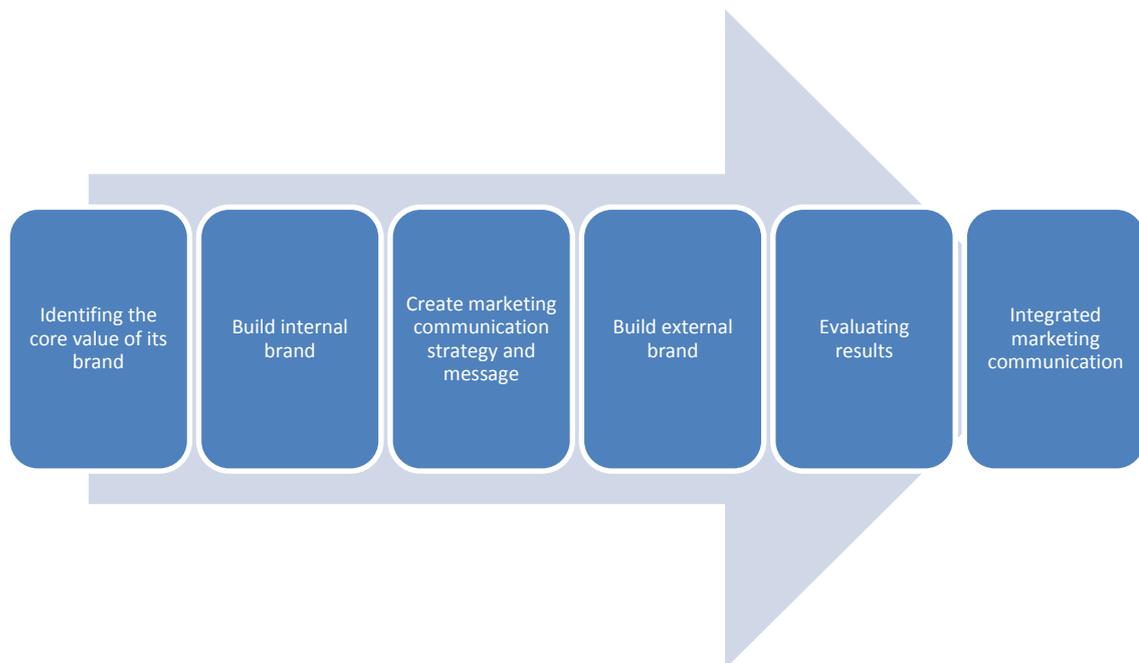
Figure 2-3   The integrated marketing communication strategy by authors

In order to fulfill the purpose of the thesis the authors created their own marketing communication model. The research model corresponds to whole process that Vålådalens Fjällstation may go through from identifying the core value of its brand and building brand and marketing strategy to evaluating the results. The process is divided into five different steps. Each step contains several smaller parts with the aim to build inte-

grated marketing communications. This model is a result of the theory research conducted for this thesis and empirical findings from communications agencies. Both large and SME service companies have to find a core value of its brand. Otherwise there is significant risk of not taking a desirable place in customer's perceptual map. According researchers in tourism trends there are more changes in travel habits then before and the market is more unpredictable. That is why the need to highlight the favorable and unique characteristics the facility has. According to the theory the management of the firm has a key task to make a long term communication plan. In order to build an internal brand management has to first contribute to build an internal brand. It may contribute to getting employees to understand what the company stands for and what kind of experience the company wants to convey. This in turn gives a motivation to employees and hopefully can contribute to better service quality.

According to the authors model, a prerequisite that the company is capable of making an effective communication strategy and message are that the first two steps in the model was well planned. In turn this prerequisite to communicate effectively with customers and to build external brand.

The authors pointed out that the model is considered as long term communication strategy model and it requires a longer time for implementation. Since this model is consider as long term model, management should make less performance measurement in each step and wait to evaluate the results of the implemented process until the fourth step is implemented. That allows making more transparent and equitable evolution of the implemented model. The company allows getting a clearer picture in which steps the company had to do more efforts in the process.

2.7   Definitions

In this section the authors will provide the reader with most used definitions in this thesis.

Brand   A name, term, symbol, sign or design, or combination of these, intended to identity to identify a service or goods and to differentiate them from competitors (Kotler, 2009, p.906)

Brand equity   The mixture of brand associations (awareness, image and beliefs of what the brand means), brand dominance (financial value and strength on the market) and brand prospects (extension possibilities for company and customer) (Fill, 2005, p.415).

AIDA   An approach to understanding how advertising and selling supposedly work, A- stand for attention, I-interest, D-desire and A-stand for action (American marketing association, http://www.marketingpower.com/_layouts/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=C

Message The set of words, pictures or symbols that sender transmits through different channels in order to make a successful interaction with customers (Kotler, 2009.p.729).

Message content Marketing communicators attempt to decide ***what*** to say (Kotler, 2009, p.729).

Message structure communicators attempt to decide ***how*** to say it (Kotler, 2009, p.729).

Decoding The process by which the receiver assigns meaning to the symbols encoded by the sender (Kotler, 2009, p.729)

Noise The unplanned static or distortion during the communication process, which results in the receiver getting a different message from the one the sender sent (Kotler 2009, p.729).

WHOP Welty Healthy Old People

DINK Double Income No Kinds

Advertising clutter The extent to which multiple messages complete for the customers (limited attention). It is often used to indicate multiple competing messages in one medium or place (American marketing association, http://www.marketingpower.com/_layouts/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=C)

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3 Method

3.1 Research design

A research design is a framework for conducting a marketing research project and it specifies the details of the procedures necessary to obtain the information needed to structure or solve a marketing research problem (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). There are several types of research design that can satisfy research objectives. The purpose of the thesis is to help Vålådalen Fjällstation create a message through different communication channels. The authors of the thesis have ambition to provide the insights and understand the nature of Vålådalen Fjällstations situation, hence the authors of the thesis used the exploratory research design.

Exploratory research design is characterized as flexible and evolving approach to understand marketing phenomena that are inherently difficult to measure (Malhotra & Birks 2007). Malhotra states that exploratory research may also be used where the researcher must define the problem more precisely. More specific this thesis tries to find appropriate communication strategy depending on company financial strength and other circumstances. Therefore the authors of the thesis chose exploratory approach in this study because the intention with this thesis is to achieve insights and understand the nature of the marketing phenomena to be able to create an appropriate communication strategy.

3.1.1 Qualitative research

When we discuss data collection we are concerned if data is either of qualitative or quantitative character. Qualitative research is an unstructured, primarily exploratory design based on small samples, intended to provide insight and understanding (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Qualitative researches try to answer to question *why*, which is important to answer in order to fulfill the intended purpose. For this thesis qualitative research design is undertaken in order to investigate a deeper meaning with a context of the chosen subject.

A qualitative research may be conducted by surveys, unstructured observations or interviews (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). In this study in-depth interviews were chosen as appropriate method in order to get opinions, comments and recommendation from the respondents. A case study of four communication companies was also chosen as a method in order to create communication strategy based on information of Vålådalens Fjällstation financial condition and strength and weaknesses of the company. The authors had no ambition in making any analysis that could be generalized for the whole mountain tourism in Åre. The author's ambition is rather to look at Vålådalens Fjällstation and to contact successful communication agencies in order to understand them thoroughly in this context and to discover suggestions that can help Vålådalens Fjällstation.

The authors made several interviews with management and made a visit to Vålådalens Fjällstation to find a business field where the company is less efficient. After the authors

made several observations in the company they decide to develop appropriate communication strategy with relevant theory. The reason for the chosen subject was the authors opinion that the chosen topic has more research need and can contribute to advantages for Vålådalens Fjällstation.

3.1.2 Case study

A case study is a detailed study of individuals, group of individuals, organizations or a specific situation (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). A case study method allows the researcher flexibility to shift attention to whatever behaviors seem most interesting and relevant at the time (Graziano & Raulin, 2004). There are different types of case studies, like historical case studies where researcher study the development of an organization or system over time, observational case studies where focus is on group or individual in order to observe actual behavior and respondents opinions and multi-case studies where researcher study and compare a couple cases with each other (Burns, 2000).

For this study four communication companies are considered as the case and a case study was the most appropriate due to the fact that aim of the study is to find an appropriate communication channel and methods for the company. The authors of this thesis considered the case study approach to be the most relevant method for the purpose of the thesis since this approach would enable for the authors to investigate a "whole picture" of the company, their ability to manage and use communication channels.

The authors made interviews at four communication companies in order to get insight in their work and hopefully get ideas how Vålådalens Fjällstation can develop a more effective communication strategy then they have now. With this approach authors have ambition to get insights not only from the case itself but also understand how service companies can more effectively communicate with customers. The authors points out that they do not aim to generalize the findings on all tourism service companies.

3.2 Data collection

It is not always possible or suitable to use structured quantitative techniques to obtain information from respondents or to observe them (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). According to Malhotra there are several reasons why data collection should be qualitative. Some of them are that information can be sensitive and participants may be unwilling to answer or give truthful answer. Other reason can be the nature of what participants are expected to answer may be hart and difficult to explain, phenomena may be complex. Quantitative data collection is suitable when the researchers already have knowledge about what is to be tested and information needed is clearly defined.

Data collection in this thesis was chosen to be qualitative in order to generate in-depth analysis, because one part of part of the thesis was to find a problem and a way how to

help the company. Other part was to make interviews with experts in the market communication field in order to get ideas from the experts in the field.

In order to get respondents to feel convenient and to be able to express themselves correctly, the interviews were held in Swedish. The results are presented in the empirical findings.

The registrations of most of the interviews were performed by tape recorder in order to not miss out any important details and to and also because it was possible to focus only on the things that are said. The authors made one face to face interview with each communication company and the length of the interviews were between 60 and 100 minutes.

Conversations with management of Vålådalen were not recorded, because aim with those conversations was to get a "whole picture" of the company in a certain situation. The authors made one face to face interview with owner of the facility that lasted an hour and a half. After that the authors made one phone interview with CEO and one phone interview with external sales consultants who worked with the company last years. Couple weeks after conducted interviews the authors made a trip to Åre and visited facility. There the authors made one two hours long face to face interview with CEO and with marketing coordinator. After visiting the facility the authors kept a mail and phone contact with the CEO.

3.2.1   Choice of company

A case study research is not a sampling research, which means that the aim of the study should be about understanding the nature of multiple influences of market phenomena (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Due to the fact that a case study was chosen, it was considered as appropriate to make a number of face to face interviews with communication agencies and visit a company in order to collect as much information as possible. Hence, the decision was to focus on service SME company who may have use of author's knowledge in marketing. The authors find that a business industry of mountain tourism is interesting and challenging as well as customer communications problems. It is the authors hope to be able to continue to work with this in the future. The fact that the study in thesis is done on behalf of Vålådalen Fjällstation we decided to investigate how authors can help the company. Marketing communication agencies in Jönköping with good references were also selected and we had opportunity to visit them and to conduct face to face interviews.

Marketing communication companies were chosen because they have a long experience of marketing and communication and hopefully can give us some suggestions and ideas, but also make us know what can go wrong when creating communication strategy. According to Malhotra (2007) experts may have other contacts that the researcher may not be aware of or may not be able to get access to and they also may have secondary data which the researcher may not be aware or may not have access to. The authors also be-

lieve that the experiences from experts in the field can help create marketing communication strategy tailored to the company's financial and other conditions.

3.2.2 Interview method

For this thesis semi-structured interviews were chosen in interviews with communication agencies since authors aim with the study is to understand ideas and processes. A semi-structured interview permits greater flexibility than structured interviews and permits a more valid response from the informant's perception of reality (Burns, 2000). Authors made semi-structured interviews with a list of topics and main questions to be covered during the interviews. The purpose of the interviewing experts is to explore ideas, make new connections between ideas and create new perspectives in defining the marketing research problem (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). By applying semi-structured questions it will allow the authors to ask a follow up questions during the interviews in order to get the respondents to answer the questions more thoroughly. The topic questions are presented in Table 3-1 with reference to connected theory.

Questions	Theory
Which media do you use to attract existing and which media you use to attract new customers?	**Marketing communication** **Brand Equity** **Purpose**
How can service companies convey an experience?	**Service marketing** **Brand** **Purpose**
What can service companies do to minimize the risk to disappear in today's media noise?	**Communication channels** **Brand** **Purpose**
How can service companies choose which media to use to which category of customers?	**Communication channels** **Customer behavior**
Do you use different marketing models such as AIDA model when creating marketing communication strategy?	**Marketing communication**
What are major differences between large and SME service companies in creating communication strategy?	**Communication strategy** **Purpose**

The extent to which service companies use personal selling?	**Marketing communication**
	Internal branding
	Purpose
Which media should be used to attract WHOPS and DINKS?	**Communication strategy**
	Customer behavior

Chart 3-1 Questions to communication agencies connected with theory

In order to get a deeper "whole picture" of the company, unstructured interviews were chosen with management of the company. The whole picture of the company means everything from financial situation to managerial relations. Unstructured interviews permits free-flowing conversation and it is made to be as natural as possible, the direction of the conversation is always controlled somewhat minimally to ensure the focus stays relevant to the problem (Burns, 2000). The authors made both phone and face to face interviews with same management members of Vålådalen Fjällstation and even kept phone and mail contact during whole research process in order to get more details that can be valuable for the authors of the thesis to create suitable and realistic communication strategy.

3.3   Presentation of Vålådalens Fjällstation

Vålådalens Fjällstation

Vålådalen is a medium sized mountain station with a ski facility located in well-known ski location Åre. Vålådalen Fjällstation has existed for more than 70 years with various ownership forms and concepts. It was built by The Swedish Sports Confederation, a nonprofit organization and it was mostly the elite athletes in skiing who trained at the facility. Until the 1970s Vålådalens Fjällstation has been very popular, especially with elite athletes. But during 1970s many elite athletes started to put their training camps in warmer countries. This change made Vålådalen drop in popularity among elite athletes and thus the facility got a huge challenge in attracting other types of customers. The facility was driven for many years by nonprofit organization STF (Swedish tourist association) who tried to attract its members to Vålådalen Fjällstation.

The last six years facility has been owned by Jonas Ågren, an entrepreneur from Jönköping who also runs other business. According to Jonas Ågren the facility was in bad condition when he took over and the need for renovation was huge. Therefore he invested a lot of money in the facility during the last years.

Vålådalen Fjällstation is a mountain station with totally 200 beds, including 70 standard hotel rooms and rest are mountain huts. Facility has also conference room for 200

guests and a huge restaurant with capacity for 250 guests. What distinguishes Vålådalen Fjällstation mostly from other mountain stations in area is the large sport hall. The facility also has 50 km trails for cross-country skiing and alpine skiing hill.

The number of employees varies from only 10 in low season to 30-35 during high season.

The participants in the study for Vålådalens Fjällstation were:

- Jonas Ågren   (Owner)
- Jonas Sundström (Vice president)
- Bengt Bengtsson (Marketing Coordinator)

Gunnar Christiansson, who is an external consultant who sells the travel packages for Vålådalen Fjällstation also participated.

3.3.1 Presentation of the case companies

Bolt communication agency

Bolt is a marketing agency with focus on B2B, B2C, international marketing and web marketing. They have been in business from 1994 and have different types of customers, from small service companies to huge multinational companies like Husqvarna Viking and Mercedes Benz and even some state authorities. Bolt has also received an award as the best marketers of the year at Jonkoping gala, a local event for successful entrepreneurs and others who positively contributed to the development of the region.

The representatives of the Bolt communication agency were:

- Anna Fursberg   (part owner and copywriter)

- Madeilene Hollender   (part owner and AD)

Kompago communication

Kompago communication is a well-known company in the region and is an agency that works with everything in from marketing and communication strategy to the printing of catalogs and magazines. They work with brand strategy and communication through web.

The representatives of the Kompago were:

- Stina Samuelsson   (PR / copywriter)

Destination Jönköping

Destination Jönköping mission is to promote Jönköping as an attractive place for both private and business travelers, investment and as a place to live. They also operate a number of projects who aims are to inform residents about different events in Jonkoping. Destination Jönköping is run by Jonkoping's municipality and industry.

The representatives of the Destination Jönköping were:

- Helena Nordström (Marketing Director)

- Mileva Blomberg (Business Manager)

Ny Reklam communications agency

Ny Reklam is also well known communication agency with focus on building strong brands through different communication channels. They have more than 20 employees with different backgrounds and skills.

The representatives for Ny Reklam were:

- Linda Karlsson (copywriter)

3.4   Trustworthiness of the research

3.4.1   Limitations of the case studies

There are several misunderstandings or limitations about the nature of the case study approach. It is difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies (Flyvbjerg, 1998). According to Flyvbjerg case studies cannot generalize on the basis on the individual case, therefore the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.

Concerns with case study can also be that authors have not followed systematic procedures and that case studies do not provide a relevant basis for generalization (Yin, 2002). To avoid those concerns authors have used a systematic procedure with well-formulated interview questions and using tape recorder to reduce the appearance of mistakes. The author's ambition was to learn more about particular case in the particular study, therefore authors have no ambition to generalize results of the study. That is why

the authors of the study chose a case study approach as it is relevant for the aim of the study. It is author's ambition that the results of the study can be interesting and meaningful for the analysis of the research findings.

3.4.2 Validity

Validity in qualitative research is the extent to which a measurement represents characteristics that exist in the phenomena under investigation (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). With other words validity refers to extent if researchers use appropriate methods to measure what they were intended to measure. According to Golafsani (2003) concept of validity is described by a wide range of terms in qualitative studies. Although some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research, at the same time, they have realized the need for some kind of qualifying or measure for their research, (Golafsani, 2003).

As the purpose was to investigate how service companies can create effective communication strategy, a qualitative study approach would better help authors to answer the purpose question then quantitative approach. Qualitative in depth-interviews were used and allowed authors to ask follow up questions during the interviews to allow respondent to better explain themselves. Previous study within marketing communication and scientific theory was used as a base for formulating the questions for interviews and this contribute to the validity of the study.

3.4.2.1 Internal validity

The internal validity deals with dilemma if the empirical findings match the reality (Merriam, 2001). In qualitative research the reality argues to be changing, because interpretation of the reality in qualitative study is the interviews with human beings. According to Merriam (2001) there are several approaches to increase validity in a study, and triangulation is one of them. The authors believe that internal validity of the study is high because respondents of communication companies shared their own professional experiences. Triangulation is when researcher uses several different sources of data or several different respondents in study in order to confirm the findings. In this study several different sources of previous data were used and respondents have been offered to check and confirm what they have been said. That reduces risk for misinterpretations and mistakes in analysis of the empirical study. All participants also agreed to get their names published in the study and to avoid translation errors all interviews were analyzed in Swedish.

3.4.2.2   External validity

The external validity concerns dilemma if study have potential to generalize. Generalization refers to if the empirical findings in the study can be also applied to other situations, (Merriam, 2001). Qualitative study often cannot generalize because the aim of the study is often to understand a particular case more deeply. Since the authors of this thesis studied a single company generalization is not assumed in this study.

However, authors believe that similarities may exist in comparable contexts and some parts of empirical findings can be applied on other SME service companies in tourism industry.

3.4.3   Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which a measurement reproduces consistent results if study were to be repeated (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). That is a controversial issue, because human behavior is changing and not constant. Therefore the question is if the authors could get the same results if the study were repeated with same population, method and purpose. Probably not because human behavior and thoughts are not static.

In order to increase reliability authors asked question about general views on certain subjects and respondents job experiences. All interviews were conducted with some strategy in order to facilitate accuracy of the results in the study. Relevant theories and articles about the topic were carefully studied before the interviews in order to gain knowledge within the field. The respondents in Vålådalen Fjällstation gave their own perception about how the company should create their communication strategy and what the problem is in their current communication strategy.

Respondents from different communication companies gave their perception how a SME service company in tourism industry could create their communication strategy in order to build brand awareness and long term relationship with customers.

The result is presented in a manner that enhances credibility while authors distinguished different respondents in order to study differences and similarities within respondents. In order to increase reliability and trustworthiness of the thesis both authors have been present during all interviews and transcripts and the summaries of all interviews were conducted together by the authors. A constant discussion was constantly conducted with all respondents about chosen topic to further enhance creditability.

4   Results from researched companies

4.1   Destination Jönköping

According to Helena Nordström service tourism companies should have two different approaches to attract both existing and potential customers. One approach should mostly focus to sell and more practical things while the other part should have in focus on build and enhance brand. Helena believes that the web plays a major role in both approaches, especially for smaller sized companies with lower budget. Through their website service companies should offer customers to book a trip and keep the customers updated with company news and small funny clips that capture attention and curiosity. She thinks that with well-thought out communication strategy companies can attract customers without investing a lot of money on other media like radio, TV, magazines and billboards.

In order to minimize risk for disappearing in the media noise the company should enhance the brand by creating a website with odd design and funny clips who can engage customers. Helena thinks that it sounds difficult because most of the other companies are also trying to positioning themselves in same way and it is much easier if the company have a clear vision of who their main customer group is and what they want to achieve with particular media. Mileva says that the most common mistake that most companies do is to make things just because everybody else is doing it, like social media or to be present at tourism fairs. Helena thinks that before we decide which media the company should use, we should ask ourselves who the target group is, how they think and to investigate their travel habits. When we get a clear picture of a target group then we can more easily decide which marketing channels we can use. That can be challenge because travel habits in different age groups have changed in recent time.

Mileva stated that the best approach to convey an experience is to try and evoke emotions and to use more pictures with strong colors and less text in messages. According to Mileva Destination Jönköping uses pictures with Jönköpings most known symbols and places in order to evoke emotions and through pictures communicate with both potential and current customers.

Social media like Facebook and Twitter are important, but Helena pointed out that some companies do not need to be present in social media. She explained that many companies create Facebook profiles even though that they cannot build relationship with customers through it. She stated that many companies have no real need to be present in social media but are doing it because it is popular at the time being. Mileva Blomberg pointed out that a company must have a thought about what they want to achieve with any particular media. In the long term it can be more negative than positive to be present in social media if the company has not thought out a well-planned communication strategy from the beginning. Bloggers have also become important part of marketing communication. Helena says: *"Bloggers are the new marketers and opinion leaders but in same time it is very important to face criticism from bloggers in time"*.

The biggest difference between small and big companies is the budget for marketing efforts according to Helena. Otherwise all companies have same requirements from markets and customers to be creative and innovative regardless of size of the company.

Destination Jönköping do not use any special marketing models, but instead have own routines in communication strategy planning. Reason for this, according to Helena, is that different situation requires different solutions. Mileva says that they have special routines in communication planning before, during and after every event. Purpose with that is to have more control during particular process and to be able to evaluate results.

Mileva also says: *"Companies should not be afraid to make mistakes if they learn lessons from them"*. She stated that service companies must keep a high level of creativity and have to dare to try new ways to satisfy their customers on their own way.

DINKS (Double income no kids) are more difficult to attract to nature and peaceful destinations because they are more interested of weekend trip to big cities or to well know holiday destinations. That is not written in stones because the trends in tourism changes according to Helena.

Helena says: *"Today people require being unique even with their travel habits but in same time they are looking for simplicity and that the destination feels genuine. People try to avoid making a lot of choices, because they believe that there are too many choices and decisions in everything"*.

Regarding tourism trends Helena says: *"For some years ago we had more defined travel trend according to age and social situation, while today there are no clear rules on how the various age groups are traveling. Today you can see 20 years olds who buy weekend trips to Paris with luxury hotels and buying expensive champagne and we can also see rich 60 year olds in simple hiking hotels"*.

Both Helena and Mileva agreed that the response in the context of the person is fairly important part of the customers overall view of the destination. Companies should listen to what customers have to say and to embrace all possible criticism at once, because negative word of mouth is often spreading faster than positive one. That is why it is extremely important that companies are honest and answers to criticism. Service companies should never be afraid of to meet any negative criticism.

Meeting criticism and listening to the customers should be major part of the long-term communication strategy. Customers are aware that companies do mistakes sometimes, that's why a communication gap between companies and customers can arise when service companies do not respond on negative critics on time or when companies ignore them.

4.2   Bolt communication agency

According to Madeilene service companies should have roughly the same approaches for both existing and new customers. She stated that service companies should never take the existing customers for granted. When companies want to convey an experience

the first thing they have to do is to decide what kind of experience they want to convey and to which audience.

Personal contact from the company, nature and other practical things together with web and advertising create a whole picture of the experience. Social media become important to many companies, but Madeleine pointed out that some of companies do not have to be present in social media. Madeleine says*:" You have to spend a lot of time and other resources to develop a plan for social media. Although it is free to appear in social media it must be done neatly and creatively".* Otherwise the company risk to hurt the brand with social media, Anna gave example with SJ where they did not understand that social media can damage the brand if you do not have a clear defined strategy from beginning.

In order to minimize the risk of disappear in the media noise requires a huge level of creativity is required and needs to be consistent. Anna says: "If *you develop a clear defined strategy, it should be known through in advertisement, in social media and everywhere else when you send a message to customers. You should be consistent because it takes a really long time to build a brand".*

When you make analysis of your own company, you should start to make a competitor analysis in the surrounding area. Madeleine says: *"We should ask ourselves what we have that others do not have. Sometimes some attributes that are considered as negative can become positive if you use it in a creative way. Service companies should not try to be good on everything because it is impossible and should try to find a core value of its brand*".

Bolt do not use any special marketing models when creating a communication strategy for their customers, they have instead a specific methodology because prerequisites are different depending on the various companies condition. The biggest differences between small and large service companies are that large companies think that they can afford to fail sometimes. According to Anna many SME companies are much more careful and usually have a small budget for marketing.

Anna stated that many service companies emphasize quality as a strong argument in marketing and it is not actually a strong argument because every company claims that they have good quality. Anna says: *"Quality should be obvious and not a part of communication strategy".* Anna stated that bloggers has also become new opinion leaders and marketers. She told about her vacation to Greece where she read the blog written by the hotel manager before she decide to spend her vacation there. The hotel manager wrote about everything from weather to complaining from customers and hotels activities. Anna says: "*It made me more familiar and confident because I already had read the blog and got a lot of information about hotel and destination".* Anna stated that it is very important to meet both positive and negative critics in order to get an overview what company's strengths and weaknesses are.

Every company has different kinds of customers, it does not necessarily mean that the approaches to communicate should be different. Anna says:"*Companies should have the same basic value of their brand, regardless of the target group*".

4.3 Ny reklam

Linda states that the choice of communication channels that are used is very dependent on what it is that the company sells and how they sell. Depending on what the product is and if it is sold through distribution or by them decides what communication channel to use. Linda continues with that the website has become the focal point of all communications with the customers due to that consumers have changed their habits in how they search for information.

While Linda says that they do not work with a particular model such as AIDA, Ny Reklam does work with models that they have developed themselves and contains elements from these models.

Linda also says that social media should not replace the ordinary communications channels with it, but use it as a compliment. Linda do think that social media is a good way to communicate with your customers, but it does require a lot of maintenance and that they have to be updated regularly and just not be something that a company starts and then leave it to itself.

To be visible in the media clutter Linda thought it was essential to have a good product and find who your market segment is. When this is done you need to use a message to convince them that they need this product, Linda didn't think it was more important to be the loudest one, but to communicate with the right segment and with the correct media.

4.4 Kompago

Stina believes that you should not eliminate any of the communication channels instead it is more important that the company should have the same message in all channels. This is due to that the competition is so much more fierce and because that there are so many more channels through which you can make yourself heard. The main limitations on the choice of channel according to Stina are the company's available budget even though you would want to be visible everywhere it is close to impossible.

 Stina also stresses the importance of researching the target audience to find out what media they uses so one can target them in the right way and that you should always work after this.

Stina thinks that digital media has become important as it is very good a targeting the customer group that the company is interested in and also because that it is fairly cheap.

The website also works as a base for the communication with customers and that it is important to maintain it. It also is easy to evaluate by being able to see who opens for example an e-mail, goes to the website and then purchases a product. The website also has the advantage that it can be more personalized for the customer that you are marketing to. Stina also believes that the social media are very useful but that it is only important to have something to say with the social media as otherwise it may be ignored. As

information search has become so common Stina believes that it is important to maintain the website and work with search engine optimization so that your website are among the first hits on search engines.

For companies that experiences the market Stina says that they find it very important for them to have this experience relayed in all media, but that it is still important that the same message appears in all of these so that the customers doesn't meet one type of message on the website, another from the staff and third from print media.

To be heard and seen in the media clutter Stina thinks that it is important to have a personal interaction with customer and that it is still important to keep message the same.

While Stina couldn't say that they worked after a special model such as AIDA, she said that a model came naturally for them and that it was important to be consequent and keep to the original idea.

4.5   Management

The management of Vålådalens Fjällstation did not have the same view on how the facility should operate and what features should be highlighted in communications with customers. The management was also not consistent with what kind of customers the company should put more focus on. The management was keen to both maintain a high proportion of elite athletes and families and WHOPS and DINKS. This creates an ambiguity and confusion in itself as a smaller facility as Vålådalens Fjällstation may find it difficult to attract that many customer groups.

4.6   Empirical findings

An empirical finding of this thesis highlights the importance of a well thought-out communication strategy into the smallest detail. This in turn facilitates the company to create a stable and effective communication strategy that increases brand equity and may provide a service company with a number of competitive advantages, both financial and growth potential.

According to theory, companies cannot create a strong brand if it is not a precise about what experience it conveys to customers and what the core values of the brand is. The authors felt that there are major differences in the opinions that the management has, ranging from the concepts of the company to the message the company wants to convey externally.

There is no clear defined communication strategy for social media and web and the authors believe that there is a development potential in those areas which the company can benefit from. On the other hand there were many similar opinions within the responses from the various communications agencies on how Vålådalens Fjällstation should create its communications strategy. They pointed out the importance of taking advantage of digital media in a creative and innovative way and also pointed out that digital media is

only a compliment to other channels and cannot replace more traditional channels. Communication agencies also stated that companies should first find the core value of the brand and be consistent, despite possible setbacks in implementing strategy.

5   Analysis

5.1   Integrated marketing communications

Using IMC comes with both advantages and disadvantages, but the gains from it would outweigh the disadvantages. Also it is a good method for coordinating the overall communications within a company. IMC changes communications within a company from being based on tactics and to a strategic part of the company. The biggest disadvantage with IMC is that if management does not commit and does not manage it properly it can hurt the brand image of the company. The authors would like to see a dedicated commitment from the management of Vålådalens Fjällstation to the integration of all customer communications. Failing at doing so may result in a loss in brand equity.

Theory also supports that IMC will make the sender more visible in the media clutter with its unified messages. This is something that the author's finds very important as making oneself heard has become much harder. By adopting an IMC approach Vålådalens Fjällstation can be able to better communicate with their customers and as such gain advantages over their competitors. Experts also supported this by bringing up the importance of having a coherent message in all of the company's communication channels.

The difference that the experts found between SME and larger companies in general was the budget available to them. Both SME and larger companies could be open to using more creative or less creative approach on how to market them. From this the authors derives that maybe it is not the budget but rather how the marketing is done that is more important, a more creative and targeted campaign could prove to be better for Vålådalens Fjällstation.

Figure 5-1   Vålådalens Communication channels by authors

5.1.1 Media planning

Media planning provides a method for the company to better communicate their message to customers. From studying other companies it was clear that traditional media is still important. Even more so if you intend to target a specific segment as what media they consume differs between them. It is even more important to be sure that one reaches the correct segment it is crucial to use the right media vehicle.

Setting target audience, objectives and media strategies according to theory would be beneficial for Vålådalens Fjällstation and ties in with the idea of IMC. With this specified the company will have it easier to evaluate what media vehicle to use and later on evaluate if the objectives with the communication where met.

Using concepts that evaluates and make the company understand where the target audience is reached, will make the communication with customers more cost-effective and the message more visible. Because of the limited budget available to them Vålådalens Fjällstation needs to get the most of the money spent. The concepts from theory provide what they need to do this.

5.1.2 Social media and internet marketing

The internet is the latest communication channel for marketers to use to communicate and it provides some new and unique methods for this. It is also important that even these communications are well planned and that the company has a clear purpose of what they want to do with the social media. The interview with Bolt Communication presented an interesting method on how blogs can be used for hotels, by writing and describing what was going on at the hotel, it gave the consumer a feeling of knowing the person working at the hotel even before they had been there. This can be seen thought as that the customer was given a sense of security about the hotel they were going to visit which could affect the decision making process for the consumer. What one shouldn't forget about social media is that it still takes time to build up relationship with customers, and as such it is important for the company to see this as a long term project and not just something that is started and then left to be on its own.

It is also important that the company uses the right social media for interacting with the customers, like with any other communication channels. Different social media are used by different customer segments. This means that social media might not be for all companies or that the kind of social media used might not be used by the target segment.

5.2 Vålådalens Fjällstation Brand

The people involved with Vålådalens Fjällstation have similar views on what the brand itself represents, nevertheless it is not a unified view. The views ranges from that it is family oriented, quiet and calm, athlete oriented and to be the opposite of the well-known party place that Åre is. This combined with that the CEO Jonas Sundström thinks that Vålådalens Fjällstation has been lacking of a vision of who they are from the beginning has crippled the brand building function. It appears that the frequent changes of the CEO in Vålådalens Fjällstation with several different views on what Vålådalens Fjällstation should be means that time for building brand equity has been lost. The authors think that Vålådalens Fjällstation has not been able to build up the brand equity that they need to be more recognized by prospective customers.

According to Jonas Sundström the main problem is that the current owner haven't had a clear goal and vision when he acquired Vålådalens Fjällstation. This can be linked to the brand identity theory of it being how the company should present themselves to the customers and what they want the customers to think that Vålådalens Fjällstation stands for. Brand identity starts at home and is developed internally at first with management and owners, then with employees and lastly moved on to the customer.

5.2.1 Internal Branding

Internal branding is of importance for a company as a method for building up the company brand within the company. This so that employees know how to act and what to do to add value to the brand.

Tourism industry in the Åre-region where work is characterized with low wages, long work days and seasonal variations make internal branding harder to build up, but it is still possible. The employee's interaction with customers can both add value and subtract value; as such it is important for the management to make sure that they are aware of what values they should relay to customers. This is something that the authors did not experience from the employees at Vålådalens Fjällstation, instead that they had different views on what Vålådalens Fjällstation is. This was also apparent from the different view on what management, owner and the external consultant. A more coherent brand image built from within inside the company is something that the authors think is required for Vålådalens Fjällstation so that they in the future can be more successful with their customer communications. As long as they are not able to deliver a message of who Vålådalens Fjällstation is and what their values are, it will be different depending on whom the customer is in contact with. For the customer this means that Vålådalens Fjällstation might not be able to deliver what they expect which have negative effects on their view of the brand.

As before said the employees in mountain tourism usually has low wage, long work days and seasonal variations this might be work as a discouragement for them to adopt what brand image that they should relay to customers. The authors think that it is important with the fact that the company keeps a coherent brand identity by having a man-

agement team that represents this brand identity over a long term. By doing this the authors thinks the employees will be able to adapt the brand identity over time from the managers.

5.2.2   Brand equity

Answers the authors got from respondents pointed out how crucial it is for companies to build and sustain high brand equity. With high brand equity it is possible for the company to have higher customer retention. The authors sees a high brand equity as something that could be useful for Vålådalens Fjällstation in the long term commitment of building brand equity, this long term commitment from Vålådalens Fjällstation would also be able to build a long term relationship with customers. High brand equity would also allow Vålådalens Fjällstation to solidify their place in the market for mountain tourism.

5.3   Consumer behaviour

Theory sees the tourism buying decisions as high involvement decisions and a lot of time is spent on deciding on it. It is important for the company to sell an image that perceives a certain value for the customer. The time process a customer has between thinking about a trip to actually make decision about a trip would have an effect on how the company communicates with the customers. The long decision time means that the company should remind the customers about their product over a longer time so that they keep the consumers attention and interest for the product. A longer and not as frequent campaign could be used to attain this. While this is being done the company should plan to have shorter but more frequent methods of advertising themselves. During times when the actual of purchase of a trip takes place, while maybe not as easy to identify, previous sales data should give an idea on when the majority of customers have done their purchases.

In tourism industry the visitor experiences are the prime source of communication and mass communication as secondary source. This means that the primary communication is on site, unless the company can find a method of relaying these or a sample of the experiences to the customer without the customer having to be on site.

WHOPS and DINKS come from the interviews that showed that Vålådalens Fjällstation appears to be popular among the two groups of customers. The authors believe that it is important for Vålådalens Fjällstation to find efficient methods of communicating with them. The answers that were collected on the other hand showed that it is not so important to target a special group but that it is more important to have a consequent message to all customers. This is due to how people choose their travel destination and method has changed. Today people in different categories such as DINKS and WHOPS can have completely different ideas of what a good vacation can be some may choose to go

on a luxury weekend in Paris while others may prefer to backpack by train and live on simpler hostels. It may be more important to research which communication channels prospective customers have an interest in the kind of experiences that Vålådalens Fjällstation offers.

5.3.1 Aida-model

The AIDA model offers a method for the company on how to structure their communications and messages. By having a structure on how they interact with the customers it is possible for them to keep a coherent message in the use with the customers.

None of the experts used a specific model such as AIDA, this due to that the experts thought that it either came natural or that they had developed their own models that included parts of several different models. The authors believe that this comes from experience of the experts and how complex marketing communications can be. Yet one cannot ignore the importance of how powerful simple models can be on how they can be used to get the most out of the planning and implementation of marketing activities. The authors believe that by using simple models such as AIDA, it would be beneficial for SME companies. As the simpler models has a certain power within themselves while being easy to understand, implement and use.

According to theory there are several methods for a company to use to gain potential customers attention. Colorful images and less text are something that Milewa Blomberg at Destination Jönköping found effective to attract people as it was able to create more of a feeling with the customer. Creating this feeling was also something that Linda Karlsson at Ny Reklam found as an important part in advertising. Imagery was something that Destination Jönköping found important in their marketing, especially using famous landmarks to show the destination.

5.3.2 Message

Today's media clutter means that it is harder for companies to make themselves heard, especially when facing giants that they can't compete with to make themselves heard. This calls for the marketer of the smaller company to be more creative and use their resources in a better and more efficient way. The marketer should concentrate more on using the right communication channel for reaching their target segments and use a more creative approach to whisper a creative and for the target segment more attractive message.

The authors agree with the expert interviews when they talked about messages and how it should be the consequent and the same in all communication channels.

The experts found that there is not a huge difference between how one markets an experience and how one markets a regular product. Some even went so far as to state that all

advertising is about creating a feeling with the receiver and as such it is more important to focus on what feeling one tries to convey to the receiver.

Ideally a message should take the customer all the way from attention to action following the AIDA-model. In practice there are few messages that manage to do this, but models such as AIDA still works as framework for how a message should be structured. Kotler (2009) finds that the company has to know what to say and how to deliver a message; this is what the expert interviews also agree with the fact that a message should be clear and consistent. To capture the customer attention a high degree of creativity is needed so that it shines through in the media clutter. Communicators should use colors and eye-catching imagery to grab the customer attention with the message; this was also supported in Destination Jonkoping's view on how to make oneself heard. What is important is that even though one has an eye-catching message it is important that the customer will still be able to decode and understand the message. Otherwise the message may be lost in translation and go without any affect. This means that a message has to be tested and make sure that even those that aren't involved with the sender can understand it.

While Vålådalens Fjällstation has a good message that they are sending to customers it isn't as clear for the receiver who may only partially decodes what is being sold. This can be overcome by using opinion leaders to help the receivers to decode the message that Vålådalens Fjällstation sends. These opinion leaders can for example be bloggers who acts as decoders. This would give Vålådalens Fjällstation a competitive advantage in how their message is decoded.

5.4   Customer Relations Management

A company should try and collect customer data at all interactions with the company and the customer. This could be done through websites visit, customer purchases, customer survey and so on. For the company it can prove hard to handle all this data, even for a SME. CRM software is useful even for SME as it provides a method for compiling this data and presents it for management. Vålådalens Fjällstation lacks these tools and yet the authors cannot overlook the importance of having this as it would be able to better understand their customers and what their needs are. CRM technology could also provide Vålådalens Fjällstation with information that could prove to be crucial for their overall communications strategy and give them a competitive advantage.

5.5   Chosen research approach

The authors had to use explorative studies at first to find out what could be more of use for them as a company. This approach proved to be effective in finding the problem and evolved the thesis from dealing with a previously thought of problem to researching what the authors see that Vålådalens Fjällstation should change or adopt before exploring the possibilities in other markets.

The author's sums up what Vålådalens Fjällstation should try and achieve with figure 3-1. What has been found is that Vålådalens Fjällstation should integrate their communication efforts to gain advantages that integrated marketing communication brings.

While digital media provides new methods for communicating with the customers Vålådalens Fjällstation should not rely on it solely. Instead digital media should be used as a compliment to more traditional media types and as a method of having a two-way communication with the customers.

Understanding who the customer is in a greater detail would be advantageous to Vålådalens Fjällstation. The addition of CRM tools would be beneficial, and also provide Vålådalens Fjällstation with data that they have a great need for. It can also help building a more personal relation with Vålådalens Fjällstation and their customers. Integrating CRM efforts with their overall communications would be in their advantage.

Vålådalens Fjällstation management has a role to relay the company's core values to employees who works as ambassadors for the brand. This is that the management should give a clear unified image of who Vålådalens Fjällstation is and what the goals of Vålådalens Fjällstation are. But interviews with management and staff show that this is not the case, rather that there are differences. This is something that Vålådalens Fjällstation will have to address so that they in the future can give a more precise image of the brand. This relates to the quality of service; as the employees must know how they are supposed interact with the customers to real the brand values to the customer. This is also crucial as the employee acts as a communication channel when they are in contact with the customers.

Traditional media has still not played out its role in the overall communication with customers. Yet it is still important that the message used in these is coherent with the overall message that the company is using. While it is expensive to use, especially for a SME with a limited budget, it is useful for being seen and heard, even more so if the customer segments is reached better in this than in digital media. With Vålådalens Fjällstation being popular in the WHOPs segment where digital media is not as popular traditional media will prove to have a better reach
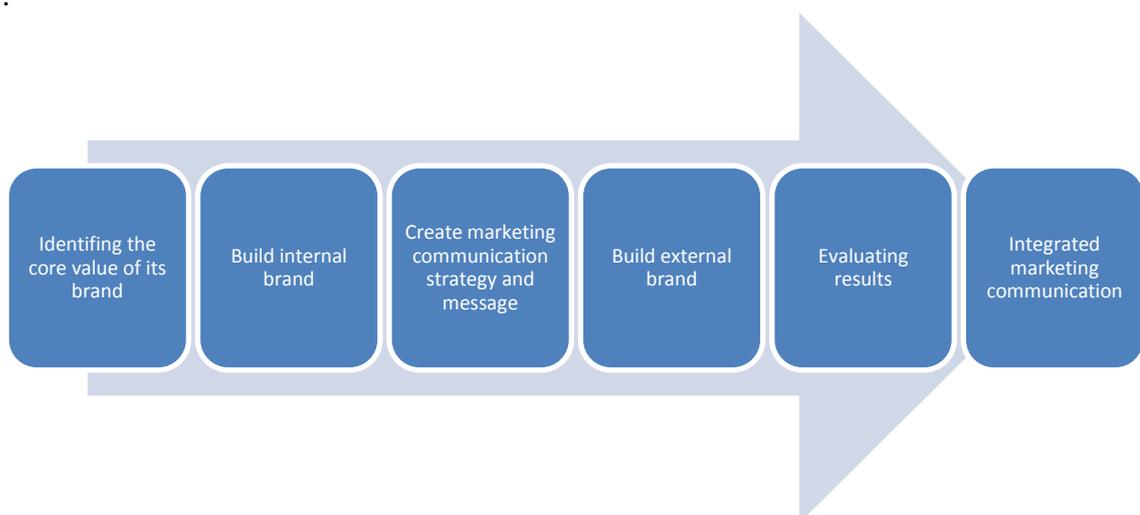
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Figure 5-2 The integrated marketing communication strategy by authors

The authors find that the process in figure 2-3 explains the steps that Vålådalens Fjällstation is required to process to be able to communicate with customers more effectively. Without stating who they are and what they plan to achieve clearly, Vålådalens Fjällstation will not be able to build any real core values. And without these core values they cannot build an internal brand that the employees and messages should relay to customers. If this is achieved Vålådalens Fjällstation will be able to better construct an overall marketing and communications strategy. The overall strategy should contain what communication channels Vålådalens Fjällstation should utilize to efficiently communicate with the target segments. Once this is done, Vålådalens Fjällstation can start to build a brand externally utilizing the communication channels that they have chosen. This would enable Vålådalens Fjällstation to build strong and sustainable brand overtime. All of this would need evaluation on how the brand value is changing, both internal and external to see if the effects wanted are being achieved. The authors think that this would lead to Vålådalens Fjällstation gaining an integrated marketing communication that would benefit them.

6   Conclusion

6.1   Conclusions

The conclusions have been drawn by reviewing what the authors have come across in their theoretical and empirical research. The conclusions focus on a more general view rather than on the needs of Vålådalens Fjällstations which are treated more in the recommendations section.

Building an integrated marketing communications strategy is a complex process both in larger companies and SME. It is especially complex if the company do not have clear brand value and coherent message. The authors have from interviews and theory found the importance of use both to be able to achieve an effective communication that the customers also will be able to understand. To achieve a better communication interviews and theory also support that may be not all communications channels are needed to effectively communicate with the customer and focus should be more about what communication channel is able to reach the target segments. This requires that the company better knows who their customers are and manage their relations with them. This increases the data that the company has to handle substantially but can be handled with the support of software. The company should be aware that travel habits among most customer categories have changed significantly recently. After having collected the customer data and defined their goals better a company can use this to formulate a communication strategy that would be able to reach customers more efficiently and have a greater effect. The message itself has to be able to stand out from all other messages that the customer receives. Interviews and theory supports that this is best achieved by using both creative messages and creative methods of delivering the message. Yet it is important for the message to be relevant to what the company represents so that there are no misunderstandings with how the receiver decodes it. According the experts in the field the company should send a same message to all customer groups, despite that customers decoding process differ.

The process of achieving an integrated marketing communication needs dedication and support from management. First, because they have to set who the company is and what to achieve and second relay this to the rest of the company. Without doing this the company will never become clear in what the brand values are to customers.

Digital media, while being both cheap and good ways to communicate with the customers should not be used on its own. Instead it is a compliment to traditional media and it is still important that companies make sure that they use a coherent message and that they consider who it will reach. Different social media is used by different segments and as such it is important to know who will be reached by the media used. With social media a company is also able to communicate with their customers and it is essential that they actually go out and do that; both to collect more data about customers but also to keep what their message coherent. The website itself has to carry the same coherent message and utilize techniques such as search engine optimization to make sure that potential customers are directed there and receives attention of the company's existence.

The conclusions that the authors' draws can be concentrated to the following points;

- Adapting IMC is a complex process and takes a time.
- Adapting IMC require dedication from management.
- The brand and message needs to be coherent to succeed.
- It's not being visible in all media channels but the right one that is important.
- Social media offers huge opportunity to communicate more effectively with customers, but it is not a replacement for traditional communications.
- It is important to understand ones customer and use tools to understand them better.
- Before using an appropriate communication channel the company must be aware purpose of using each channel and possible effects of using them.

6.2   Recommendations

Authors would recommend Vålådalens Fjällstation to do the following to achieve a better communication with their customers.

6.2.1   Integrating marketing communications

Integration of marketing communications comes with both advantages and disadvantages for any company. But for Vålådalens Fjällstation it provides an opportunity to develop a strategy for marketing rather than using different tactics.

Integrated marketing communication also has an ability to make Vålådalens Fjällstation more visible in the media clutter. This as the messages communicated are more fine-tuned, coherent and planned than when using individual tactics in communication. And being able to stand out in the media clutter is a strong competitive advantage that Vålådalens Fjällstation could use when compared to other companies in the industry.

Combined with concepts and theories of media planning, Vålådalens Fjällstation could better reach the right audience and meet their marketing objective more efficiently. And by using the right media vehicle Vålådalens Fjällstation would not have to be the loudest speaker, but can successfully communicate by whispering the message to the right audience.

It is also suggested by theory of both media planning and IMC that it is able to cut cost. This is something that Vålådalens Fjällstation would have great use of as they have a rather limited budget available. With cost being such an important factor for Vålådalens Fjällstation methods of getting the message through at lower costs will prove to be important.

6.2.2 Coherent message

As pointed out, there are different views on what Vålådalens Fjällstation is within the company and with external partners. This means that the message being communicated differs depending on who is responsible for it. This kind of incoherent message will make customers confused on whom and what Vålådalens Fjällstation is and the message will be lost in the media clutter. A more coherent message from Vålådalens Fjällstation will be able to better communicate who they are and what they offer to the customer, and be able to overcome the media clutter.

Interviews and theory brought out the importance of the message being creative to stand out in the media clutter. Suggested by the interviews was to use a lot of images and less text to be able to stand out and at the same time be able to convey the experience that they are trying to sell. With the main experience is the nature that the Swedish mountains offers Vålådalens Fjällstation should have these as the major focus of their message and what is unique with it

6.2.3 Social media and internet marketing

Social media and the internet provide companies with new ways to communicate with their customers. And using them can prove to be important to companies in certain industries. For Vålådalens Fjällstation it provides an opportunity to communicate with their customers in a two way method. For Vålådalens Fjällstation this means that not only will they be able to communicate their message to customers, but for customers to communicate what they think of Vålådalens Fjällstation through different internet media. This means that Vålådalens Fjällstation cannot run a campaign and let it take its course. But that they have to actively go out and meet their customers and take part in the discussion about them. Social media calls for a lot of activity from Vålådalens Fjällstation, not only to keep their own efforts updated but to keep a watch over where they are being mentioned and is being said about them.

Social media also means that Vålådalens Fjällstation may be able to use methods that before wasn't available to them. While they previously might not have been able to use movies to market the experience that the Swedish mountains offer, this is now available through YouTube. Using blogs, both done by the company and external bloggers is another method that could prove to be better at conveying the experience of visiting Vålådalens Fjällstation compared to a static ad in a newspaper.

Vålådalens Fjällstation should also consider to whom they target with the social media. With the current efforts being concentrated on the athlete part of Vålådalens Fjällstation, it may prove to not be as effective as it could be if it concentrated on private customers. As in planning of traditional media, the concepts used to evaluate what media vehicle to be used could be used. This so that Vålådalens Fjällstation knows that they are using the right social media to communicate with the target audience, rather than just using whatever. Social media are used by different segments, and unless this is taken into account the efforts might prove to be close to useless.

The interviews conducted pointed to that social media should be used as a compliment to more traditional media. As such it is important for Vålådalens Fjällstation to not use it as a replacement for this, but to continue to use traditional media and support it with the interactivity that social media offers. This requires that social media as well are integrated with the overall marketing communications.

6.2.4 Long term marketing strategy

Vålådalens Fjällstation has experienced several changes in management over the years and with it changes in marketing strategy. This means that there have been changes in objectives, strategies and target audience over the years. But by adopting a more long-term strategy, which stays the same even with changes in management Vålådalens Fjällstation would not experience problems with this. By having a more long-term marketing strategy they would be able to build a brand that is more recognized by the customer and be more visible. Better definition of who they are, what they want to achieve would have to be done to make the long term strategy more viable for Vålådalens Fjällstation. This definition would also help overcome the problem that Vålådalens Fjällstation currently have with that the owner, management and external partners have with the view of what the brand is.

6.2.5 Customer Relations Management

By studying who the customer at Vålådalens Fjällstation is, it is possible to better know who they are. This would be useful in planning communications, as Vålådalens Fjällstation could better now what media vehicles to use to target them. This would require that Vålådalens Fjällstation uses CRM software that helps them manage the data collected. The data collected is also useful to develop a more personal communication with current customers and would allow Vålådalens Fjällstation to make more personal offers to these customers.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

For future research the authors suggests to study the impact of management on the communications for service companies. This due to management being important for setting what the company will achieve.

The authors would also recommend research in how to create and design a message that is able to stand out in the media clutter and still being coherent over several media channels.

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Appendix interviews with Vålådalens Fjällstation

Jonas Ågren, Owner

Jonas spoke of the history of Vålådalen Fjällstation and what his view on what it should be today. Jonas sees it as to be the opposite of what Åre is today. While Åre is famous for the young audience and the parties associated with them, Jonas wishes Vålådalens Fjällstation to be a quiet, calm and place with a focus on the surrounding nature. He also emphasized on that it should be a place for families to visit.

Jonas said that there have not been any real emphasis on marketing Vålådalens Fjällstation as they previously had relied on using STF to market themselves and sponsored a skiing team, but as they now have ended this cooperation they now have to do this work themselves. One of the new methods of marketing themselves was that they now had a website introduced which had have 10000 views since it started.

Jonas Sundström, Vice President

Jonas Sundström believes that it is hard for Vålådalens Fjällstation to market themselves to a wide audience especially in today's media clutter and that because it is so expensive to market them in such a way. He also don't think that they can attract more professional athletes by using non-personal communications but that they have to use a more personal and directed advertising to them with for example e-mail. Jonas Sundström is also worried by the lack of contacts and market channels that brings in a steady stream of customers for them, but on the other hand he believes that they are really good at packaging the products and how to present themselves. Jonas thinks that this is because that they haven't had a tradition, vision or positioned themselves to this is who we are, this is what we will do, these are our customers and these are our channels. Jonas believes that this happened due to the frequent changes in who is CEO and that the different CEOs have done their own thing rather than been working for a predefined goal, and think that Vålådalens Fjällstation have had been in a better position if the owner had defined a clear goal when he purchased it and that they've continued that path even when the CEO was change.

Jonas think that the athlete focus of Vålådalens Fjällstation have a certain risk and that ordinary private customers can be frightened by this and that they would be known to be something for professional athletes only. But he also claims that they can attract customers by having a small group of professional athletes' active there, this is similar to why athletes get sponsorships, which is that people wants to associate themselves with these. But he thinks that they have almost positioned themselves right, think that they should tone down the professional athletes a bit and instead focus on health and wellbeing. Jonas doesn't think that ecotourism is an option for them in this, mainly because it very difficult to make money on this as a hotel, but that they should be "green profiled" instead.

Another problem for Vålådalens Fjällstation is that it is extremely expensive to run with its multiple properties with high maintenance costs which causes them

Jonas thinks that the Sami also poses a challenge as they have a say in what Vålådalens Fjällstation do on the land that they dispose of. While Jonas doesn't think that they

hinder the development but that they can make it take more time. According to Jonas the Sami thinks that the reindeers are disturbed by the tourism, but even so they themselves finds that the reindeers aren't disturbed by the tourism.

Jonas viewed STF as a marketing channel but he thought that it wasn't a very efficient for what they paid. Vålådalens Fjällstation had to maintain all the material themselves and the only thing that they actually got from it was access to their websites and just a paragraph in STFs magazine where they didn't really stand out So they reasoned that the customers from STF that they got where interested in hiking in the Swedish mountains, and that these would already know what Vålådalens Fjällstation is as it is a historical and natural starting point for this.

Jonas thought that it would be really advantageous if they had a full time sales representative, but due to the size of the company they have to combine roles, so now they have one person working with sales on consultancy basis and one person working with marketing and activities. But Jonas wishes and have discussed with the owner to change this into a marketing and sales role instead as he think this would be more beneficial for Vålådalens Fjällstation. He also believes that it is important that they go out and meet potential customers and tries to have a good contact with them, yet he finds that conventions might not good as he believes that these doesn't generate enough bookings at the end of the day.

Jonas says that they have been working together with other companies on something that is similar to a destination, but not fully one as they don't view themselves as destination, but that it is Åre that are the true destination. And Jonas finds this kind of cooperation as in important as he think that the customers doesn't look on what individual place to visit but on a what area to go to. As such the local competition is none existence while other areas such as Funäsdalen are the true competitors. Also Jonas believes that this kind of cooperation performs much better than when each individual company should market themselves. The first that has come out of this cooperation is a small guide over the ski tracks in the area that has been distributed, and Jonas thinks that this one has been really successful so far as it was brought up in a weekly magazine, is available at Ski star, it was handed out during the skiing world cup and that it was distributed with a newspaper. The next project for them was to produce a summer guide with the hiking trails in the area. Jonas believes that this cooperation will be good as he believes that in the current market clutter Vålådalen can't make themselves heard and from his own experience he says that those who have succeed are those who have managed to cooperate to make themselves heard.

Bengt Bengtsson, Marketing Coordinator

Bengt explained how Vålådalens Fjällstation were advertising themselves right now, and it consisted of a mix of the internet and newspaper ads, the internet marketing consisted of the website, an e-mail newsletter and Facebook for social media. The website is mainly used for information about Vålådalens Fjällstation, the newsletter to keep in contact with already existing customers and the Facebook was mainly aimed at athletes and sports. Bengt biggest concern was what they actually sell and how you convey that to the customers. For the customer it might be that it is skiing that they sell and everything associated with it while Bent stressed that it is Swedish mountain experience and

the nature that they are selling to the customer, and he was interested in how they could actually show this to the customer. He also mentioned that he was developing a catalogue which is due to that they have broken off the deal with STF and that they know have to develop this material themselves. According to Bent the usual customers were experienced with trips to the Swedish mountains and that they had very few customers that are new to these types of travelling.

Gunnar Christensson, external consultant

Gunnar explained his role as a sales consultant for Vålådalens Fjällstation and that he primarily worked with customer clubs in southern Sweden and Denmark, he dedicated roughly 30 hours per month for this. Gunnar was very concerned with that there was a lack of data available on the previous customers and that it make his work of selling the products so much harder as he couldn't derive why the customers choose to go to Vålådalens Fjällstation. And the importance of researching the current customers was something that he kept pointing out as important to be able to do future marketing campaigns more successful. Gunnar also spoke of the importance for Vålådalens Fjällstation to profile itself and build up a concept better. But to do this he thinks that they would have to do several new investments as he thought that there where features that he couldn't use when selling Vålådalens Fjällstation as he thought that the standard were too low, especially he thought that he couldn't sell it as child friendly as he believes that the facilities are lacking in this and that marketing it as this would cause problems for himself.