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Content marketing strategy in business

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis entitled “Content marketing strategy in business”. I duly marked out all quotations. The used literature and sources are stated in the attached list of references.

In Prague on 09, August, 2015

Signature

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Content

Introduction	2
1. Content marketing	6
1.1. Defining content marketing.....	6
1.2. Distribution channels.....	9
1.3. Comparison of content and traditional marketing.....	14
2. Creation of content marketing strategy	16
2.1. Formulation of goals and mission statement.....	16
2.2. Development of buyer persona	18
2.3. Unique brand storytelling.....	21
2.4. Alignment of elements of content marketing strategy	26
3. Research methodology	30
4. Analysis of the existing content marketing strategy: the case of Adidas.	34
4.1. Adidas Group: company profile	34
4.1.1. Historical overview	34
4.1.2. Adidas Group business strategy	37
4.2. Adidas content marketing goals and mission statement.....	40
4.3. Consumer analysis for development of buyer persona	43
4.4. Analysis of Adidas digital content marketing strategy	52
4.4.1. Technical SEO audit and keywords identification	52
4.4.2. Content and link footprint audit	55
4.4.3. Social SEO audit	58
5. Recommendations.	64
Conclusion.....	71
Bibliography	73
List of Figures.....	78
List of Tables.....	79
List of Appendices	80

Introduction

Vigorous growth of popularity of the Internet and rapid development of technologies has led to significant changes in business world. New way of consumers' interaction and engagement with brands forced companies from B2B as well as B2C sectors to reconsider their marketing efforts.

This master thesis introduces the modern entertaining, educating, and inspiring way of communication with customers which is content marketing. It is a strategic approach which enables brands to tell their stories to the target audience, to share their experience in the field of companies' expertise, and to convert from advertisers into publishers.

The author established the following goals while running the research:

- To define the elements of content marketing strategy;
- To analyze the existing content marketing strategy of the case brand;
- To build buyer persona profile for the case brand's target segment;
- To develop recommendations for improvement of the case brand's content marketing strategy.

As there is lack of pure content marketing literature in the world, the study contributes to the academic knowledge as a summary of the basic theories of content marketing, detailed description of strategic elements and the ways of aligning them. Moreover, there are only a few theses written on the topic in the world. Thus, the thesis contributes to the existing knowledge base. Due to the fact that complex analyses of companies' content marketing strategy are rarely introduced to the public in details, the empirical part of the thesis can serve as an example of systematic examination of the existing content marketing strategy for the practitioners. In addition, the creation of buyer persona profile for the target segment as well as the recommendations which were developed based on the outcomes of the research could be useful for the case brand while creating future content marketing campaigns.

Before description of the strategic steps the company should follow, it is important to define a content marketing as a discipline. Books of Joe Pulizzi (2008, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2014), the guru of content marketing, and his colleagues Robert Rose (2011, 2013) and Newt Barrett (2009) were studied as the basic literature on the topic. In addition, the perceptions of the discipline in the works of Pine (1999), Bowden (2014), and Gattis (2014) were examined.

Such electronic sources as articles, white paper series, and ebooks that were published by the Content Marketing Institute and its contributors were also actively used for formulation of the notion and basic principles of the approach.

In spite of the fact that popularity of content marketing has significantly increased during the last years, it was created and firstly implemented in 1890s. Thus, it was found necessary to make a historical overview of the most creative application of the approach by such companies as John Deere, Procter & Gamble, Nike, Michelin, Hasbro, Lego, Blendtec, and American Express. Also the main information sources which are suitable for sharing the content are emphasized.

To make the advantages of content marketing over traditional marketing more clear a comparison of these approaches is done. The author appeals to the works of Pulizzi (2008), Leibtag (2013), Miller (2013), Lund (2014), Maczug (2014), Maksymiw (2014), and Watts and Williams (2014).

Then description of the basic elements of content marketing strategy is made. First of all the author introduces the importance of formulation of goals and content marketing mission statement and the ways of generation of those. As one of the core initiatives of the approach is to nurture prospects and convert them into evangelists, the content marketing funnel developed by Joe Pulizzi and Robert Rose (2011) is considered. Secondly, the buyer persona which represents “the best customer” from the target segment is defined based on the works of Adlin and Pruitt (2005), Odden (2012), and Belew (2014).

Then, the core principles of the brand storytelling are emphasized. Among those are the content marketing brand hero’s journey (Vogler, 1992; Campbell, 2008; Pulizzi & Rose, 2011; Rose, 2013) and archetypes of stories based on Aristotle’s golden rules for storytelling (384 – 322 BCE) which were adopted to serve the companies content marketing initiatives by Dutton (2005), Booker (2006), Walker (2011), Sykes, Malik, and West (2012), Aschoff (2013), and Rhoads (2014). Finally, commonly used techniques for aligning all strategic elements are described.

Adidas has been chosen as the case brand for the analysis, because it is a worldwide known international company which serves a global customer. In addition, in 2011 it has reconsidered its marketing efforts in order to meet rapidly changing customers’ preferences. Adidas has appealed to content marketing strategy in order to accomplish an ambitious goal to

be the leading sporting company in the world by the year 2015. Moreover, the brand competes for the audience's attention with Nike which pioneered the development of content marketing approach. Thus, it was decided on analyzing the existing content marketing strategy of Adidas and benchmarking it with initiatives exploited by Nike. Also, the development of the buyer persona profile and recommendations for improvement of the case brand's approach is seen as relevant.

To start with, the historical overview of Adidas Group is made. In order to understand the context of content marketing initiatives, overall business strategy is considered. Then the author introduces the goals and mission statement of Adidas content marketing strategy.

As the case brand focuses its efforts mostly on digital communication with the target audience, demographic analysis of online visitors of the adidas.com is run on Alexa.com web analytics platform. In addition, the consumer analysis is made which aims at gaining the insights related to customers' decision-making process, buying habits, information sources they use more often, motivations and challenges for doing sports, and their perception of success. Questionnaire is chosen as the data collection method, because it enables to gather quantitative and qualitative data from a geographically scattered population. It is created on the Qualtrics web platform and is distributed by emails and through social media channels.

The consumer analysis is limited with the impossibility of the author to interview the brand's frontline employees and customers globally. Thus, due to Adidas strategic initiative to strengthen the market position in Central and Western Europe and the basic characteristics of the target segment, the sample is defined as English-speaking male and female students aged from 18 to 35 of the European universities, specifically the High School of Economics (Prague, Czech Republic), the University of Applied Sciences (Mainz, Germany), the IAE Lyon School of Management (Lyon, France), and International University in Geneva (Geneva, Switzerland). The results of the analysis reflect in the creation of buyer persona profile for Adidas target customers and their conversion cycle.

To analyze existing digital content marketing strategy of the case brand and develop further recommendations, five essential SEO audit are accomplished, in particular technical SEO audit, keywords research, content audit, link footprint, and social SEO audit. The author examines the brand's official website adidas.com, Facebook page, and YouTube video channel in more details, and benchmarks it with Nike. For this purpose, Alexa.com, Google

Trends, and BuzzSumo web analytics platforms are employed. As a result, content plan for Adidas as well as recommendations for each main distribution channel is generated.

In order to gain the corporate insights concerning the case brand's content marketing strategy and to have a clear picture of the company's marketing processes, an interview with an Adidas employee was established. The interview questions were directed to the employee by an email in the form of Microsoft Office Word document. A person was offered to choose whether the answers should be kept anonymous or not, and if an employee is interested in the results of the current analysis. The information directs and facilitates the consumer analysis as well as SEO essential audits.

1. Content marketing

1.1. Defining content marketing

The expression “content marketing” was firstly said by John F. Oppendahl in 1996 at the roundtable for journalists at the American Society for Newspaper Editors (Doyle, 1996). There are various modern interpretations of this concept which are worth emphasizing.

Joe Pulizzi (2012b), guru of content marketing and founder of Content Marketing Institute, explains the approach as “the marketing and business process of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action”

(<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/06/content-marketing-definition/>, retrieved: 20, November, 2014). This classical definition emphasizes the necessity of establishing two-ways communication with determined segment by sharing consistent content. Through this content the organization is able to show its experience in the field of specialization. “When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages – as in theatrical play – to engage him in a personal way” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p.3).

Moreover a company has to educate the audience by providing worthwhile information which customers pursue about the niche and the product in simple and precise way. Consequently, it helps to strike up, improve and maintain positive and trustful relationships with target consumers. Therefore content marketing can be also determined as “a powerful approach that drives deeper, more valuable relationships... and engages prospects in a meaningful way by sharing insightful information that consumers seek” (Gattis, 2014, p.52). In order to build loyalty, it is important to keep in touch with customers on a lifetime basis. This can be accomplished through social networks, blogs, articles and other means of communication which will be examined in Chapter 1.2 in more details. This side of the considered approach can be summarized with the help of the following definition: “Content marketing is the use of any type of media as a tool for garnering exposure and sales for your company or organization” (Bowden, 2014, p.3).

The core point of content marketing is telling the unique story of a particular brand. It is essential for people to narrate, deliberate and share different stories. They usually engage with those that provide answers to the bothering questions emerged from their routine lives. Thus it is crucial to take into account that “facts tell, but stories sell”

(<http://www.bryaneisenberg.com/contentmarketingsuperhero/>, retrieved: 10, January, 2015).

Even though content marketing is known as an innovative approach, brands began telling their stories long before now. In 1895 John Deere & Company, which is famous worldwide for producing the best quality farming equipment, issued the first branded magazine “The Furrow”. (John Deere, 2014) It was an agricultural customers’ journal, which is still distributed to farmers and specialists in the field in 40 countries and in 12 different languages (Maczuga, 2014) and helps them to solve everyday problems. Then in 1990 French tire manufacturer Michelin published the first “Michelin Guide”, annual book for drivers and travelers which facilitated French motorists on their way with instructions for maintaining tires, suggesting gas stations, and cafes in France. As Michelin brothers claimed “this Guide was born with the century, and it will last every bit as long”

(<http://www.viamichelin.co.uk/tpl/mag6/art200903/htm/tour-saga-michelin.htm>, retrieved: 10, January, 2015). Another example is a 19-pages booklet named “Jogging”, which was published in 1966 by Bill Bowerman, a co-founder of Nike Inc., with support of professional cardiologist. This booklet led to the jogging boom in the United States, which was actively exploited by Nike. As Bill Bowerman said: “the greatest improvement is made by the man who works most intelligently” (<http://www.thebowerman.org/about/bill-bowerman>, retrieved: 30, January, 2015). Later in 1982 Hasbro produced new toy line “3 ¾” and in order to keep ahead of the competitors the company decided to create a story about that toys, which would be able to engage kids. As creating cartoons which plot was based on the toy line was illegal, Hasbro came up with the comics about them. It was published in the Comics book G.I. Joe and helped the toy line to succeed. (<http://www.yojoe.com/comics/>, retrieved: 30, January, 2015) Later in 1987 Lego issued the first “Brick Kicks” magazine which is popular nowadays as “Lego club”. (Pulizzi, 2012a)

With development of the internet and social media, in 2008 Procter & Gamble has created a website BeingGirl.com with valuable tips concerning the body&wellness, style&beuty, relationships, entertainments, and P&G’s products. Besides the girls can ask experts questions, discuss with other subscribers issues they are interested in, and share the content through social networks. Moreover P&G created a TV series “Home made simple”. This is a reality

show which illustrates how to decorate the house and garden in simple and not expensive way with the help of the family and friends. (Pulizzi, 2012a) All this content marketing tools increase customers' engagement and influence sales positively. Furthermore first content video series appeared in 2007, which was launched on YouTube by Blendtec, a blender producer, and was called "Will it blend?". Dom Dickson, an engineer and inventor, was blending different things, from toys to mobile phones, in two blenders in order to know whether it will blend or not. These entertaining videos provoked the instant reaction of the audience and made them distribute this content through different online channels.

(<http://www.blendtec.com/company/about>, retrieved: 29, January, 2015) Also American Express created an "OPEN forum" in 2008 where people can exchange their opinion and experiences in the financial, marketing, and other business related fields. Its slogan was "Exchange advice. Make smart decisions". Forum still inspires people from all around the globe and helps them run their businesses efficiently.

(<https://www.americanexpress.com/us/small-business/openforum/explore/?linknav=us-openforum-global-header-logo>, retrieved: 29, January, 2015)

In spite of the fact that there are dozen successful examples of implementation of content marketing, there are still a lot of uncertainties and difficulties that companies have to deal with. As a result of technological development, customers are equipped with all necessary tools for quick search and distribution of the information about products or companies they are interested in. And the firms have to take an advantage of the current situation. Therefore the main goal of the modern organizations is to create a transparent and credible source for their target audience, make a contribution to their everyday lives, but not to the information overload.

In order to succeed in accomplishing that goal, the B.E.S.T. formula, created by Joe Pulizzi and Newt Barrett (2009), is recommended to apply. The abbreviation contains four basic principles of content marketing, such as behavioral, essential, strategic, and targeted.

1. Behavioral principle. First understand, and then be understood. It is impossible to conduct an effective content marketing strategy without clear vision of the required output. It is important to define what effect on the buyers the certain content makes and in which actions the motivation has to result. Also the measurement system of customers' behavior has to be established. Besides, every piece of information

communicated with the target audience needs to be passed through the prism of company's goals. (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009)

2. Essential principle is about providing personally and professionally beneficial information, which the target audience needs to know (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009). Consequently, the usage of appropriate media channels is required.
3. Strategic principle. It is crucial to consider a content marketing as an integrated part of the overall business strategy, which aims at spreading information through owned media, not rented (<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/what-is-content-marketing/>, retrieved: 29, December, 2014).
4. Targeted principal combines the preciseness of defining characteristics of the target customers; understanding their motives and attitude to the company's products and services.

By implementing B.E.S.T. formula the efficiency of content marketing is likely to increase. However, there is a possibility for a wrong understanding of customers' motivations and needs. Besides, if visual elements are not included into the content marketing initiatives, attracting and involving customers become pointless. Moreover it is important to formulate the measurement framework in advance, in order to avoid a trap of missing the target. Also companies may distract the audience with information which is essential to the organization, but not to the buyers, or push sales information which is veiled as a valuable content. Some of them aim too high or too low which is ineffective in both cases, therefore the content has to be simple and understandable for the readers. Another crucial mistake organizations usually make is separation of content marketing process from the whole company. (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009)

1.2. Content marketing distribution channels

There is a wide variety of the information sources that are used in content marketing process. They can be defined as a number of tools, techniques, and services brands use to deliver their messages (Miller, 2013). These communication channels can be divided into printed, online, and in-person sources based on the way they are spread. Each group will be observed in more details.

Although printed information sources require substantial investments in order to create relevant, absorbing, and well thought out paper-based publications, it has a significant impact on the audience (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009). Moreover, in comparison with online sources, a company is able to keep printed distribution channels under control. Also they are easily transported and presence of the online connection is not required for consumption. The following printed information sources are included in this group:

- Magazines;
- Newsletters;
- White paper series.

Since people usually buy magazines that suit their personal or professional interests, this communication channel is very useful for market segmentation. If a company understands the type of information the target audience wants, magazines will be beneficial for the content marketing process. While using this information source for the content distribution, it is crucial to take into account not only the main subject, but also a design of the coverage, the pages layout, length of the article, and the language style. So “print magazines can be a powerful weapon within your content marketing arsenal. They enable you to reach out with precision to your customers with carefully targeted messaging that is totally under your control”. (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009, p.23)

Another printed information sources are newsletters. They can be of different length, for instance from one side of the paper to 15 pages text, however their main characteristic is being attention grabbing, because they are invented to be immediately consumed. This can be achieved through eye-catching images and noticeable design of the page. (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009) The information has to be precise, concise and interesting for the target consumer. It is important not to overload customers with the newsletters for the reason that it may be considered by them as a push to make a purchase of a product or service. Consequently, this can negatively affect the relationships between organization and the audience.

The last but not the least in this group is white paper series, which are focused on delivering valuable, self-sufficient content which educates customers. Besides, white paper communicates the innovative ideas and stimulates creative and unusual way of thinking. The author’s point of view has to be relevant, proved with statistical data and research findings.

(Neuwirth, 2014) White papers usually cover the sophisticated topics which require broad explanation.

The second group of information sources is online. With the development of technologies and expansion of the Internet, online communication channels became very important. In 1998 Google was established, which led to the easier information accessibility. Also in the 1990s blogs became effortlessly available. Then in 2005 YouTube was found, and later in 2006 Twitter and Facebook opened to the users. (Miller, 2013) These events made a significant contribution to the growth of information published, read, discussed, and shared through the Internet. The biggest advantage of the online information sources is that they are going through the time and space instantaneously, and can be reached from every corner of the world, where the online connection exists. This group includes:

- Websites;
- Content web portals;
- Blog posts;
- Forums;
- Webinars;
- Video channels;
- EBook series;
- Online version of printed information sources: digital magazines, eNewsletters, white paper series.

Nowadays website – is the face of an organization. Therefore it has to be well structured and designed, in order to engage users immediately. User friendly interface will make it easier for the public to find the information they need. Thus it is important to organize a research in advance in order to accomplish that. The website has to be very informative and tell the users about the company, its products and services, competitive advantages, and recent news (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009). In addition to that it has to be easy to comment on the content and share it with friends and followers. Also the content has to be integrated and the story of the brand has to penetrate each page of the website. “P&G everyday” is a classical example of

how corporate website has to be organized. On the main page there are sections for family, food, home & garden, health & wellbeing, and beauty. Moreover it is possible to get to know the P&G's communities, brands, and offers. Besides a lot of valuable content can be found: from recipes, helpful articles, and tips to relevant TV series and YouTube videos. Every piece of content is tagged, which makes the information spreading easier. Also users are able to express their opinion by giving "like" and leave comments. (<https://www.pgeveryday.com/>, retrieved: 12, January, 2015)

As a matter of fact, usually large companies have not only the main corporate website, but also a number of small sites with a specific content aimed at narrow audience. (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009) These websites are called content web portals. For example, apart from "P&G's everyday" the company has a web portal "BeingGirl.com", which dedicated for answers to the question of girl's routine life.

Another online information sources are blogs. They enable brands to deliver the messages quickly and in real time. Blogs are used for constant content creation and provoke public interaction in real-time. After the content reached the user, the feedback occurs instantly by way of comments and discussions. (Gattis, 2012) Besides it is possible to spread blog posts in real time by means of tags, links, retweets, and other social media shares. It is easy to find relevant information with the help of blogs, because they are sorted by the issuance date which makes them one of the most search engine friendly online information sources.

Furthermore the companies often use such communicational channel as forums, which connect people with common interests who communicate, debate, and share experiences and useful content with each other. Apart from active participants, forums attract plenty of search traffic, so that the Internet users usually have recurrence to them on day-to-day basis. In order to make the forum being popular it is necessary for the administrator to be active as well as react immediately. The messages on the forums are listed in the same way as the blog posts, specifically in reverse chronological order. Also it is easy to measure the effectiveness of the forums according to the number of registered users online, the level of activity, number of visitors, and number of new members which updates every day. (Garner, 2012)

Next online source under consideration is webinar, which was firstly conducted by Placeware, Xerox's PARC Laboratory in 1996 (Pulizzi, 2012a). Webinar or Web Conference is a platform or a platform that supports shared audio, visual, and other materials in real time.

They are lead by the live speaker who has expert knowledge in the topic. The speaker responses to the questions immediately and can manage the discussion in real time. (Bunzel, 2010) Webinars are seen as possible substitution for the usual conferences, because they enable to educate audience worldwide, involve bigger amount of participants, and are less costly.

Moreover companies usually use video channels as part of their content marketing strategy. They are the most interactive and engaging real time component of content marketing. Online videos are used for distributing the news, topical events, tutorial, and series. Since video is uploaded, it starts the immediate feedback mechanism of “likes”, comments, and shares. However, it is important to treat the video as an integral part of the content marketing strategy. Video channel requires to be supported by other content distribution sources such as website, blogs, and social networks. (Garner, 2012)

If there is a big prospective informational block which a company would like to emphasize and share with its customers, it is possible to issue a series of eBooks. The typical length of the eBook is from 20 to 40 pages; the text is reader-friendly and includes bullet points and graphics. It can be sent to the users by chapters or the whole book at once. (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009)

The third group of information sources to be observed is called In-Person. The frequency of usage of the In-person information sources as a content distribution channel decreases with the growth popularity of the Internet. Moreover in comparison to the online channels, In-Person sources are more expensive and time-consuming. However, companies still use the following ways of content delivery, because they see the necessity in talking to the customers physically face-to-face. (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009) This group contains the following types of in-person communication channels:

- Road show;
- Executive Roundtable.

Road show is the series of conferences on tour organized by a single company or several non-competitive companies. (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009) The typical length of each conference is one day. It is organized in several cities which are more interesting for the business in terms of

concentration of potential consumers. It is important for participants to feel that they received vital, problem-solving information.

The next type of in-person information sources is executive roundtable which can be defined as a meeting of the industry representatives, who have expertise knowledge in a particular field and leadership skills. The speakers engage the participants with the help of presentations and organized discussions. (Barrett & Pulizzi, 2009) This type of In-person information sources is more efficient for distributing content in B2B sector.

To sum it up, there are many different ways of distributing the content, which will educate and engage the prospect customers. As the story of a brand which is told through content marketing is unique, the choice of an appropriate communication channel or a combination of them is also unique for each organization. It depends on the characteristics of the target audience, their interests and needs, their expectations from the products and the organization, and the essential questions they have about the area of the company's expertise.

1.3. Comparison of content and traditional marketing

With the rapid development of technologies and the Internet information becomes readily available. So people are aware of the company and its ethics, advantages and disadvantages of the products and services. For that reason methods of traditional marketing become less effective, and it becomes more complicated for the companies and their products and services to stand out from the crowd of competitors. (Maczuga, 2014) Consequently, there is a power shift from advertisers to customers (Watts & Williams, 2013).

Content marketing is more effective in terms of reaching the target audience. While traditional marketing interrupts the prospective customers with pushing messages and strives to enforce them to make a purchase, content marketing is trying to build trustful relationship with the audience and hold an open conversation with them (Miller, 2013). Amanda Maksymiw (2014), a content marketing manager for Lattice Engines, claims that "the value of content marketing lies in the engagement between the customer and your company. Traditional advertising shouts at prospect customers whereas content marketing talks with them" (<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2014/03/content-marketing-plan-influencers-partners/>, retrieved: 20, November, 2015).

Nowadays people seek for honesty and transparency. However advertisers usually cover the brand story with disturbing messages which they found to be persuasive. “People want to work with real people... We want honest, easy-to-find information and we reward those businesses that offer it by giving them our purchases, referrals, and loyalty.” (Watts & Williams, 2013, p.13)

Thus it is important to establish the contact on the emotional level with the audience, so that they will spread their opinion about the organization, share the experience they gained, and buy the products. In other words the brands’ stories have to be “humanized”, customers demand more heart and soul in the content the company creates (Lund & Sutton, 2014). Stories are originally social, therefore they are considered to be the basic of the content marketing strategy. They make the customers to take an action, which creates a synergy and not just increases the sales. Ahava Leibtag (2013) published in Aha media Group Blog: “One of the disadvantages of traditional advertising was the one-way aspect of the conversation: sales metric was one of your only measurements to see if engagement was really happening. With content marketing, you can have a two-way conversation with your customers and use varied tools to measure engagement.”(<http://onlineitallmatters.blogspot.de/2013/08/content-marketing-how-to-sell-it-inside.html>, retrieved: 29, November, 2014)

One of the core advantages of the content marketing approach over traditional one are the company-owned media channels. It is cost effective and also brings to life the business ideas more accurately and in the expected form. However, it is difficult to switch from traditional way of paying advertising agencies, because companies typically are tight closely to their media partners (Pulizzi, 2008).

The content marketing is mostly a long-term strategy and it requires time in order for the results to be feasible. While traditional advertising is at most short-term oriented and is able to show the results quicker, however, the effect from this method has shorter duration in comparison to the content marketing. (Miller, 2013)

Taking into account discussed pros and cons of both marketing approaches, it can be concluded that in order for a company to adapt to rapidly changing environment it is necessary to implement content marketing. However, it can be also beneficial for the company to use both, traditional and content marketing, simultaneously.

2. Creation of content marketing strategy

2.1. Formulation of goals and mission statement

“Who you are? Where you are now? Where do you want to be?”, - these are three basic questions which have to be answered before building content marketing strategy (Pulizzi & Rose, 2013). These responses are the fundamental step on the way from point A to point Z that should not be ignored. As famous American marketing consultant, Jay Baer, said: „Content helps achieve business objectives, not content objectives“. Understanding what the certain business stands for, why content marketing is needed and what benefits the content will bring to the organization will help content marketing strategy to move forward.

Visualization of business goals is crucial for creating successful strategy. Traditional marketing helps businesses to get customers through “the sales funnel” (Figure 1). It is a consumers’ buying cycle which includes several stages from absolute unawareness of the company, the brand and the product, to final purchase (Levenson, 2011). In comparison with “the sales funnel”, “the content marketing funnel” (Figure 2) or a conversion cycle covers more organizational objectives and helps to accomplish the initiatives before and beyond customers stage (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011).

Figure 1: the sales funnel.



Source: Pulizzi & Rose, 2011.

Figure 2: the content marketing funnel.

The Content Marketing Funnel



Source: Pulizzi & Rose, 2011.

The main goal of the content marketing strategy is to convert unqualified prospects into passionate subscribers. Each stage of the content marketing funnel represents particular goal of this long-tail strategy. The funnels can differ among companies based on their overall aim.

Visitors as a first stage of conversion cycle imply the absence of knowledge about the company and its products or services. Content marketing strategy can be used for building brand awareness through attention grabbing educational content that can be quickly and simply digested (OpenView, 2013). Interested visitors are transforming into the leads. In this case companies are aimed at building trustful relationship with leads and show the value of their content. At this stage it is crucial to stimulate the audience to provide personal information and to receive permission to direct content to them permanently (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011). Once leads confined in the company, the opportunities should be offered. The goal is to provide problem-solving solutions for the audience. It is necessary to demonstrate the variety of possibilities, and to encourage comparison of opportunities. For the purpose of sales, it is important to prove that the particular company's solution can help the target audience with pressing problem better than competitors. After the purchase is made the target buyer becomes a customer. However in order for one-shot customer to convert into a passionate subscriber, it is essential to maintain after sales relationship with the audience.

Satisfaction stage is aimed at encouraging customers to buy other company's products and services. This can be achieved through motivating satisfied consumers to generate product reviews, comments below the posts, and testimonials which will be, for instance, published in the company's magazine, on its website, or quoted in Twitter (<http://www.singlegrain.com>, retrieved: 29, April, 2015). This stage is also helpful for creating an image of valued and trusted brand that appreciates consumers' opinions. Once the audience becomes loyal, the main goal of satisfaction phase has been achieved. However, settling into the comfortable zone has to be continued by working on relationships with customers on the regular basis. This is initial aim of the retention stage. This can be accomplished by sending routinely newsletters with updates, organizing special events or creating a webinar series (Pulizzi, 2011). Also it is possible to use special offers, gift coupons, and giveaways in order to express gratitude for choosing the company's products and services (<http://www.singlegrain.com>, retrieved: 29, April, 2015). Along with retention, upsell phase helps to accomplish those goals as well as forcing ongoing engagement after the "check-out". Finally visitors become evangelists. If company reached the evangelism stage, then it has built a community of

passionate subscribers who will create entertaining content, distribute it among their friends, and will fight for the brand if it is necessary (Pulizzi, 2011).

As John Watton says, “making a complex message manageable and easily digested, we’ve driven people into our funnel at a faster rate.” (John Watton, CMO of ShipServ) Thus content marketing mission statement is crucial for developing a strategy. The mission expresses why the company exists and what makes it being special. The message clarifies the goals of content marketing strategy and contains problematic issues of the audience that the company is going to solve. (Pulizzi, 2014)

As a case in point, HomeMadeSimple.com, the Procter & Gamble’s content website, will be analyzed. Its mission statement is the following: “Home Made Simple is dedicated to fresh ideas for home. Whether it’s a delicious recipe, an inspiring décor idea or a refreshing approach to organizing, we strive to help you create a home that’s truly your own. Everything we do here is designed to empower and inspire you to make your home even better, and most importantly, a place you love to be.” (P&G, HomeMadeSimple.com)

First of all, this statement serves as an ideal example of content marketing mission, because it highlights the target audience. Even though it is not said directly in the message, it is understandable that the content is aimed at homemakers who care of a family comfort. Secondly, the pieces of content to be delivered are stated. These are recipes, décor ideas, and new ways of organizing home space. Thirdly, the benefit for the audience is clear. P&G assures the customers that HomeMadeSimple.com will help them to dignify their homes and create a pleasant atmosphere.

The content marketing mission statement should be available and visible for the audience. For instance, it can be posted on the company’s website or published on the first page of its magazine. Mission statement can also be used as a measure of content fit. It is important to distribute this message among the content creators in order for the content marketing strategy to serve properly. (Pulizzi, 2014)

2.2. Development of buyer persona

Individualised marketing became a challenging marketing task in the 1990s. There was a shift from poorly differentiated “clan market” concept which was characterized by similar

behavior, based on traditions or class, ethnic and cultural habits, among large consumer groups, to a market of personas. (Jenkinson, 1994)

Defining target segments with demographic characteristics such as age, gender or race is not enough for creating engaging content marketing strategy. Treating customers as individuals with different habits and behavior is crucial for developing compelling content. (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011) Therefore buyer persona has to be implemented. “It is an archetype, a composite picture of the real people who buy, or might buy, products like the ones you sell” (Revella, 2011, p.5). Buyer persona is also considered as “a fictitious profile of a larger group that may share an attitude and/or certain behaviors”

(<http://www.sundoginteractive.com/sunblog/posts/how-to-develop-buyer-personas/>, retrieved: 20, May, 2015). It is impossible to serve everyone at one level, so that it is more efficient to concentrate on the individual who will lead to the highest probability of success. (OpenView, 2013) Buyer persona is a helpful instrument which allows taking marketing segmentation to the upper level by changing company’s focus from corporate egocentrism of promoting products, hoping someone will buy, to gaining better insight of what stimulates the customers’ desire to make a purchase (Odden, 2012).

Building buyer persona means to choose “the best customer” that will be marketed through content (Belew, 2014). For that reason, it is crucial to identify the context of buyer personas. Without understanding customers’ situation it is impossible to produce content successfully. There are three core points that have to be covered:

- Buyers’ incentives, pain points, and shopping habits;
- The most problematic stage of buyers’ journey for the customer;
- The reason for concerns and the influential points that may help customers to continue moving through content marketing funnel. (OpenView, 2013)

Furthermore, the model of buyer persona includes detailed description of a fictional person with realistic features such as name, age, job title and functions, place of living, routine problems and needs, goals in life, experience, information sources that the buyer uses, expectations, and even a photo. (Belew, 2014) These data provides insight into the customers’ life and enables companies to develop more effective and relevant content marketing strategy. In order to collect these qualitative and quantitative data the following data sources can be used: questionnaires and telephone or personal interviews with potential and loyal customers

as well as frontline employees, conversion data and web analytics, social media listening and monitoring tools, key words analysis, and available demographic information. (Odden, 2012) The interview is considered to be the best qualitative data collection method which enables to emerge a fuller picture of buyer persona. Surveys and focus groups are not useful in the uncertain situation: they can prove the information which is already known or facilitate in choosing the best one from several alternatives. However, through asking customers provocative questions it is easier to gain deeper view and identify unpredictable insights of their minds. (Revella, 2011)

Once the information is collected it has to be carefully analyzed. The correlation between demographic data, pain points, and incentives enables to distinguish between customer segments. Finding common characteristics, building trends and identifying buying pillars are crucial for creating a buyer persona's profile. (Odden, 2012) The example below illustrates an outcome of the surveys of teenage girls and their mothers in the mid 1940s in the form of description of a fictional character Teena, that was created by Estelle Ellis, the promotion director of the teenage magazine "*Seventeen*": "Teena the High School Girl has a peck of problems. She is what older folks call an awkward adolescent—too tall, too plump, too shy—a little too much of a lot of little things. But they are big things to Teena. And though she does not always take her troubles to mother, Teena writes her favourite magazine for the tip-off on the clothes she wears, the food she eats, the lipstick she wields, the room she bunks in, the budget she keeps, the boy she has a crush on. *Seventeen* seems to have all the answers—that is why like Teena, smart advertisers use *Seventeen*." (Hu, 2012)

According to the customers' roles in the buying cycle, a company can base its content marketing strategy on two or three personas. For example, there is a firm which produces a computer game at B2C market. They are aimed at preteen age boys, teenage girls, and mothers of those teenagers. In this case it is better to create three persona's profiles in order for the content creators to visualize people they are targeting. Besides, these buyers' descriptions serve as a model of content fit which enables to stay focused. (Belew, 2014)

The power of buyer personas can be psychologically proved. According to the findings of the researcher Jonathan Grudin, Microsoft Corporation, it is essential for people to create and apply models of other people. He considers humans as "social animals" who can foresee the responses of others by internally modeling the person. People explain things differently to an adult and to a child, to a stranger and to a friend. Therefore content has to be delivered to

different buyer personas accordingly. The researcher also emphasizes that human capability to engage with models of real people converts to models of fictional people, which are distinguished by their complexity and details (Adlin & Pruitt, 2005). In other words, making mental image of the customer is a powerful tool of the content design. With understanding of these psychological pillars it becomes effortless for the content creators to convey the message to an imaginary character that company is aimed at.

To sum it up, buyer personas enable companies to meet each customer segment's expectations and needs more efficiently. The model gives an opportunity to create more compelling and engaging content which reflects the solutions to the customers' problems. Identifying buyer personas facilitates in choosing the right topics and style for the content and distribution channels. It helps companies to build consistent content marketing strategy and establish trustful long-term relationships with the audience which also affect positively on the brand image and sales.

2.3. Unique brand story telling

“Story sharing is the central plank on which human society is focused” (Dunbar, 2004, p.100). The content, which a company shares, predetermines the amount of customers it will tempt that will in turn define the company's influence on the market. It is necessary to start from the end of this logical chain, because “the central plank” of shared stories will initially determine strategic point of destination. (Oatway, 2012) As the goals of content marketing strategy (Chapter 2.1) and buyer personas (Chapter 2.2) have been already examined, a concept of stories creation which brands tell to the audience will be considered in details in this Chapter.

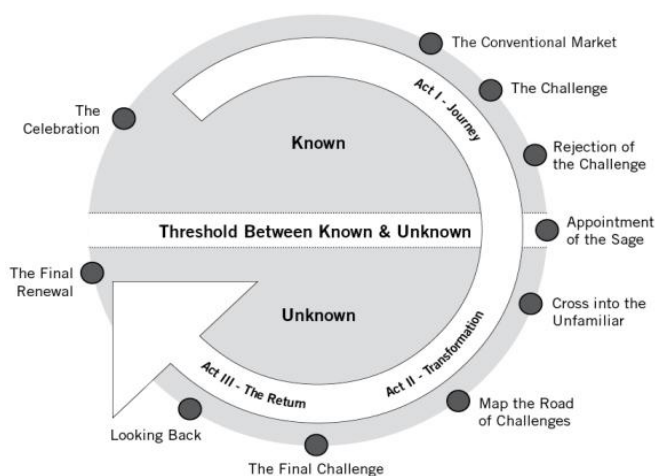
Every brand is unique and it communicates in different ways inside and outside the organization. Depending on the company's goals and target audience, there are two basic types of generated brand content: brand-centric content and editorial content. The brand-centric content describes organizational activities and values. It is expressed in the form of “About us” section, press releases, product instructions, company's presentations, and sustainability reports. This content type is widely used in order to inform stakeholders about current business situation and attract public attention to the brand. It is aimed at narrower audience than editorial content. The last one is determined as a material for storytelling. This type of content pursues two objectives: thought leadership and virality. In other words,

editorial content helps companies to distinguish themselves as the industry experts that are able to serve broader audience because of its viral potential. (Lankow et. al., 2012)

Nowadays the stories that revolve in and around modern company depict its corporate culture and organizational values win and lose points, heroes and enemies. Through storytelling a company can tell the world about itself and what it stands for. The strong market leader, to whom employees and customers listen to, distinguishes itself by being good at telling inspiring stories. (Fog et. al., 2011) According to Content Marketing Institute, “developing the content in our content marketing strategy is developing the stories of us. It is the big ideas that we represent. It is the differentiated experiences we want to create. It is what we really do for a living.” (<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/story/>, retrieved: 10, May, 2015)

Storytelling is a challenging task for today’s marketers (Rhoads, 2014). However the concept itself is not new. In 1949 Joseph Campbell (2008) wrote a book “The Hero with a Thousand Faces”, where he summarized his findings of comparative mythology and developed a characters’ development cycle named “hero’s journey”. Campbell claimed that all stories are substantially built in the same way. So he designed the structure of story based on the idea of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung about “archetypes” as building blocks of the myth. The model formed the pillars for the content marketing brand hero’s journey (Figure 3) which was developed by the Joe Pulizzi and Robert Rose in 2011. This is a helpful tool which provides a framework for creating brand’s stories or identifying what is missing in the existing story. (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011)

Figure 3: The Content Marketing Brand Hero’s Journey.



Source: Pulizzi and Rose, 2011.

The content marketing brand hero's journey starts from identifying the conventional market that means determining the characteristics of the industry, competitors and their market positions, the reality of target audience, and the reasons for choosing the company's brand (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011). After eliciting the pillars for content creation, it is important to issue the challenge. In order to accomplish it, the following "what if" question has to be answered: what would the world look like if the company could achieve its strategic goals? Also it is necessary to determine "a call to adventure" for the product and to give customers a promise to help them with overcoming difficulties. (Rose, 2013) A challenge can be refused by the hero, because of the threat of uncertainties and insecurity (Campbell, 2008). Understanding of why it has not been implemented yet and influence of the changes on the initial brand can help the company to move forward in this journey (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011). On the threshold between known and unknown the hero meets a mentor who admonishes him and provides with the insights and guideline for the way to success. (Vogler, 1992) So it is important to assign the roles responsibilities for the brand story facilitation inside the team. Furthermore it is crucial to decide whether a brand needs a mentor or sage that will represent it in public. (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011) When a customer crosses into the unfamiliar, a brand crosses into the "what if" world described during the first stage of hero's journey. In this unknown area the pieces of content and distribution channels has to be determined (Rose, 2013).

During the next step a company has to map the road of challenges. The brand will be tested by customers who have not decided yet whether to trust it or not. Therefore it is necessary to determine how to gather friends or how to deal with the enemies. Identifying the competitors that the customers align the brand with and establishing partnerships are the essential activities at this transformation stage (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011). After quickenning public interest to the brand story, a company meets the final challenge. The hero has to use all the gathered skills and knowledge in the journey and apply them to move forward to success. This step shows how the hero transformed in action. (Vogler, 1992) While looking back a company has to analyze the journey which the brand has accomplished and identify the differences that has been made on the market and with the brand itself (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011). Understanding of these changes gives an opportunity to the final renewal. The hero has become balanced and competent in inner and outer world (Campbell J., 2008). It enables a company to establish new aims, adapt its strategy to the current market situation and generate the content that will contain a wisdom that a hero gained on his journey. Finally it leads to the

celebration stage when brand gains benefits from the journey in the form of customers' gratitudes, reviews and comments. (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011)

Based on Aristotle's golden rules for storytelling (384 – 322 BCE), the first thing to consider while writing a successful story is a good plot. "A plot is a simplified structure of the story that identifies the key events, turning points, actions and reactions" (Sykes et. al., 2012, p.123) . According to the findings of Christopher Booker (2006), there are seven archetypal plot lines behind the stories people tell: the overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, rebirth, voyage and return, comedy, and tragedy. The essence of the "Overcoming the Monster" story is in facing with the evil and escaping from death, which ends with saving humanity and the world from danger (Dutton, 2005). Brand makes a customer being a hero that can overcome the monster with the help of the company's product and additional value that content brings to their lives (Rhoads, 2014). For instance, Nike's campaign "Just Do It" inspires people to overcome threat, fight down indecision and achieve their goals (Nike, 2013). The second story archetype is "Rags to Riches". Booker aligns it with such tales as "Cinderella", "Jane Eyre", and "The Ugly Duckling" that describe a modest, oppressed, but naturally talented hero who passes series of trials on the way to happiness (Booker, 2006). Brands often exploit this plot line taking at the forefront their founders' stories of success (Rhoads, 2014). For example, the biography of John Paul DeJoria, co-founder and chairman of the board of the hair-care company "Paul Mitchell", is placed on the organization's webpage. It highlights his transformation from Christmas cards seller, bottles collector and once homeless person to the successful entrepreneur and supports the brand's philanthropic message - "giving is my style" (<https://www.paulmitchell.com/our-story/our-company/john-paul-dejoria-bio/>, retrieved: 12, May, 2015).

The next story archetype under consideration is "The Quest" where the hero has a distant goal and he goes on travel in order to achieve it, like in the "Odyssey" and "Lord of the Ring". Throughout the journey, he will find allies and resources; will face challenges that will try to stop the hero from completing the quest. (Sykes et. al., 2012) A business example for this plot line is recent story of Intel about Jack Andraka, a high school student and the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) innovator. Andraka's quest has begun when his uncle was diagnosed with cancer at the latest stage. This forced him to make a discovery and in 2012 he invented an early-detection method for pancreatic cancer which is 168 times faster, 400 times more sensitive, and 26 times less expensive than the medical standard (Rhoads, 2014). This story and its hero Jack Andraka represent Intel's "Look Inside"

current campaign. Similar to “The Quest” is a “Voyage and Return” plot which is also based on the journey. However, in this case the protagonist lives a normal life until the adventure unpredictably happens to him or her. The hero gets into an alien world and then comes back with deeper understanding of the external environment. (Sykes et. al., 2012) The protagonist is usually naïve and his voyage and return is seen as a progression to wisdom. The archetype was used in such stories as “Alice in Wonderland”, “Back to the Future”, and “Robinson Crusoe”. (Rhoads, 2014) Chrysler’s campaign “Imported from Detroit” by Olivier François, a Chief Marketing Officer for Fiat, an Italian car company that took over Chrysler in 2009, is a business example of this archetype application. After surviving the structured bankruptcy, Chrysler introduced the advertisement at the Super Bowl 2011. It has shown the spirit of a brand and a town; a company’s improvement after the crisis in 2008 and restoring the Detroit’s image of the Motor City. (Aschoff, 2013)

The “Rebirth” stories tell about a hero who is under the dark spell, which can be broken only with the help of good forces, for instance, “Snow White” and “A Christmas Carol”. (Walker, 2011) The Red Kettle history of the international movement Salvation Army, an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church, is a good example of the “Rebirth” plot type usage. This is a story of The Salvation Army Captain Joseph McFee, who wanted to organize a free Christmas dinner for poor inhabitants of San Francisco. His “dark spell” was lack of funding for the project, which was broken by the creative idea of placing red kettle on the streets with a message “Keep the Pot Boiling”. He collected money very soon and people in need were fed at Christmas. The tradition of red kettle has spread all around the globe. This is how the Salvation Army is able to help more than four million people during the Christmas and Thanksgiving holidays. (<http://salvationarmyusa.org/usn/red-kettle-history>, retrieved: 15, May, 2015)

According to Booker (2006), “Comedy” covers five above mentioned plots. All archetypes have happy endings in most of the cases, in addition, they are based on the hero’s journey and lead to the redemption, progression, and renewal. Such stories consist of confusion which comes to an end after misunderstandings have been solved. (Sykes et. al., 2012) As “Comedy” is the audience’s favourite plot type, brands often use it as a pillar of content marketing strategy (Rhoads, 2014). The opposite of “Comedy” is “Tragedy” which highlights the consequences of human ruse, narcissism and egotism (Aschoff, 2013). The protagonist is despaired, suffers from imperfection or immaturity, and in the end the hero passes away or becomes absolutely destructed. (Booker, 2006) “Tragedy” is not very suitable plot for a brand

storytelling, with the exception of tragic narratives that can motivate the audience to action. For example, in 2014 Quit, a British company that helps smokers to give up their bad habits, organized a Vine campaign for World No Tobacco Day. The company created six-second videos that showed different people making a puff with a slogan “Before this video starts again, another smoker will die”. During the first five days the campaign generated 26,000 reposts and 50,000 likes in social media. (<http://beta21.circussocial.com/campaigns/quits-creative-vine-campaign-for-world-no-tobacco-day/>, retrieved: 15, May, 2015)

Knowledge of stories archetypes helps content marketers to be focused and distinguish between appropriate and irrelevant content. In addition, a common plot makes a content marketing strategy being coherent. As archetypes are media agnostic, enlargement of working portfolios leads to the enrichment of the stories. Commitment to one type of narratives supports the brand image and aligns its message with integrated content marketing campaigns across different distribution channels. Stories are timeless, therefore they continue to exist and being diffused in renewed forms, through new media and with the help of progressive technologies. (Rhoads, 2014)

2.4. Alignment of elements of content marketing strategy

According to Alan Lakein, an author of time management books, “planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now” (<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alanlakein154655.html>, retrieved: 14, June, 2015). Planning of content marketing activities depends on the scale and the time. The scale means the size of target audience which can vary from one person to a group of people, a company, or a nation. The time means duration of customers’ decision making process, which can be divided into four groups: gut feel, repetition, elapsed time, and reevaluation. The first type corresponds to people who make their decisions fast based on their experience, short information, and individual assumptions. In this case concise and to the point content is needed to be presented in the understandable manner. That will decrease a probability of contradictory assumptions. Some consumers need to hear the arguments and see the evidences repeatedly before making a final decision. Thus company needs to increase a variety of distribution channels and content formats. People from “elapsed time” group require more time for making up their mind. Therefore content has to be delivered partially getting the audience familiar with a company and its products or services gradually. The last group of people cannot make a complete decision. They always reevaluate the decision especially if it

is influenced by another person's opinion, new arguments against and different circumstances. (Sykes et. al., 2012)

After establishing goals and objectives of the content marketing strategy and creating a mission statement (Chapter 2.1), identifying buyer personas (Chapter 2.2) and determining story of the brand (Chapter 2.3), it is important to align them. Creation of content plan (Figure 1, Appendix) is required for that purpose. Based on content marketing strategic goals and buyer personas' pain points, specific topic, and content format is assigned to serve customers' needs. (Odden, 2012) For example, if a buyer wants to prepare a delicious and fast dinner, then content can be delivered in the form of an article or "Do It Yourself" (DIY) video.

The distribution channels (Chapter 1.2) also require careful planning. Firstly, it is necessary to do a situational analysis to identify the channels a company has and those required for storytelling. The analysis is based on the information from buyer personas profiles and the stages of the engagement cycle. (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011) Secondly, the distribution channels' objectives are mapped with the goals of each step of the content marketing funnel. It is important to understand the drivers of consumer behavior and produce the content accordingly. (Brener, 2015) Thirdly, the points of contact are assigned to different stories. There are distribution channels for content consumption and for conversation with the audience (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011). Based on the context of buyers defined in the personas profile and established strategic goals stories can be diffused through one or multiple points of contact. Then conversion goals and call to action are aligned with each stage of buying cycle. In addition, several key messages a company wants to address can be highlighted here. (OpenView, 2013) The last step of channel plan is creating main points of style guide including velocity of publishing content, communication tone (for example, professional, casual, conversational, or friendly), language (formal or informal), and grammar (for example, British or American English). (Garner, 2012) With the help of written Channel Plan content marketing campaigns can be arranged (OpenView, 2013). An example of simple version of the Channel plan (Figure 2, Appendix) and more complex Matrix (Figure 3, Appendix) are provided in the Appendix.

As content marketing strategy is based on storytelling it is important for marketers to think like publishers (Tilton, 2012). The core tool for managing the existing life cycle of the company's content marketing strategy is an editorial calendar (Harris, 2014). It is a spreadsheet that represents assets, channels and schedule for publishing content (Garner,

2012). The calendar can look simple or complex however the basic creation process is common for both forms. Picking up relevant topics that meet customers' needs, solve their problems, and stimulate to consume more content is essential for making the editorial calendar. (Odden, 2012) Then topics are divided into categories. One of the possible ways is to segregate them into three groups: "evergreen" content which stays permanently relevant in spite of seasonality, for instance the company's website; "perennials" which return year after year and require regular maintenance, for example some topics of the newsletters or blog posts; and "annual color" which covers short-term oriented topics that create extra activities, for instance some of the publications in the social medias. (Miller, 2013)

The next step in organizing the calendar is assigning forms of content to the categories according to the audience's preferences and set up timeline (Odden, 2012). There is a two-step approach regarding the time. The first step is to create monthly editorial calendar that will contain twelve themes for each month of the following year. This will create a framework for the second step which is a weekly editorial calendar. It determines specific activities and schedules them regarding to the key message of the current month. (Parker, 2012) This approach is more suitable for small firms, but can be enlarged and adopted by bigger companies. While creating a timeline it is also important to take into consideration seasonality and public holidays that can affect communication with customers (Miller, 2013).

After collecting all necessary information and organizing a plan for producing content, the editorial calendar needs to be integrated with other existing marketing plans, advertising and PR efforts (Odden, 2012). Due to complexity of the calendar, it can be separated for each main distribution channel, topic, or buyer persona (Miller, 2013). As the external environment is rapidly changing, the editorial calendar has to be constantly monitored, evaluated, and adjusted. For these purposes editorial meetings are organized about once a quarter. (Odden, 2012) Editorial calendar assures that the content marketing strategy is not "trapped" by one distribution channel and helps to set priorities between them (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011); enables a company to concentrate efforts, cover under one umbrella contributing departments, and eliminate confusion among them (Miller, 2013); provides daily guidance for content production and clarifies deadlines (Garner, 2012).

Finally, assigning resources for a content marketing initiatives is organized in the document called "The Resource plan". After aligning goals, buyer personas, stories, and schedule there will be the tasks that have to be done. Thus it is important to deligate responsibilities among

employees and assign other required organizational resources. This is the last step of mapping a strategy which affects the timeline and budget. (Pulizzi & Rose, 2011) If a company wants to succeed in content marketing, the strategy has to be documented and shared between employees. According to the research made by Content Marketing Institute, only 27% of B2C marketers from North America claimed that they have a documented content marketing strategy and 43% of them are more effective at measuring the ROI than others (Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs, 2014). In addition, based on the B2B research report (Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs, 2014) it can be concluded that the key to the content marketing's success is putting strategy in writing.

To sum it up, the information introduced in the Chapter 2 can be seen as a guideline and milestone for content marketing strategy, but not as a template. "The process you put in place to manage your content marketing will be unique. Your story is unique, and so too will be your methods for telling it" (<http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/process/>, retrieved: 10, June, 2015).

3. Research methodology

One of the most challenging tasks for the case brand Adidas nowadays is to generate the right content for the right audience and to distribute it through the channels which current and potential buyers use on the regular basis (Chapter 4.2). Therefore the consumer analysis (Chapter 4.3) is run by the author in order to identify the customers' buying habits; preferences of communication channels; attitude, motivations and challenges for doing sport; and their perception of success. As the brand focuses more on digital content marketing strategy, the analysis also aims at determination of social media presence in particular; the audience's interests and participation in communities related to sport and healthy lifestyle. The study assumes that there is no difference between online and offline customers in demographic characteristics, content marketing funnel, and decision making process. Gathered information is used for building buyer persona profile, which represents the case brand's target audience, and for creation of the content marketing funnel (Chapter 5).

Before deciding on data collection method for the consumer analysis, the demographic characteristics of the adidas target segment were identified. In order to determine the similarity between general internet population and visitors of the official website of the brand, www.adidas.com was examined by Alexa.com, the Internet platform which offers a complete web analytics toolkit for improving online business activities. Based on the voluntary demographics information provided by the internet users globally, Alexa represents the data for the last 12 months which is updated every month. Thus, the time frame used in the research is from July, 2014, to July, 2015.

The study is limited with the possibility of the researcher to interview a group of the adidas frontline employees and to analyze current and potential adidas customers globally. Therefore, based on the results from data gathered by Alexa internet platform, the sample for this study was identified as the European Universities' English-speaking male and female students, particularly students of the High School of Economics (Prague, Czech Republic), the University of Applied Sciences (Mainz, Germany), the IAE Lyon School of Management (Lyon, France), and International University in Geneva (Geneva, Switzerland), aged from 18 to 35. The geographical characteristics of sample are seen relevant, because of the strategic initiative of Adidas to enlarge and enrich the brand in Western and Central Europe where it is losing the market share in comparison with its main competitor Nike that experienced an 18% revenue growth in the fourth quarter of 2014 on that markets (Trefis Team, 2014).

The research methodology used for this part of the paper is survey which can be defined as completely quantitative or quantitative with qualitative elements research project (Quinlan, 2011). Therefore questionnaire was determined as the most appropriate data collection method under the described framework. The chosen approach is objective, because it eliminates influence of the researcher on the respondents' behavior, attitude, and consequently their answers. Moreover it can be easily distributed among geographically scattered population sample. Besides, there is a wide variety of platforms which enable to design and then analyze the study properly.

In the case of adidas, free online software package Qualtrics facilitated the questionnaire development. While exploiting electronic survey, it was assumed that the target segment has access to the internet technologies and has required skills to complete the online questionnaire. In order to collect quantitative data closed-ended questions were used which provided the participants with only limited number of options to choose from. The main advantage is simplicity of coding the collected information for further analysis however it eliminates the possibility to receive spontaneous and unexpected answers. Thus, to gather unprompted qualitative data open questions were implemented. In spite of the fact that it is usually difficult to interpret the answers, collected qualitative information was essential for creating the buyer persona profile for Adidas. With the help of useful Qualtrics' tools, different design and types of questions were created, especially multiline text entry for open questions; multiple choice questions with the possibility of single as well as multiple answers; "drag and drop" questions for ranking the response options; "draggable sliders" for determination of percentage spend on the offered items; "drag and drop" grouping of options; and drill down question type was used for examination of basic demographics.

The questionnaire (Attachment 1, Appendix) started with a gratitude for participation, a small description of the main aim, the average duration, and request to give honest and proper answers: *"Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey. It is aimed at measuring the level of your interaction with content marketing of a sport brand, identifying your interests and motivations for doing sport. It will take only 5 minutes of your time. We would like to learn more about you and your experience. Please, answer openly and truly"*. It consisted of one scroll-down page and 18 questions. Due to the logic of this questionnaire, there were a number of questions that the respondents had to ignore under the special conditions. It was adopted for smartphones and tablets, so that the respondents could accomplish it wherever

they were with the help of wide variety of electronic devices. Link for the questionnaire was distributed through emails and student communities in social media.

To describe collected responses descriptive statistics is be applied by measuring the mean, variance, and percentages. To represent conclusions which extend beyond the gathered data inferential statistics is used by evaluation of correlation between parameters.

In addition to consumer analysis, an interview with an Adidas manager was arranged. The author created and sent the questions (Attachment 2, Appendix) to the Adidas manager per email in the form of Microsoft Office document. Then the answers were filled in by the Adidas employee and forwarded to the author's email address. It was agreed that responses will be kept anonymous.

As Adidas is committed to global digital content marketing strategy which serves global customer, the performance of adidas.com as one of the main branded information sources for the customers is analyzed. "Benchmarking is a key element on the path to success" (Garner, 2012, p.331), hence the adidas official website is compared to the brand's main competitor Nike. The analysis was set up with the help of Alexa.com web analytics toolkit.

Then to identify relevant problem-solving solutions Adidas's potential and current customers are searching on the Internet, a keyword research will be applied. Alexa.com web analytics platform defines keywords as phrases that drive traffic to a website from search engines (www.alexa.com, retrieved: 11, July, 2015). They are seen as "connections to people, and knowing the current language through analytics helps you reach them" (Garner, 2012, p.334). In order to see whether adidas is discussed on the web, branded keywords will be examined with the help of Alexa.com. After determining keyword phrases, it is necessary to hold a content and link footprint audit which is essential for identification of optimization opportunities and development of recommendations for new content creation (Odden, 2012). In addition, assessment of engagement and distribution of content through social media channels is required. In order to check what type of branded keywords related content is promoted through such social media channels as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, and Pinterest, which topics customers find the most engaging, and where they find the information they are interested in, a professional version of BuzzSumo web platform will be exploited. The time frame is equal to six months, specifically from January, 2015 to July, 2015.

Due to the growing popularity of social media channels and its importance for business activities, it is necessary to run a social SEO audit of adidas and Nike which is defined as an assessment of the brand's presence on social networks, the level of engagement, and distribution of content through these communication channels (Odden, 2012). Based on the information gathered from adidas manager, *"the company uses Net Promoter score (NPS) to evaluate the growing number of advocates for our brand across each market of the globe"*. NPS measures the probability of the brand being recommended. However, satisfaction rate and liking are seen as more appropriate and representative metrics for evaluation of customers' loyalty and business growth. (Schneider et. al., 2008) Thus, such Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as number of fans, comments, likes, and shares are examined under the social SEO audit of the brands' Facebook communities and YouTube channels.

4. Analysis of the existing content marketing strategy: the case of Adidas

4.1. Adidas Group. Company profile

4.1.1. Historical overview

“We started in a wash room and conquered the world. And in-between, we have scored big and also, sometimes, struggled to reach our goals. We have done our best for the best. We have improved and grown. Looking ahead to the future, always remembering where we came from. This is our story.” (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/history/>, retrieved: 16, June, 2015). After the World War I, in 1920 Adi Dassler and his sisters started a small family shoe business at the mother’s wash room. Their first products were slippers and orthopedic shoes for disabled athletes. Decommissioned military uniforms and old tires served as the materials. (http://cobrands.hoovers.com/company/adidas_AG/stjyti-1-1njhvk.html, retrieved 16, June, 2015) When in 1924 older brother of Adi Dassler, Rudolf Dassler, joined the business they registered “Gebrüder Dassler Schuhfabrik” (“The brothers Dassler Shoe Factory”) in Herzogenaurach in the southern German state of Bayern with the mission to produce the best equipment for athletes. (Ugesh, 2013) In order to improve quality and meet the customers’ needs, Adi Dassler visited athletes personally on regular basis for collecting the feedback. (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/history/>, retrieved: 16, June, 2015)

Adidas’s tradition of conducting marketing campaigns in cooperation with sportsmen has started at the Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928, when Lina Radke won a Gold wearing Dassler’s shoes which can be seen as the first remarkable success of this marketing effort. However, a breakthrough moment in Adidas’s history plays Jesse Owens, an American sprinter, who won four Golden medals and established five world records in Dassler’s sport shoes at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Due to his achievements the Factory’s sales exceeded 400, 000 Deutsch Marks that year. (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/history/>, retrieved: 16, June, 2015)

In 1947 brothers split the business due to the disagreements the reasons for which they did not explained publicly. (Ugesh, 2013) On 18, August, 1949 Adi Dassler registered the “Adi Dassler adidas Sportschuhfabrik” with today worldwide known three stripes logo that was created by adding one stripe to the brothers’ brand logo. (<http://www.adidas->

group.com/en/group/history/, retrieved: 16, June, 2015) Rudolf Dassler in turn set up a company called “Puma” and built new factory on the opposite bank of the River Aurach. Since then brothers didn’t speak to each other, Puma became one a competitor of Adidas, and their employees’ children went to different schools. (http://cobrand.hoovers.com/company/adidas_AG/stjyti-1-1njhxxk.html, retrieved 16, June, 2015)

Adidas continued promoting the products with the help of athletes and in 1954 German football team for the first time won a World Cup in the Adidas soccer boots. The company became an International sport market leader with a wide variety of products from sport shoes to sport bags, training suits, and soccer balls. (Rothacher, 2004) In 1972 at the opening of the Olympic Games in Munich the company presented its new logo “Trefoil” which today devoted to Adidas Originals. (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/history/>, retrieved: 16, June, 2015) The height of its success was seen when 82.8% of medalists were wearing Adidas at the Montreal Olympic Games in 1976. (Rothacher, 2004)

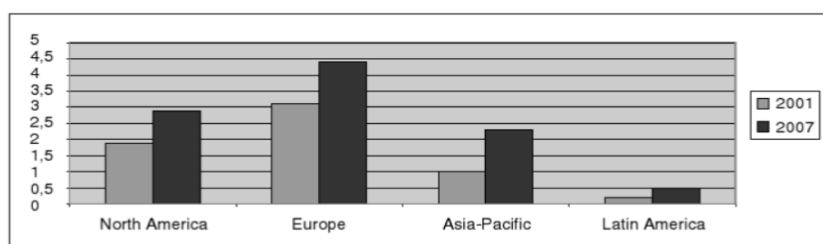
However, when Adidas started its expansion to the USA during the period from 1970s to early 1980s, the company had underestimated its competitors who aggressively followed a rapidly growing trend for healthy lifestyle and exploited the benefits from a boom on the running shoe market. Adidas was skeptical about the duration of this tendency and focused on other product lines. At that time a small American company Nike concentrated its efforts on producing innovative wide line of running shoes and contributed to the promotion of the healthy lifestyle in the USA. (Rothacher, 2004) This was a turning point in the history of Adidas when Nike has started gaining the lead. In addition, death of Adi Dassler in 1978 weakened Adidas which lost the charismatic inspirational leader. (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/history/>, retrieved: 16, June, 2015)

In 1989 Dassler family excited the company and sold Adidas to a French politician and businessman Bernard Tapie. (http://cobrand.hoovers.com/company/adidas_AG/stjyti-1-1njhxxk.html, retrieved 16, June, 2015) Due to poor leadership performance and a number of insufficient strategic decisions, in 1992 the company achieved its record loss and was close to bankruptcy. (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/history/>, retrieved: 16, June, 2015) In 1993 Robert Louis-Dreyfus, who earned his fortune by saving troubled companies with the help of a keen business sense, was hired by adidas. (Martin, 2009) Emulating the Nike’s example, Dreyfus moved production from Germany to low cost Asian countries and cut the

payroll by two-thirds. He focused on innovation and R&D, highly invested in marketing, and reorganized the company's international supply chain. (Christensen, 2009) In addition Dreyfus diversified the portfolio of Adidas. In order to get advantage of the growing trend for playing golf and to enter the market of outdoor sports, the company took over Salomon Group and became the "Adidas-Salomon AG" in 1997.

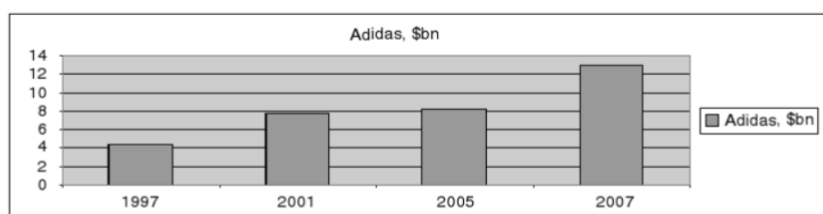
(http://cobrands.hoovers.com/company/adidas_AG/stjyti-1-1njhxx.html, retrieved 16, June, 2015) After Dreyfus's retirement in 2001 Herbert Hainer became the CEO of "Adidas-Salomon AG". As an innovative and creative leader he encouraged the sports-inspired streetwear through strategic partnerships with designers Stella McCartney and Yohji Yamamoto. Besides, Adidas introduced new brands Y-3 and Porche Design Sport in 2003 and 2007 respectively. (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/history/>, retrieved: 16, June, 2015) Although all Salomon brands except Taylor Made were sold to Amer Sports in 2005, the next year renamed company "Adidas AG" acquired Reebok thereby established strong competitive position in the USA, Europe, and Asia (Figure 4). While Adidas aimed at team sports, especially football, Reebok promoted integration of sport and lifestyle with a strong focus on women and American sports. Consequently, in 2007 company's revenues were approximately 13 billion dollars (Figure 5) where 20% devoted to Reebok's sales and 10% to Taylor Made's sales. (Christensen, 2009)

Figure 4: Adidas's regional markets, \$bn 2001 and 2007.



Source: Christensen, 2009.

Figure 5: The Adidas Group's revenues in \$bn 1997 – 2007.



Source: Christensen, 2009.

4.1.2. Adidas Group business strategy

Adidas Group headquarters in Herzogenaurach, Germany and is led by CEO Herbert Heiner. Company yields more than 660 million product units yearly with the help of 53,731 employees in more than 160 countries. In 2014 Adidas Group generated sales of €14,534 billion. (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/profile/>, retrieved: 28, June, 2015)

Rapidly changing consumer behaviour forced Adidas Group to move from vertically integrated brand to a multi-brand strategy in 2009 (Ugesh, 2013). In 2010 the company introduced global brands' "Route 2015" – the business plan with duration of five years. The main goals of this strategic approach are:

- to grow the business to 45-50% to €17 billion in 2015 compared to the annual results in 2010;
- to surpass market growth;
- to persist in growing its bottom line faster than its top line;
- to excel the main competitors in sporting goods;
- to achieve compounded annual earnings growth rate of 15%;
- to attain a steady operating margin of 11% by 2015 the latest. (Adidas Group, Adidas Group presents 2015 strategic business plan , 2010)

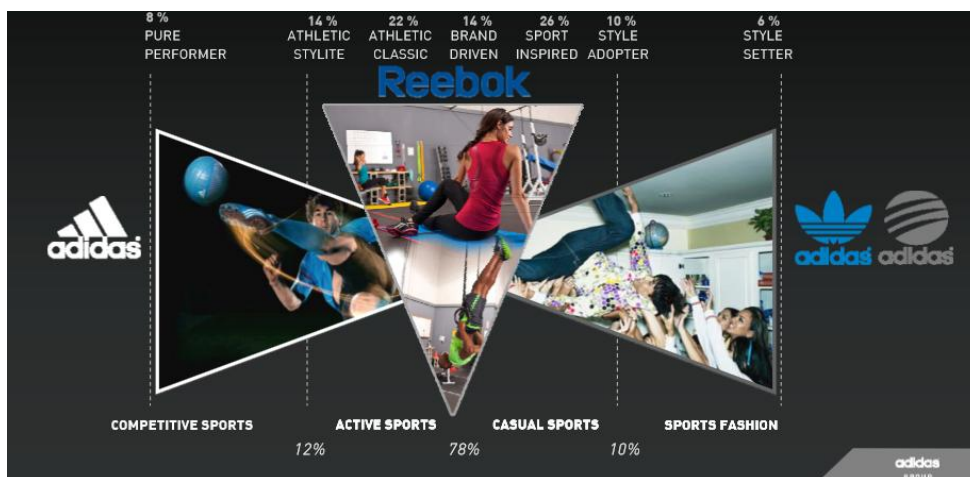
Growing modern trend of communication digitalization enables customers to be better aware of product and service offers, and consequently changes their shopping behavior. They enrich and enlarge their online presence, and can buy whatever they want regardless time and geographical distance. These stipulate Adidas Group for implementing omni-channel sales approach which is characterized with global harmonization of product offer and communication, and availability of service across all sales channels, including wholesale, retail, and e-commerce, and buyer touch points (Adidas Group, Make a difference. Adidas Group annual report, 2014). *"Our consumers clearly want to have a choice. Whether it is the athlete looking for the best possible equipment or the lifestyle consumers searching for the next fashion trend. We are inspired to develop and create products, experiences, and services that engage consumers in long-lasting relationships with our brand"*, - answered Florian Zimmermann to the author's question concerning company's new strategic approach. (6, July, 2015)

Adidas Group's portfolio is highly diversified. It consists of three main brands: Adidas, Reebok, and TaylorMade that are driven by sport and innovation. They are tied by shared values such as performance, passion, integrity, and diversity. (Adidas Group, 2014)

Adidas brand performs as three sub brands: Adidas Sport Performance that aims at improving athletes' performance in football, basketball, running, training, and outdoor; Adidas Originals and Sport & Style that promotes cult fashionable street sportswear; and Five Ten, the "Brand of the Brave", which offers footwear for people doing extreme sports. Adidas brand and its sub brands will be discussed in more details in Chapter 4.2. Next brand in the portfolio is Reebok. Having American roots and history, it promotes fitness and stimulates people to be fit for life. Reebok-CCM Hockey is the leading brand in ice hockey. It produces high-quality equipment and apparel for hockey lovers and sportsmen. The third Adidas Group's brand is TaylorMade – number one in golf industry. It consists of four following sub brands: TaylorMade which is seen as a leader in development and sales of metalwoods and driver category goods; Adidas Golf that aims at producing high-quality golf shoes and clothes; Adams Golf that offers golf equipment for players with different skill levels; Ashworth that is well-known veritable golf apparel and footwear brand. (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/profile/>, retrieved: 28, June, 2015)

In spite of the fact that before acquisition Reebok was one of the main competitors of Adidas, the brands are mutually complementary in the company's portfolio (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Global brands architecture and differentiation.



Source: adidas Group, Global Brands Route 2015, 2010.

Each brand expresses its definite identity and unique positioning through different products and years of experience in sport industry. Both of them carry rich inheritance, creativity, and innovation in design and technologies, reputation of valued and trusted brands. Adidas and Reebok target competitive, active, and casual sports as well as sport fashion segments. The broad coverage of market is the Adidas Group's competitive advantage that enables to reach customers from different prospective. (Figure 6)

Trying to achieve strategic goals under "Route 2015", each brand in the portfolio promotes its special message towards potential and current buyers. However, all brands are connected and inspired by the main Group's mission:

*"The Adidas Group strives to be the global leader in the sporting industry with brands built upon a passion for sports and a sporting lifecycle. We are committed to continuously strengthening our brands and products to improve our competitive position. **We are innovation and design leaders** who seek to help athletes of all skill levels achieve peak performance with every product we bring to the market. **We are consumer focused** and therefore we continuously improve the quality, look, feel, and image of our products and our organizational structures to match and exceed consumer expectations and to provide them with the highest value. **We are a global organization** that is socially and environmentally responsible, that embraces creativity and diversity, and is financially rewarding for our employees and shareholders. **We are dedicated** to consistently delivering outstanding financial results".* (<http://careers.adidas-group.com/mission-and-values.aspx>, retrieved 29, June, 2015)

The mission statement is seen as carefully thought up and consistent message. It introduced the main strategic goal of the Group related to leadership in the sporting industry. Besides, the target audience is clearly defined, in particular professional sportsmen and people who enjoy doing sport of all skill levels. The company introduces itself as an expert in sport who is able to help athletes to achieve their aims through innovations in product design and technologies. Moreover the Adidas Group possesses itself as a good corporate citizen who aims at creating as much value as possible for the customers and shareholders. This mission is visible and available for all company's employees around the globe on the career page of the Adidas Group, so that workers' efforts are concentrated on the particular audience and contribute to the harmonized and unified global approach. The short version of the statement is more widely spread through company's official website, corporate blog, press releases, annual

reports, and the CEO's speech: *"the Adidas Group strives to be the global leader in the sporting industry with brands built upon a passion for sports and a sporting lifecycle."*

4.2. Adidas content marketing goals and mission statement

Adidas is one of the core global brands in the portfolio. As it was discussed in the Chapter 4.1.1 of the master thesis, Adidas is an original German brand with rich heritage. The brand defines its mission as following: *"to be the leading sports brand in the world"* (<http://careers.adidas-group.com/adidas/mission-and-values.aspx>, retrieved: 30, June, 2015). In spite of the fact that Adidas's message is too broad it can be justified with an existence of clearly stated Adidas Group's mission (Chapter 4.1.2). However, the brand's statement contradicts with a recognized term of mission which is usually defined as an "invisible hand" of the organization and it reflects company's major goals, values, and scope of market competition including target segment, products or services to be offered (Kotler, 1997). Adidas's mission describes rather where the brand wants to be than what it stands for. Therefore it is better statement for a vision, a broad long-term aspiration for future (Cole, 2005), with a focus on market dominance.

Adidas serves consumer needs with the help of three sub brands. The first is Adidas Sport Performance that delivers innovations to competitive sporting industry in three major categories: football, basketball, and running. Besides, the sub brand is trying to increase its presence in other different sports (for instance, tennis, baseball, volleyball, and etc.) in order to maintain reputation of a multi-sport expert. The target audience varies from sport lovers to professional sportsmen of all skill levels. The primary goal of Adidas Sport Performance is based on Adi Dassler's perception of the brand and it is relevant also today: *"to make athletes better, with innovation at the heart of all Adidas Sport Performance products"* (Adidas Group, Make a difference. adidas Group annual report, 2014, p. 55). The second sub brand is Adidas Originals which is seen as a trendsetter in sports lifestyle fashion and streetwear. It embodies the brand heritage which reflects in the famous Trefoil logo, and credibility. Originals' customers are inspired by stories and creative product design. Moreover they are following modern fashion trends and permanently looking for ways of emphasizing their individuality. Therefore Adidas Originals is defined as a dynamic brand which keeps up to date and actively listens to consumers to serve them with the best products such as Stan Smith, Samba, Superstar, and ZX. (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/profile/#/adidas-goes-all-in-to-make-you-a-better-athlete/>, retrieved: 30, June, 2015) Adidas Sport & Style,

which was a separate division, became a part of Originals sub brand in 2014. It enables the brand to cover broader audience by means of targeting teenagers with Adidas NEO, Y-3, and Porsche Design Sport labels. (Adidas Group, Make a difference. Adidas Group annual report 2014, 2014) Third sub brand is Five Ten - the former outdoor sports niche player which was acquired by Adidas in 2011 in order to reach fans and professionals in rock climbing, kayaking, and other outdoor activities. It designs and produces high-friction footwear for “the brave”. (Thomas, 2012) Described structure of the Adidas brand contributes to growth of the market share, enables the brand to reach customers in wide range of sport categories and allocate the risks.

The key strategic objectives of Adidas under the “Route 2015” are:

1. to get sales and market share in the main global sport categories such as football, basketball, and running by means of Adidas Sport Performance sub brand;
2. to enlarge adidas in fast fashion industry by means of the Adidas NEO label;
3. to keep Adidas Originals’ urge to promote fashion consumer lifestyle. (Adidas Group, Annual report, 2013)

In order to accomplish strategic goals Adidas had started looking for more innovative and engaging way of marketing. As Tom Ramsden, Senior Global Director of Adidas Football, noticed in the YouTube video series “Go Behind the Scenes With Adidas”, that exploiting traditional marketing, when you upload a picture or a video with whatever the content is and hope that it will somehow work, is not effective model of targeting modern buyers. Today the audience is online 24/7. Customers wake up and have their mobile phones, tablets, or laptops near them. So the first thing they do every morning is checking out “what is the latest and greatest”. (YouTube Advertisers, Go Behind the Scenes with Adidas, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjXu-0zptSo&list=PL9Xlh2Jq9l7VnCYfX00i4pPrLm_thrN6Z, retrieved: 3, July, 2015) Therefore one of the most challenging tasks for Adidas nowadays is to create relevant content which the customers need and look for, and to distribute these pieces of information through appropriate channels.

To keep communication with consumers up to date, Adidas focuses on digital content marketing activities. Aiming at striking up deeper relationships with the target customers, Adidas generates and promotes content for the sport enthusiasts and professional sportsmen of all skill levels on the right platforms. Thus the key initiative of Adidas’ content marketing

strategy is “*to harness the emotion of sport and the benefits of a sporting lifestyle across all communication channels*” (Adidas Group, Annual report 2013, 2013, p. 84). The tenet is consistent with Adidas Group’s overall business goals because offering new opportunities for customers in real time will enable the company to outperform competitors by increasing market share, which in turns will lead to the growth of business and the earnings. Moreover interaction with the audience through different communication channels will provide the better understanding of customers’ insights, will stimulate active listening and learning, and will give measurable outcomes which can be used for improving the long-term business strategy of Adidas and its sub brands.

Adidas brings to life innovative marketing approaches on the regular basis with simple and inspiring messages for promotion of new product lines. In 2014 the brand launched a campaign called “All in or Nothing” which was supported by the following powerful message: “*We give everything we’ve got, then go back for more. No doubts, no holding back, no giving in. From the court to the catwalk, the stadium to the street, whatever the game, we play the same way. Heart over head. Inclusion over ego. United by passion, we go all in*” (<http://www.adidas-group.com/en/brands/adidas/>, retrieved: 3, July, 2015). According to Fabio Costa, creative director of TBWA/Chiat/Day advertising agency that participated in the launch of the campaign, Adidas “looked inside the human truth”. He claimed that victory or defeat is of no importance if a person does his or her best and goes nap to achieve the goal, because “this is the life worth living, this is the life with no regrets”. (YouTube Advertisers, Go Behind the Scenes with adidas, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjXu-0zptSo&list=PL9Xlh2Jq9l7VnCYfX00i4pPrLm_thrN6Z, retrieved: 3, July, 2015) The message can be considered as a content marketing mission statement. The brand introduces its unique attitude to sport and life, and this is what makes it being special. In addition, according to the definition of content marketing mission statement (Chapter 2.1) the message should contain the consumers’ pain points and methods which the brand will use to solve their problems. Adidas has chosen not obvious and structured way to deliver this issue. The brand is trying to lead the audience by their own example, which on the one hand is seen as innovative approach. Moreover it supports the Adidas’s strategic goal “*to make athletes better*” through expressing the understanding of sporting obstacles and motivation to overcome them. On the other hand it can be criticized for the lack of interactive and engaging factor, because Adidas gives nothing but inspiration to the audience. From a content

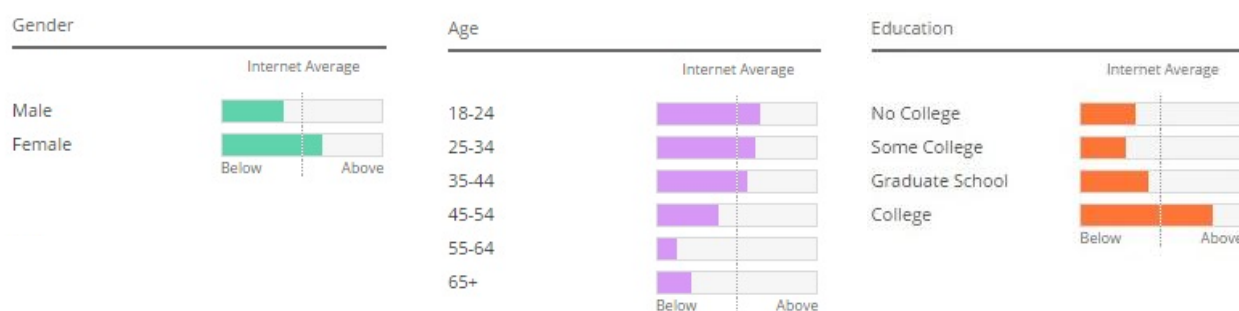
marketing prospective, the brand has to emphasize the content tools with the help of which it is going to solve the problems of its customers.

The year 2014 was the most eventful for the Adidas under the “Route 2015”. The calendar of important events in sport was created including National Basketball Association (NBA) Game Europe, London, UK, which was sponsored by Adidas; Men’s European Handball Federation (EHF) Europe 2014, Denmark, which was organized in partnership with the brand; and the most important was 2014 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup in Brazil where Adidas was Official partner (Adidas Group, Annual report, 2013, p.67). Marketing through strategic partnership is essential for Adidas as well as for Reebok to establish an extensive and respectful position in the industry.

4.3. Consumer analysis for development of buyer persona

The results of demographical analysis established on Alexa.com web analytics platform (Figure 7) discovered that 18-24 year old and 25-34 year old visitors are over-represented at the www.adidas.com in relation to the general internet population. In addition male users are under-represented at this website, whereas female users are over-represented relative to the overall internet population. Moreover people who went to college are more likely to visit the brand’s website than visitors with lower education level.

Figure 7: Demographics of adidas.com users related to the Internet average.



Source: Alexa.com.

The questionnaire (Attachment 1, Appendix) was answered by 120 people among them 58 male, 58 female, and 4 students who did not select the gender. 75% of participants are from 21 to 25 years old, 18% are from 26 to 30 years old, 5% corresponds to the age group from 16 to 20, and 2% are in the age group from 31 to 35. The majority of students work in spheres related to economics, business, finance, marketing, and sales. 10% of respondents could not

describe their job category with the offered options, so they selected “Other”, and 25% of respondents are not employed. (Table 1)

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample.

N=120		
Gender	Female	58
	Male	58
	Not specified	4
Age group	16 – 20	5%
	21 – 25	75%
	26 – 30	18%
	31 – 35	2%
Employment	Employed	75%
	Not Employed	25%

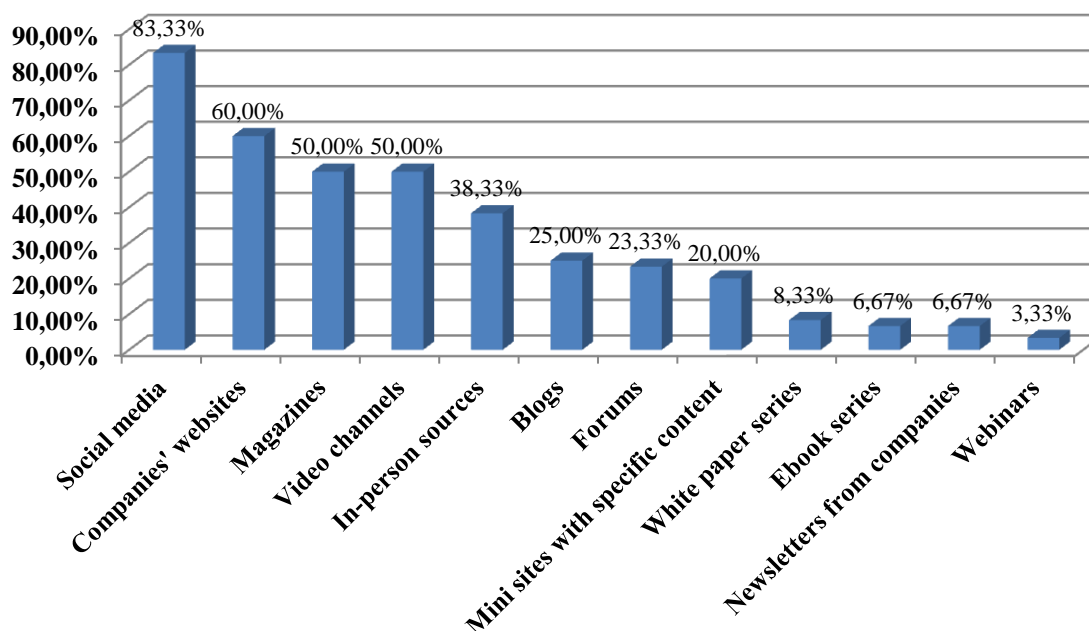
Source: author, N=120.

First of all the participants were asked to choose maximum 4 information sources which they use more often. The answer options included the content marketing distribution channels which were described in Chapter 1.2. The exception was made for road show and executive roundtable that are more suitable for B2B content marketing strategy. They were replaced with In-person information source. As it is represented on Figure 8, social media is the most popular information source among students. In addition, 60% of participants prefer companies’ websites, and 50% use video channels and magazines. Female students do not appeal to Webinars for information; however they are more likely to use ebook series than male respondents.

Then participants were asked to select a suitable percentage of time a day they usually spend on the social media channels. The day length 24 hours was defined as 100% for each social network. Offered options were created according to the following answer of the adidas manager to the interview question: *“adidas is also looking at ways to partner with consumers to co-create content that could be published both on our brand social media channels and the consumers social media pages themselves. Globally adidas uses Instagram, Youtube, Facebook and Twitter as our main distribution channels.”* Also the author added LinkedIn, Google+, and Pinterest in order to cover all channels where adidas is present. On average approximately 25% of time a day the majority of students spend on Facebook, and 104

respondents devote to YouTube 13.63% of their time. About half of the sample spent 24.41% a day on average on Instagram. (Table 2) Moreover, it was discovered that Russian respondents do not use LinkedIn and Pinterest as they are not widely spread in their home country.

Figure 8: Answers to the question: “Please, choose maximum 4 information sources that you use more often”.



Source: author, N=120.

Table 2: Average percentage of time a day particular number of respondents spend on the offered social media channels.

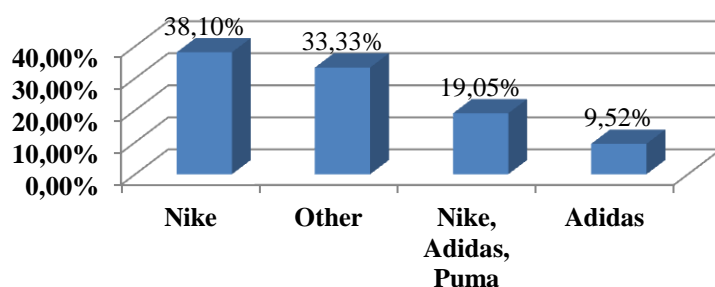
#	Answer	Average Value	Number of responses
1	FACEBOOK	24.83	108
2	TWITTER	26.42	38
3	INSTAGRAM	24.41	68
4	YOUTUBE	13.63	104
5	LINKEDIN	11.17	58
6	PINTEREST	11.25	24
7	GOOGLE +	15.33	32

Source: author, N=120.

With the help of the third question it was discovered that 35% of students follow social media publics of different sport brands. Then to clarify their answers these participants were asked to entry the name of the brand, the channel, and the public. 65% of students who answered “No”

to the third question could skip this one. After analysis of the raw data, the responses were grouped into four categories: Nike; Adidas; Nike, Adidas, and Puma; Other (Figure 9). 38.1% of participants mentioned Nike's social media publics especially on Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, and Facebook. 9.52% of students wrote that they follow adidas on Facebook. If a respondent inserted Adidas along with its main competitors, particularly Nike and Puma, the answer fell into the third category. Lastly, 33.33% of participants noticed other social media publics which do not relate to the considered sport brand. However, it is worth mentioning, that the fourth group of students is mostly interested in football, racing, and training. In addition, none of the female respondents mentioned Adidas separately or along with its main competitors while answering this question.

Figure 9: Sport brands which respondents follow on social media channels.



Source: author, N=120.

In order to gain insights concerning customers' decision making process, students were asked to choose one of the following sentences which characterize them more precisely:

1. *I make a final decision fast based on my experience, short information, and individual assumptions.*
2. *I look for the arguments and the evidences in different information sources. And then I make a final decision pretty fast.*
3. *I usually reevaluate information before coming up with a final decision. Thus I require more time than others.*
4. *It is difficult for me to make a final decision. Therefore I usually delegate it to others.*

These response categories reflect the four groups of customers in terms of duration of decision making process respectively that were described in Chapter 2.4 of the master thesis. 38% of participants who have chosen the first sentence belong to "gut feel" group, and 25% of students fall into the second category called "repetition". In addition, 32% of respondents

characterized themselves as doubting decision-makers, and 5% belong to the last “reevaluation” category. Then it was found necessary to determine the content provider that customers trust more when they make a decision about purchase of sport goods. For that purpose, “drag and drop” type of question was used in order to enable respondents to organize offered answer options in the appropriate for them order. The results showed that the first-priority content providers are family and friends which can be proved with a small spread of data from the mean as variance is equal to 0.60 (Table 3). Based on average values from the Table 3, it can be concluded that thought leaders were ranked the second, sportsmen’ expert opinion was the third, and company which sells the sport goods became the fourth-priority content provider. Due to the mean value 4.26 and relatively small variance 1.39 (Table 3), it can be reported that it is unlikely for the participants to rely on the content generated by people outside of the offered response categories.

Table 3: Content providers that customers trust more when they make buying decision.

Statistic	Family and friends	Thought leaders	Sportsmen’ expert opinion	Company which sells the sport goods	Other people
Mean	1.55	2.78	3.10	3.31	4.26
Variance	0.60	1.51	1.01	1.76	1.39
Standard Deviation	0.78	1.23	1.00	1.33	1.18

Source: author, N=120.

After identification of the way Adidas’s potential and current customers make a decision about purchase of sporting goods, it is necessary to determine the stages of their buying cycle. To begin with, students were asked to select whether they have bought any products from the case brand. 82% of people, who answered “Yes” to this question, were invited to choose the steps they took while buying Adidas goods from the range of options. The following response categories were created according to the content marketing funnel which was described in Chapter 2.1 of the master thesis:








- *Search for information about the brand and its products on the internet;*
- *Provide personal information and subscribe for content offered by Adidas;*
- *Search for content provided by Adidas that offers problem-solving solutions;*
- *Evaluate and compare problem-solving solutions provided by Adidas and its competitors (for example, Nike);*
- *Make a decision about the purchase from Adidas based on gathered information;*

- *Share personal experience with others through writing reviews and comments below Adidas's posts on different social media channels;*
- *Maintain loyalty to the brand and/or a particular product;*
- *Generate brand related content in the form of photos, videos, blog posts, and etc., and distribute it among friends.*

Examination of correlation between gender and stages of content marketing funnel showed, that the difference between steps male and female consumers take while shopping for Adidas's goods is not significant. Most of the respondents have difficulties with sharing their personal experience with others and generating brand related content. In addition, the results showed that it is unlikely for approximately half of the students, who are current customers of the case brand, to give personal information and subscribe for Adidas content; search for content provided by Adidas; and being loyal to the brand and/or its products. Also it was discovered that not all respondents, who search for information about the Adidas and its sporting goods as well as problem-solving content generated by the case brand and its competitors, come to a final purchase.

According to the adidas manager, the company believes that *“sport has the power to change lives. Sport is central to every culture and society and is core to an individual's health and happiness. Adidas works every day to inspire and enable people to harness the power of sport in their lives. We also translate our competence in sports into streetwear and fashion because sport is an attitude and a lifestyle”*. Thus to build buyer persona profile for Adidas, it is important to identify customers' habits and attitude to sport. Thus respondents were asked about frequency of doing sport. It was discovered that all students are exercising, and half of the participants do it on the regular basis, particularly 2-3 times a week (Table 4). However, only 5% of students devote every day to sports.

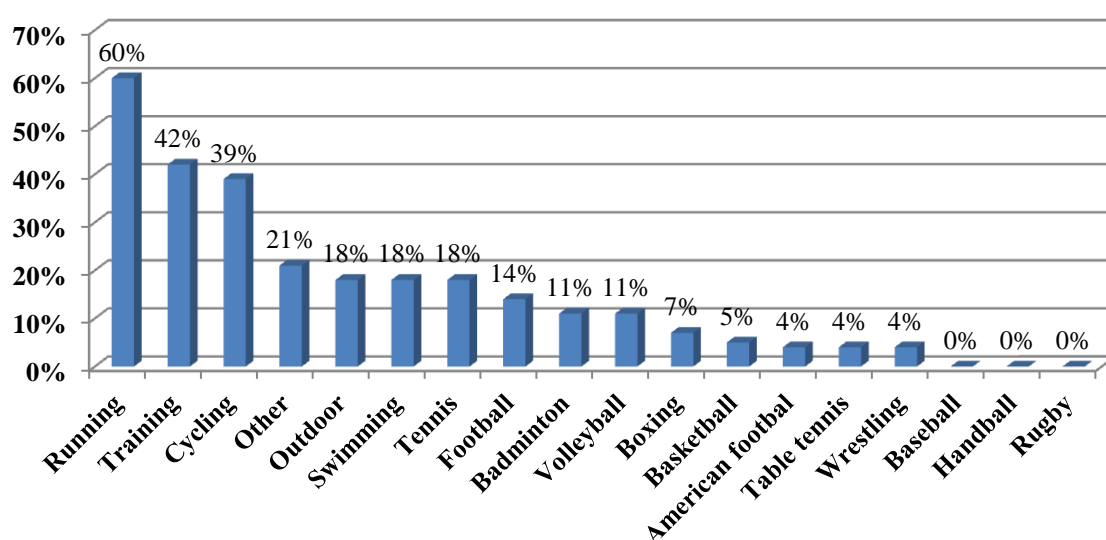
Table 4: Frequency of doing sports.

#	Answer		%
1	Never		0%
2	Less than Once a Month		8%
3	Once a Month		3%
4	2-3 Times a Month		10%
5	Once a Week		23%
6	2-3 Times a Week		50%
7	Daily		5%
	Total		100%

Source: author, N=120.

To determine what kind of sport Adidas's customers are mostly interested in, the respondents were asked about the sports they prefer doing. They had to choose maximum 3 items out of 18 including 17 sporting activities which Adidas covers and the "other" response category. People, who selected option "other", could specify the response while answering to the next open question. It can be seen on the Figure 10 that running, training, and cycling are the most favourite sport activities of the European University's students. Moreover, none of the respondents have chosen baseball, handball, and rugby, which can be explained by the popularity of these sport games mostly in the United States and United Kingdom. 21% of participants did not found their favourite sports on the list, therefore they wrote their own options while responding to the next question, especially yoga, roller-skating, squash, snowboarding, and martial arts.

Figure 10: Respondents' preferences in sports.

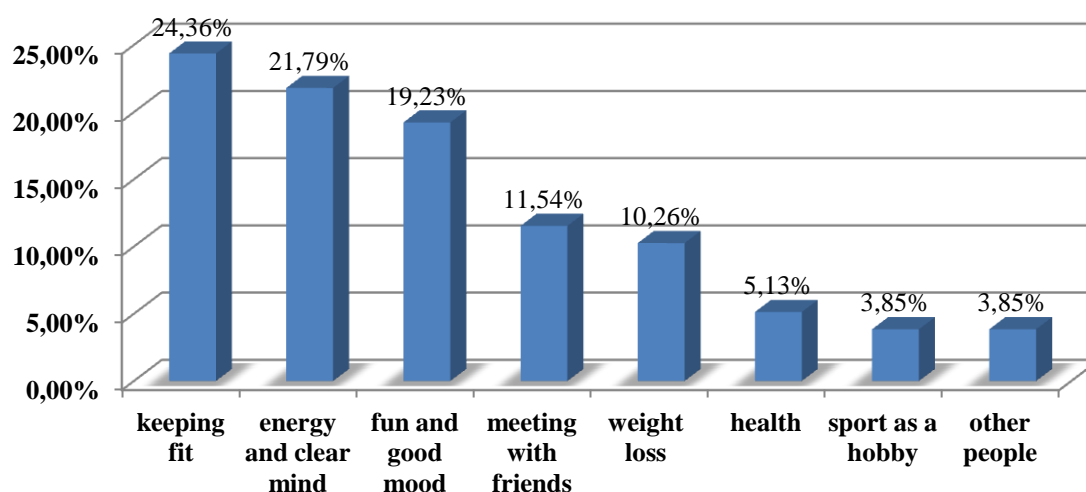


Source: author, N=120.

The final step required for building buyer persona profile for Adidas is identification of customers' motivations for doing sport, challenges they face, and their perception of success. For this purpose respondents were asked three open-ended questions. People, who selected "Never" in the ninth question about frequency of doing sports, could skip questions concerning motivations and challenges. However, as it was previously stated, all participants do exercises. Thus all students answered these open questions. After collection of responses, the keywords for grouping were created. For motivations for doing sports the following main categories were determined: keeping fit, energy and clear mind, fun and good mood, meeting

with friends, weight loss, sport as a hobby, other people (Figure 11). The will to be healthy motivates 24.36% of respondents to exercise. Having fun and exciting the mood as well as keeping fit are also considered as strong incentives by the participants. In addition, 11.54% of students are stimulated by the will to have better body shape, and 10.26% of people clear up their mind from the routine problems and obtain energy for a new achievements. Moreover, 5% responded that sport is their hobby, so that they got used to do it. Less than 4% of students wrote that doing sport is an occasion to meet with friends, and the same number of participants claimed that they are motivated by other people in particular by parents, friends, colleagues, and girls.

Figure 11: Motivations for doing sports.

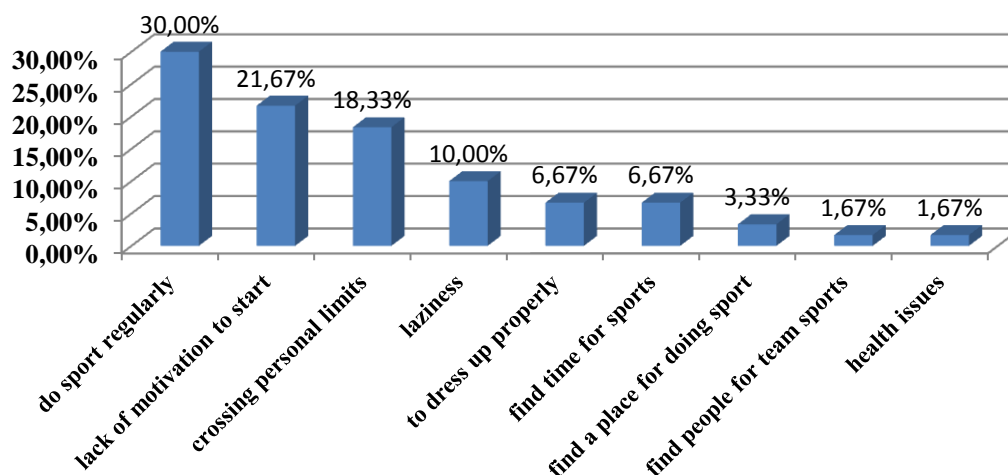


Source: author, N=120.

While analyzing the challenges the respondents usually face in doing sports, answers were summarized into the following categories: do sport regularly, lack of motivation to start, crossing personal limits, laziness, to dress up properly, find time for sports, find place for doing sports, find people for doing team sports, health issues (Figure 12). Most of the participants have difficulties with doing sport regularly, however only 10% have busy schedule and sometimes do not have a chance to find time for doing sports. Lack of motivation to start exercising bothers 21.67% of students, 6.67% struggle from the laziness. In addition, 18.33% of respondents claimed that constant improvement and overcome individual boundaries are the most challenging tasks for them. Some participants have health problems, which often prevent them from doing sports. Also less than 5% of students cannot decide on

the proper place for sporting activities; cannot find a team for playing sport games with a common spirit; and do not know how to dress up for doing sports.

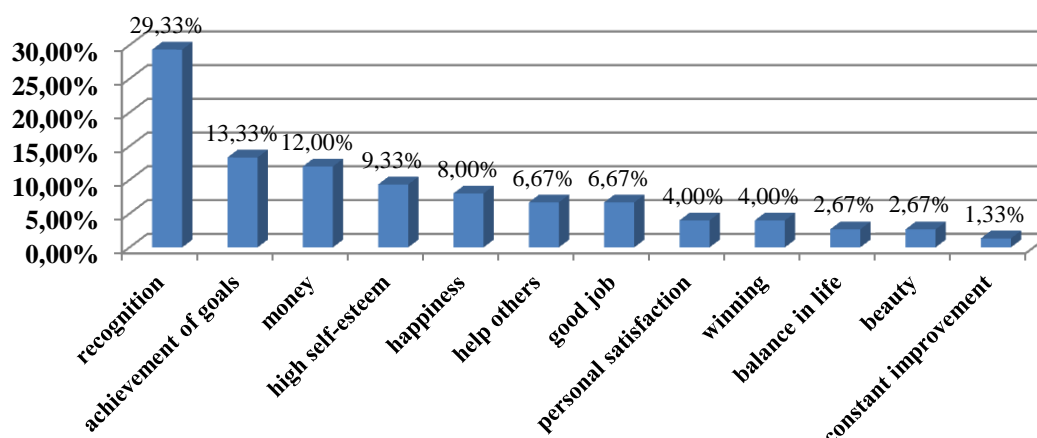
Figure 12: Challenges of doing sports.



Source: author, N=120.

Lastly, the respondents were asked to clarify what success means for them. The majority of students describe it as an achievement of established goals (Figure 13). In addition, 13.33% characterize success as a constant improvement. 12% of participants equalize it with happiness whereas 9.33% of respondents equalize it with winning. Besides, 8% of students feel personal satisfaction at the moment of triumph, and 6.67% perceive success as recognition or money. Other responses represent less than 5% of the sample and were grouped into high self-esteem, help others, good job, beauty, and balance in life categories.

Figure 13: Perception of success.



Source: author, N=120.

4.4. Analysis of Adidas digital content marketing strategy

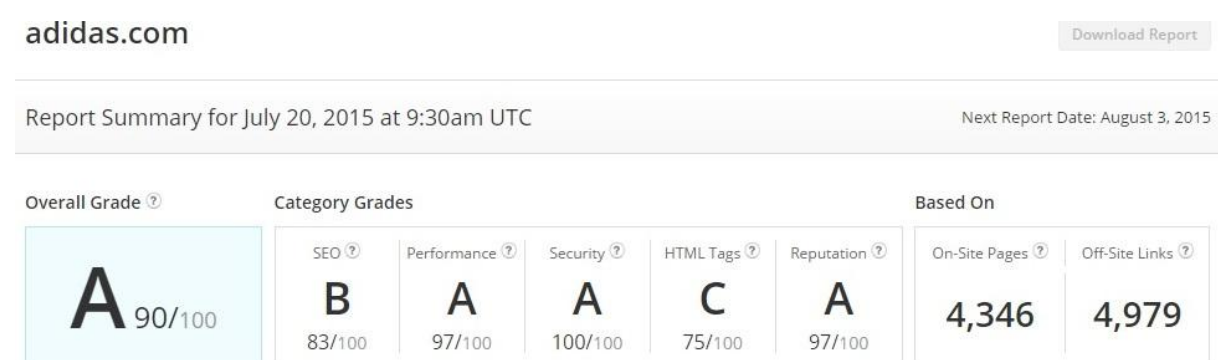
4.4.1. Technical SEO audit and keywords identification

The outcome of the analysis conducted on Alexa.com web analytics platform assigned to adidas.com an overall grade “A”, particularly 90 out of 100 points (Figure 14). This value represents the average of the following five categories:

- SEO which reflects in importance and uniqueness of each page of the website;
- performance expresses the speed of the website;
- security represents the level of customers’ safety while using the website;
- HTML tags grade mirrors whether it is easy to share the content which adidas publishes on the website;
- reputation corresponds to the appropriate amount of links from outside sources.

Figure 14 represents the results of adidas.com overall evaluation based on 4,346 website pages which the Alexa platform analyzed and 4,979 off-site links. Thus, it can be concluded that the website’s performance is relatively fast, safe for the online visitors, and it is easy to find from the outside sources. However, the users have difficulties with sharing the content offered on adidas.com. Also it is worth mentioning that widely spread information concerning Adidas brand and products influenced the SEO grade which is equal to 83 out 100.

Figure 14: Evaluation of adidas.com on Alexa web analytics platform.



Source: Alexa.com.

The Adidas’s official website is on the 3,122 position in the Alexa’s global traffic rank which estimates the site’s popularity by calculating an average number of daily visitors of the adidas.com and the quantity of page views on this site over the past 3 months, in particular from May, 2015 to July, 2015. Nike’s official website is ranked 563 relative to other sites.

Consequently, online users visit nike.com more often than adidas.com, and view their more pages. For instance, in Germany nike.com has on 3% visitors per day more, than adidas.com. The localized website for Germany adidas.de has 85.9% of visitors, which is 81.5% more than nike.com. However, Adidas still has a rank in Germany lower than its competitor.

Immediately before going to adidas.com 28.8% of users visited google.com (Table 5). In addition, 2.5% of users visited nike.com before adidas.com (Table 5) and 2.8% go to the competitor's website after looking through Adidas's official site, which proves the importance of evaluation and comparison of problem-solving solutions for customers before making a purchase from the case brand. Moreover, more prospects visited Facebook and YouTube before looking through Nike's website pages (Table 5). Thus, it can be concluded that Nike exploits social media channels in more engaging way with higher conversion rate than Adidas. In addition, search visibility is important factor of websites' optimization facilitating better user experience and content marketing performance (Odden, 2012). Table 5 shows that nike.com is more visible on different search engines, especially on Google and Yahoo! than adidas.com as they appear in the first five websites users visited immediately before Nike's official website.

Table 5: The sites users visited immediately before adidas.com and nike.com respectively.









adidas.com		nike.com	
1. google.com	28.8%	1. google.com	26.6%
2. shareasale.com	5.7%	2. facebook.com	3.3%
3. amazon.com	2.9%	3. amazon.com	2.4%
4. nike.com	2.5%	4. youtube.com	2.1%
5. facebook.com	2.1%	5. yahoo.com	1.5%

Source: author, based on Alexa.com.

Based on the outcomes of the analysis on Alexa platform the rating of 10 most globally searched keyword phrases was created (Figure 15). The first criterion used for evaluation of the keyword is popularity which is the frequency of search of a particular phrase ranked from 0 to 100, where the higher number is an indicator of higher frequency. The second criterion is competition index which shows the amount of ads displayed on search engines while users type the keyword. The third factor is the percentage of organic search which is directed from a specific keyword phrase to adidas.com. Thus, from Figure 15 it is seen that the most popular keyword with weak advertising competition is the brand name, which leads to 22.38% of

search traffic. Also the fifth and the sixth phrases are variation of the same keyword; therefore the generated search traffic can be summed. In addition, the list represents the most popular Adidas's products, which are the shoes, in particular Adidas superstar, Stan Smith, ZX flux, and Ultra Boost; and the sub brands, especially Adidas Originals and Adidas NEO, among online users. Moreover, the users are interested in adidas logo which generates 1.03% of search traffic for adidas.com.

Figure 15: Organic keywords for adidas.com.

Keyword ?	Popularity ?	Competition ?	% of Search Traffic ?
1. adidas	 60 / 100	 21 / 100	22.38%
2. adidas shoes	 38 / 100	 48 / 100	2.44%
3. adidas originals	 37 / 100	 28 / 100	2.08%
4. adidas superstar	 38 / 100	 67 / 100	1.88%
5. adidas stan smith	 34 / 100	 43 / 100	1.34%
6. stan smith	 38 / 100	 25 / 100	1.24%
7. adidas zx flux	 34 / 100	 49 / 100	1.18%
8. adidas ultra boost	 29 / 100	 100 / 100	1.07%
9. adidas logo	 35 / 100	 10 / 100	1.03%
10. adidas neo	 34 / 100	 21 / 100	0.95%

Source: Alexa.com.

In addition, the results of analysis of retrieval requests of the words “adidas” and “nike” (Table 6) which was established with the help of Google Trends show, that during the twelve-month period, from July, 2014 to July, 2015, Adidas was mostly searched in Netherlands, whereas Nike was mainly popular in Slovakia. Moreover, in Germany Adidas interested users more than its competitor as well as in the United Kingdom.

Table 6: Analysis of retrieval requests “adidas” and “nike” from July, 2014, to July, 2015.

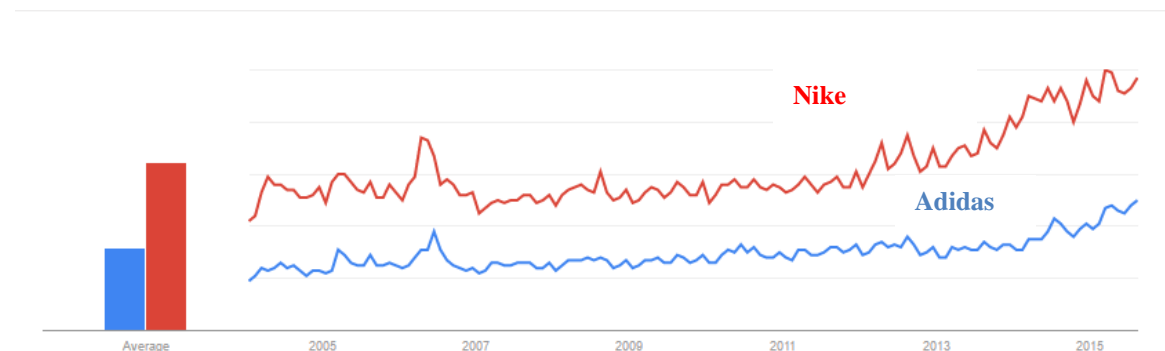
Country	“adidas”	“nike”
Netherlands	100*	71
Germany	93	68
Slovakia	93	100*
United Kingdom	91	73

*100 – maximum score.

Source: author, based on Google Trends.

Examination of the retrieval requests “adidas” and “nike” on Google Trends with wider time frame, especially from 2004 till 2015, shows that the search volume which related to the competitor brand is bigger. The trends represented on the Figure 16 go up after the year 2013. This rapid growth can be explained by active content marketing campaigns which Adidas and Nike launched due to the FIFA World Cup 2014.

Figure 16: Trends for retrieval requests “adidas” and “nike” from 2004 to 2015.



Source: Google Trends.

It can be concluded that Adidas has strengthened its position on the European market. However, the mission to be a leader which has been established by the case brand under the “Route 2015” (Chapter 4.2) will not be accomplished in the target year. Adidas still has to repulse a charge from the main competitor Nike which confidently keeps the market leadership.

4.4.2. Content and link footprint audit

As ZX Flux, superstar, and Stan Smith are different collections of Adidas Originals sub brand, they can be discovered under the common keyword phrase “adidas Originals”. Thus in order to focus more on the brand and sub brands related stories than on the specific products, the keywords (Figure 15) were generalized and only the following were examined on BuzzSumo: “adidas”, “adidas shoes”, “adidas originals”, and “adidas neo”. The time frame chosen for the analysis is one year, in particular from July, 2014 till July, 2015. Examination of the word “adidas” showed that on average the most shared topic related to the brand name is the Adidas sneakers which are made from the ocean garbage and illegally used fishing nets. Besides, the social media users widely distribute content related to soccer and Manchester United football club which numbers approximately 3,700 shares. Moreover, the limited edition of Adidas Marvel’s Avengers shoes is discussed on social media channels and has been shared on average 2,832 times during the last 6 months. The most popular content pieces related to the

keyword “adidas” which are shared on the social media are shown in the Table 7. It is worth mentioning that content was mostly shared on Facebook, less than 10% was distributed by the users on Twitter and Google+. Summarizing the findings, prospects and customers, who search for “adidas”, value the brand for being a good corporate citizen as well as for innovation and creativity. They are always looking for new trends and ways of standing out in the crowd. Moreover, the results prove the outcome of the consumer analysis described in Chapter 4.3 concerning the audience’s interests in football and high activity on Facebook. Also new marketing campaign of Adidas called “Here’s to the Takers” and the commercial are seen as attractive and engaging which the online users want to share with their friends.

Table 7: Top 5 pieces of content for “adidas” keyword from July, 2014 till July, 2015.

Content title	Type of content	Domain Name	Date of publication	Total shares
<i>adidas Climachill campaign</i>	Article	adidas.isobar.com.tw	30, April, 2015	255,041
<i>Adidas releases awesome Limited-edition Marvel’s Avengers Shoes</i>	Article	therealstanlee.com	26, June, 2015	107,487
<i>Adidas create a shoe made almost entirely from ocean garbage</i>	Article	iflscience.com	4, July, 2015	106,299
<i>adidas: Here’s to the Takers</i>	Video	youtube.com	6, April, 2015	92,612
<i>Adidas makes sneakers from ocean trash and illegal fishing nets taken from poachers</i>	Article	boredpanda.com	2, July, 2015	88,192

Source: author, based on BuzzSumo Pro.

The results of analysis of the phrase “adidas shoes” mainly led to the same results as for the keyword “adidas”. Among five most shared content pieces are the articles concerning Adidas Limited-Edition Marvel’s Avengers Shoes as well as sneakers made from the ocean trash. For example, an article on upworthy.com called “More companies like this, please: Adidas is using plastic debris from the ocean to make shoes” received 51,646 shares in total. The most shared domain through social networks is bleacherreport.com which is a digital space for content related to the specific teams, team sports, and events. Approximately 22,000 shares through social media channels are devoted to www.xxlmag.com which is a digital magazine about hip-hop and rap music and celebrities, sporting events, and streetwear fashion. Thus, it can be concluded that the audience is also attracted by team sports related content; hip-hop

and rap music style, for instance topics connected to American rap performer Kanye West and Adidas numbers 246 shares on social media; and streetwear trends.

Then the Internet users who search for the keyword phrase “adidas Originals” prefer video type of content, which they share with their friends mainly on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. For instance, YouTube videos “Adidas Originals x Kanye West| YEEZY Season 1” and “adidas Originals| Supercolor with Pharrell Williams” were distributed by online users through social media channels 39,427 and 23,325 times respectively. Among the mostly shared domains on all networks there are 291,900 times shared website [sneakerfreaker.com](#) which is a forum, store guide, shop, and a digital magazine about trending sporting shoes’ brand, for instance Adidas, Reebok, Nike; a digital magazine specialized in fashion, footwear, music, lifestyle, and art & design topics called [highsnobiety.com](#) with 221,046 total shares; [hypebeast.com](#) online store and a digital magazine about fashion, sport, food, travel, art & design, and entertainment which was shared 201,396 times; and [youtube.com](#) with total networks shares equal to 168,222. The most popular topics corresponded to adidas Originals are related to the new sub brand’s collections, especially Yeezy boost and Adidas Wings by Jeremy Scott. Examination of the keyword phrase “adidas Originals” proves the audience’s preference in gaining information through the magazines (Chapter 4.3) and clarifies the most interesting topic categories, for instance fashion, music, art & design, and etc. Moreover, the same music preferences of the prospects and leads as in the analysis of “adidas shoes” are emphasized which can be interpreted as the right celebrity endorsement tactics exploited by the Adidas brand.

Analysis of the phrase “adidas neo” resulted in the high engagement of the audience with the video content on YouTube, which was shared 108,245 times through different social media channels, in particular 106,273 times through Facebook and the rest is devoted to Twitter and Google+. The most popular piece of content is a YouTube video called “Best of Justin Bieber & Adidas NEO” with 105,088 total shares. Also the online users who search for “adidas neo” are interested in the articles about the label’s new collection and Selena Gomez, a pop singer, the face of the NEO label which was published on [mtv.com](#), [teenvogue.com](#), [trendybynicky.com](#), and [juksy.com](#). The length of the content they are able to digest and engage with is from 0 to 1000 words. Therefore it can be concluded that the potential and current customers of Adidas NEO are teenagers, who prefer listening to the pop music and watching videos on YouTube more than reading digital magazines. They are always searching

for new trendy apparel and footwear, and find their famous celebrities trustful and reliable source of information.

4.4.3. Social SEO audit

Both, Adidas and Nike, have their official pages on Facebook. They cover information which the brands are distributing through other social media publics as well as the unique content. Adidas profile provides insights into the brand specifically it has a short description of the history and information concerning privacy policy, terms and conditions. However, Adidas missed the link to the company's official website, whereas Nike introduced nike.com as well as the key message "Just do it" to the Facebook users. In addition, both brands have information about upcoming sporting events worldwide, but the last updates were made in 2012 by Adidas and in 2014 by Nike. This can be considered as a disadvantage because due to the results of keywords research, prospects and leads are always looking for the new information and are following current sporting events. They both have links to their Instagram profiles and Nike has a special section for Nike+ support, which includes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), top news, discussions, and feedback form for potential and current consumers of Nike+ app and electronic devices. Adidas is discussed by 47,794 people on Facebook and 20,176,439 users liked its page, whereas Nike is discussed by 64,432 people and its profile received likes, especially 22,511,020. During the week from 20, July, 2015 till 27, July, 2015 the number of users who liked the Adidas and Nike Facebook pages has decreased by 5.1% and 21.9% respectively. (Table 8) It can be explained by the lack of posts' regularity created by brands; in particular the last publication made by Adidas on its page was on the 1st of July, 2015 and by Nike on the 15th of July, 2015. The majority of posts are featured with the hashtag corresponding to the particular topic and the link to the related branded Facebook pages in order to increase social media space coverage and a consumers' engagement rate.

Table 8: Comparison of Adidas and Nike official Facebook pages (27, July, 2015).

	Adidas	Nike
Number of people discussing the page	47,794	64,432
Total number of likes	20,176,439	22,511,020
New weekly page likes	-5.1%	-21.9%

Source: author, based on Facebook.com.

The results of audit of Adidas's posts on official Facebook page during a four-month period (Attachment 3, Appendix) show that there are three main types of content which the brand usually publishes: promotional pictures with short text, video content, announcement of Adidas related events (Table 9). Due to the difference in the audience reaction to short videos with a less than one minute duration and long videos, that are longer than one minute, they are considered separately. Adidas made one sportsman related post on the 3rd, April, 2015 to congratulate Andrew Wiggins who became the NBA Kia Rookie of the year. Also the brand expressed its attitude to the non-branded worldwide discussed event on the 26th, June, 2015, calling the users to celebrate "*a victory in the fight for equality*" together (<https://www.facebook.com/adidas>, retrieved: 6, August, 2015).

From April, 2015 to July, 2015 Adidas made 39 publications on its Facebook page (Table 9), but it is worth mentioning that the brand made only one post in July, 2015. The majority of content distributed through this social network is in the form of promotional pictures with short advertising or motivational text. As it can be seen from Table 9, Facebook users prefer long videos more than other content types and they are more likely to share it among friends. However, it is important to emphasize that the average numbers of likes and shares in the case of long videos were influenced by the extreme point which is adidas new commercial "Adidas: Here's to the Takers" that collected 153,802 likes and 8,664 total shares (Attachment 3, Appendix). In comparison with other videos with duration more than one minute, this video does not advertise a specific product, it promotes the brand's attitude to sport, its perception of success. In addition, it has a motivating context and it is emotional. Another extreme value is equal to 628 comments below the short Adidas Football X15 boots commercial posted on the 25th, May, 2015, which were caused by external circumstances related to FIFA and corruption issues. By calculating an average frequency of posts, it was found out that Adidas uploads long videos with twelve days intervals, whereas promotional pictures are published more often. Also from the outcomes that non-branded worldwide discussed event has generated it can be concluded, that the audience engages more with the brand that cares about the surrounded world. In addition, it is necessary to point out that the event in cooperation with Parley for the Oceans, where Adidas introduced its concept shoes made from the ocean garbage and illegally used nets, received slightly below the content type's average results (Attachment 3, Appendix). However, according to the content audit conducted on BuzzSumo web platform (Chapter 4.4.2.) the Internet users were interested in the articles related to this specific topic. Summarizing the findings from both analyses, it can

be stated that a picture with short description of this kind of event is not enough for the prospects and leads. As Adidas did not offer it on the official Facebook page, the users appealed to other information sources available on the Internet which provide longer and more detailed content on the topic.

Table 9: Audit of Adidas publications on the brand's official Facebook page from April, 2015 to July, 2015.

Content type	Number of posts	Average frequency (in days)	Average number of likes	Average number of shares	Average number of comments
short video	4	21	1,048	185	240
long video	4	12	41,138	2,516	134
promotional picture	24	4	1,798	94	112
sportsman related post	1	-	783	16	101
announcement of adidas related event	5	18	898	32	95
non-branded worldwide event	1	-	3,042	217	126

Source: author.

According to the outcomes of the content audit described in Chapter 4.4.2, the users are attracted by the video content published on YouTube. Therefore it is important to run a social SEO audit of another distribution channel, especially the case brand's official video channel on YouTube and to compare it with the competitor's one. Adidas registered on YouTube on the 29th of October 2005. During the 10-year period the channel has converted 169,688 people into subscribers and has gained 78,998,540 views. (Table 10) Adidas has 18 related YouTube channels including Adidas football, Adidas Originals, Adidas NEO, and etc. which have generated 2,760 videos in total, received 435,403,918 views, and forced 1,508,359 people to subscribe for the channels. In the description section Adidas introduces its content marketing mission statement (Chapter 4.2) to the audience and provides the links to its official website and other branded profiles on such social networks as Instagram, Twitter, Google+, and Facebook. Analyzing Nike's competitive position on YouTube, it is necessary to emphasize a better structure of the front page. Videos are grouped according to the brand's core initiatives, in particular football, running, basketball, golf, skateboarding, snowboarding, women sport, and two local American video collections. There is also a special category called "Nike commercials" which is a phrase appeared on the fourth place in the YouTube suggestions for the search by keyword "nike". This fact emphasizes the high competitor's attention to the SEO optimization of content. Nike places only its evergreen slogan "Just do it" in the

description section, but from the content marketing prospective it is important to make a mission statement visible, understandable, and engaging for the audience. Thus, Adidas has an advantage over its competitor in terms of this aspect. However, Nike's YouTube channel has about 110,000 subscribers more than the case brand. Since 7th of March, 2006, when the profile was registered, the video content was viewed 56,232,763 times. (Table 10) To identify the reasons behind the outnumbered loyal followers of Nike video channel in spite of the fewer amounts of views, the example of video content will be examined.

Table 10: Comparison of Adidas and Nike YouTube channels (27, July, 2015).

	Registration date	Number of subscribers	Total views of content
Adidas	29, October, 2005	169,688	78,998,540
Nike	7, March, 2006	282,707	56,232,763

Source: author, based on youtube.com.

FIFA World Cup 2014 was the biggest event during the last year where both competitors were present, in particular Adidas was an official sponsor of the championship. The brands prepared the campaigns supported by the powerful messages, which were exploited as promotional hashtags on different social media channels, and a number of videos. Adidas launched a campaign with a slogan “all in or nothing” which represents a life choice athletes and sport lovers have to make. 41 videos for the approximate duration of 30 seconds with footballers from all around the globe were created. According to the interviewed Adidas manager, *“nowadays Athletes, Opinion Leaders and Influencers expect to be part of brands that help them shape their own identity. They want to be heard, to participate, to have a voice, to shape and create. The ambition at Adidas is to be their collaborator to help them shape who they want to be.”* Thus, Adidas introduced the footballers' thoughts concerning the soccer, their teams, secrets of the techniques, motivations, and challenges. However the videos were too short to tell the sportsmen' stories. They were watched 6,872,580 times, and received 18,673 likes and 615 dislikes in total which is less than another Adidas's video with World Cup football stars such as a former French player Zinedine Zidane and David Beckham who decided to organize a house match with younger footballers Gareth Bale and Lucas Moura. This YouTube video received 19,605,373 views, 35,124 likes, and 675 dislikes which proves the audience's interest in entertaining contents with specific plots (Table 11).

Nike produced a 5-minutes cartoon called “The Last Game” supported by a slogan “risk everything” for FIFA World Cup 2014. As in the campaign “Just Do It”, the brand tells “Overcoming the monster” type of story (Chapter 2.3). It is about famous footballers, such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Ronaldo Fenomeno, Wayne Rooney, and others, who decided to risk everything to win everything. The monster in this story is the scientist who created the clones of sportsmen in order to make soccer game perfect excluding human factors. The footballers decided to prove the whole world that the scientist is wrong, and they play the last game to show who is right. The cartoon has been viewed 86,928,872 times, and received 497,639 likes from the audience (Table 11). After running a sentiment analysis of the first 100 comments below this video, it can be concluded that users enjoyed watching this cartoon, for instance they wrote that “it is amazing, epic, cool, awesome”, however approximately 20% of people were interested in the absence of Argentinean soccer player Lionel Messi, who is sponsored by adidas. To sum it up, Nike appealed to content marketing and told the story of the brand through the cartoon. The potential and current customers of the brand experienced positive emotions and were motivated by the heroes of the video. It is worth mentioning that Nike made each soccer player a character with the unique and exaggerated features for which they are famous. This is an example of appropriate application of content marketing for telling the brand’s story through simultaneously educating and entertaining content.

Table 11: Comparison of videos for FIFA World Cup 2014 by Adidas and Nike (27, July,2015).

		Adidas	Nike
Long video	Duration	1 minute 6 seconds	5 minutes 29 seconds
	Number of views	19,605,373	86,928,872
	Number of likes	35,124	497,639
	Number of dislikes	675	13,794

Source: author, based on youtube.com.

After that in 2015 adidas created a video series on YouTube facilitated with a slogan “Take it. Take today”. The brand generated 38 videos which were posted on its main YouTube channel. There were 11 videos with 16-seconds duration, 23 videos with 31-seconds duration, 2 videos with 44-seconds duration, and 2 long videos 1minute 3 seconds each (Table 12). In the short videos (less than one minute each) sportsmen say few motivational sentences, which are supported by the scenes of the moments of their triumph. The core message the athletes

want to deliver is that today does know about the difficulties that were overcome in order to become who they are; it does not remember anything. Thus, sportsmen urge the audience to “take today”. Two long videos were posted on the 13th, February, 2015 and on the 6th, April, 2015 respectively. There was a common logic behind these videos in particular both of them show a mixture of different team sport games divided in three core parts: the preparation for the match, culmination, and the moment of victory. The first one is facilitated with the voice on the background that says the following: *“The last goal does not matter. The last victory is already forgotten. Yesterday is gone. Lost in the record books. But today is up for grabs. Unpredictable. Unwritten. Undecided. Now is ours. Do something and be remembered. Or do nothing and be forgotten. No one owns today. Take it”*.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiQVkoDlBbQ>, retrieved 6, August, 2015) This powerful message was delivered to the audience in the stimulating style in an informal manner, and it has been viewed 38,639,224 times. Another long video is accompanied with a dynamic melody with short phrases in rap style and with the following written slogan: *“Good things come to those who take”*. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2TEZ8UOLMw>, retrieved: 6, August, 2015) The Output of the analysis of Adidas’s video series “Take it. Take today” on YouTube (Table 12) shows that longer emotional videos engage the audience more than the short ones. Thus, it can be concluded that the longer messages delivered through video content influence the users more than a few word sentence. In addition, the outcomes presented on Table 12 support the results of examination of the content published on Adidas’s official Facebook page.

Table 12: Analysis of Adidas “Take it. Take today” campaign on YouTube (27, July, 2015).

Duration of video	Total number of videos	Average number of views	Average number of likes	Average number of dislikes
16 seconds	11	102,387	346	182
31 seconds	23	145,552	594	104
44 seconds	2	220,360	1,035	307
63 seconds	2	35,143,412	21,591	5,930

Source: author.

5. Recommendations

In this Chapter the results of consumer analysis and examination of Adidas content marketing strategy will be used for building a buyer persona profile for the case brand and the content marketing funnel. Then alignment of these elements will be made; content and channel plans will be created. Based on the weak sides of the Adidas's approach identified during the research, recommendations for improvement of the content marketing strategy will be generated.

The main purpose of consumer analysis was to gain adidas customers' insights and to build buyer persona profile. From the results of inferential analysis which measured correlation between gender and responses to several multiple choice questions (Chapter 4.3) it can be concluded that the difference between the buying habits, decision making process, motivation and challenges for doing sport as well as perception of success is not significant. Therefore it is not necessary to create separate buyer persona profiles for male and female consumers.

The author proposes to appeal to male buyer, because none of female respondents mentioned Adidas communities among those they follow on social media. The majority of respondents are from Czech Republic and Germany, in particular 20% and 18% respectively, which is important to reflect in the buyer persona profile. In addition, most of participants are from 21 to 25 years old. (Chapter 4.3) The first Slavic name on the list of the most popular masculine name of the 1990s was Joseph (http://www.babycenter.com/0_100-most-popular-baby-names-of-1990_1738066.bc, retrieved: 10, July, 2015). Thus, the best customer for Adidas can be described as a Czech guy Joseph, who is 23 years old. He lives in Germany and studies at the University of Applied Sciences in Mainz. In addition, 75% of the respondents were employed mainly in business, economics, marketing, and sales. Also the questionnaire was in English. Therefore we can conclude that Joseph works as a marketing assistant in an international company in Germany and knows Czech, German, and English languages. Based on the analysis of multiple choice questions, Joseph is an active social media user. He follows Adidas as well as Nike on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram where he is present, and he enjoys publics related to football, racing, and training. Due to the results of the analysis from BuzzSumo web platform (Chapter 4.4.2) the buyer persona shares content with friends mostly through Facebook. Besides, he usually gains information from magazines, company's websites, and video channels. Outcome of the keyword research (Chapter 4.4.1) shows that buyer persona looks for the information predominantly with the help of Google.com search

engine. He prefers video type of content published on YouTube and reading digital magazines mainly related to streetwear fashion trends, team sports and sporting events, and lifestyle, for instance highsnobiety.com, hypebeast.com, and sneakerfreaker.com. In addition, he likes listening to hip-hop and rap music, and his favourite performer is Kanye West.

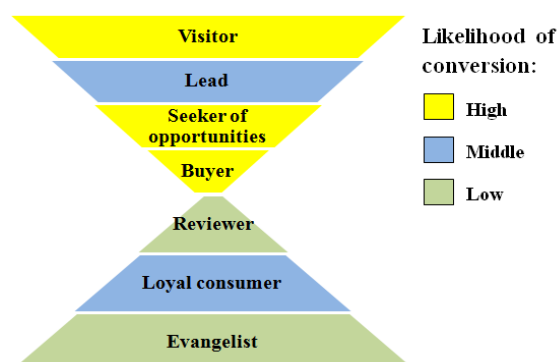
Then it is necessary to emphasize the buyer persona's interests, incentives, and pain points in doing sports. According to the results of consumer analysis, Joseph does sports 2 times a week which represents an average between two popular answers on the question concerning frequency of doing exercises, especially ones a week and 2-3 times a week. Summarizing finding of open-ended questions, Joseph leads a healthy lifestyle. In order to keep himself in a good physical shape he does cycling, running, and training. Besides, he believes that doing sports helps him to improve the mood. However, it is challenging for Joseph to motivate himself to start exercising and do it with the same regularity. He perceives success as a constant improvement, but it is difficult for him to cross personal limits every time he does sports. In addition, Joseph equalizes success with achievement of goals and happiness in different spheres of life, especially in personal life and career.

Joseph is a current customer of Adidas. He makes a decision about purchase based on his own experience and he considers the information collected from different sources. Joseph trusts mostly his family and friends; however he also listens to sportsmen and thought leaders' opinion while shopping for sporting goods. In majority of cases, he searches for Adidas shoes and wants to keep up to date with footwear trends and the brand's new collections. In order to identify the content marketing funnel for the buyer persona and the problematic issues, firstly, it is necessary to consider information from the Adidas manager. He claimed that the decision of the brand's consumers about making a purchase is ensuing from the same logic as one of McKinsey decision making process. The employee described each step in the following way:

1. *"Initial consideration set where the consumer considers an initial set of brands based on brand perceptions and exposure to recent touch points with the brand;*
2. *Active Evaluation where consumers add or subtract brands as they evaluate what they want;*
3. *Moment of Purchase where ultimately the consumer selects a brand to purchase;*
4. *Post-purchase Experience where after purchasing a product or service the consumer builds expectations based on experience to inform the next decision journey."*

This buying cycle reflects the sales funnel described in Chapter 2.1. However, in order to make content marketing strategy more engaging, it is important to consider further steps of customers' journey. Therefore, within the scope of consumer analysis, the respondents were offered to choose from a range of options the steps they take while making a purchase from Adidas (Chapter 4.3). Based on the results, the content marketing funnel for the buyer persona was generated with three levels of conversion likelihood (Figure 17). The names of the stages reflect the roles consumers try on each time after accomplishing the activity described in the survey question. For instance, after searching for information about the brand and its products on the internet, consumer becomes a visitor, and etc. According to the Adidas manager, the most challenging task for the customers is maintaining loyalty to the brand and/or its products. In addition to this obstacle, outcome of the questionnaire showed that consumers rarely convert into reviewers and evangelists after making a purchase.

Figure 17: The content marketing funnel for adidas customers with three levels of conversion likelihood.



Source: author.

As the interviewed Adidas manager stated, *“the digital content planning is organized and managed by each individual category or business unit (football, running, originals, basketball, etc). The content publishing process is managed through a centralized tool to help the global teams to communicate the plan and actions at the local market level. Each business unit works with creative agencies and internal community managers to create the content.”* Summarizing the elements of the Adidas's content marketing strategy, the author created a simple version of the content plan (Table 13) described in Chapter 2.4. In order to form the frame for the content creation, it is essential to include Adidas content marketing mission statement (Chapter 4.2) into the plan as a description of the situation. Then generated pieces of content has to contribute to the same goal, thus, content marketing strategic goal has

to be emphasized (Chapter 4.2). In addition to the detailed buyer persona profile, brief overview of the demographic characteristics, interests, motivations, challenges are outlined in the content plan. Based on the results of the keyword research (Chapter 4.4.1) as well as content audit (Chapter 4.4.2), four groups of keywords are proposed in the content plan. Lastly, the main distribution channels, suggested topics, and core content marketing initiatives which will be considered below in details are stated there.

Table 13: Content plan for Adidas.

Content plan for adidas	
Content marketing mission statement	<i>We give everything we've got, then go back for more. No doubts, no holding back, no giving in. From the court to the catwalk, the stadium to the street, whatever the game, we play the same way. Heart over head. Inclusion over ego. United by passion, we go all in.</i>
Content marketing goal	<i>To harness the emotion of sport and the benefits of a sporting lifestyle across all communication channels.</i>
Persona overview	<p>Joseph, 23 years, student of HS Mainz, Germany, marketing assistant</p> <p><u>Interests:</u> cycling, running, training, watching football (Lionel Messi), listening to hip-hop and rap music (Kanye West)</p> <p><u>Motivations for doing sport:</u> keeping fit, have fun and improve the mood, be healthy</p> <p><u>Challenges for doing sport:</u> regularity, lack of motivation to start an exercise, crossing personal limits</p>
Core content marketing initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvement of adidas.com; - Focusing on proper management of official Facebook page; - Integration of Facebook and YouTube social media channels; - Following concept from “little to big” for YouTube; - Employment of “Hygiene, Hub, Hero” content strategy.
Keywords	<p><u>Branded and sub-branded related keywords:</u> adidas, adidas Originals, adidas neo.</p> <p><u>Products related keywords:</u> adidas shoes, adidas limited edition, adidas new collection.</p>

	<p><u>Celebrities related keywords</u>: adidas Messi, adidas Kanye, adidas neo Selena Gomez, adidas neo Bieber.</p> <p><u>Campaigns related keywords</u>: adidas commercial, adidas take today, adidas World Cup.</p>
Main distribution channels	Facebook, YouTube, digital magazines, adidas.com
Content topics	Team sports, sporting events, fashion streetwear trends, healthy lifestyle, motivational texts for overcoming personal barriers

Source: author.

In order to serve the buyer persona properly, Adidas should improve website's visibility on the search engines, especially on Google.com, which is mainly exploited by the audience. Also as Joseph uses company's website as one of the information sources it is necessary to add the link to adidas.com to the brand's YouTube profile in a description section. To show the customers that the case brand knows them and cares about their interests and needs, the author proposes to let visitors of adidas.com to segment themselves. Particularly, on the first page of the official website the user should be offered to select a category he or she personally belongs to. By clicking on one of the section, the user will be redirected to the page with a suitable content and product range. Based on the outcomes of the research the following groups are suggested for implementation: professional athlete; trendsetter; and sport lover. These options will direct buyers' experience, improve usability of the website, and simplify further analysis of online consumers' behavior.

In view of high activity of the buyer persona on social networks, it is essential to concentrate the efforts on one main platform and to choose a facilitated one. As it was mentioned in the content plan (Table 13), Adidas needs to manage Facebook page properly as the core social media channel, and to support it with the brand's official YouTube video channel. As Joseph likes being aware of sport news, Adidas should keep updated the section for upcoming sporting events on Facebook. It can serve for the brand as an editorial calendar like those, adidas developed for the year 2014 and published in the Adidas Group annual report 2013. Also the outcome of the analysis of Facebook posts (Attachment 3, Appendix) shows that there is no established regularity in the publishing process. Thus, it is proposed to upload promotional pictures ones in three days. Moreover, in order to engage the audience with fostering discussions, once a week a brand can ask the audience for their opinion concerning

the sporting events, their favourite athletes, or celebrities. Also, Facebook users enjoy discussing buzzed events happening in the world, for instance, FIFA and corruption case generated 628 comments under the brand's short video at the end of May, 2015 (Attachement 3, Appendix). Thus, Adidas can stimulate a discussion with the audience related to the most world bothering topics as well. Besides, the brand can offer users the longer content by posting a link to Adidas Group blog or articles from the controlled media.

In addition, it is important to integrate Facebook channel with the videos from the case brand's official YouTube channel. It was found out that longer videos generate more likes and shares than shorter ones. However, from the required costs side it is difficult to film videos with duration more than one minute very often. Therefore, the author proposes to employ the concept "from little to big" (OpenView, 2013). The author suggests employing this approach in the form of creation of a number of small videos which will be the parts of the bigger one. Then it is necessary to deliver them gradually to the audience and upload the core video as a final point of the series. At the end of each video it is important to offer users to watch other videos from the series and to visit the case brand's official website. All small videos should contribute to the brand's story however each message should contain something special and encourage the audience to move further in the hero's journey (Chapter 2.3).

It is possible to appeal to the "Rags to Riches" archetype (Chapter 2.3) in order to tell a story of adidas founder Adi Dassler (Chapter 4.4.1) in video series format. As adidas wants to provide athletes with an opportunity to speak, it is necessary to give them a chance to tell their story. "Overcoming the Monster" archetype (Chapter 2.3) is seen as the most suitable for telling their stories of success. Leading the audience by their own example and motivating through the journey they made as a hero are seen as an engaging content for the customers. The elements of "Comedy" (Chapter 2.3) can be implemented in both previously mentioned types of story, which is supposed to be positively met by the audience. The concept "from little to big" for the case brand's YouTube channel will help Adidas to grab and maintain the users' attention and interest to the brand. It will increase the level of the audience's engagement with short videos and will stimulate the conversion.

The recommendations for the Adidas official Facebook page and YouTube channel can be summarized with the help of "Hygiene, Hub, Hero" content strategy. "Hygiene" is the basic type of content which should be delivered regularly. (Google, 2014) The author proposes to publish every two days on the case brand's Facebook page powerful motivational messages

accompanied with examples and inspiring pictures from a world of sport. As “Hub” is devoted to the episodic content (Google, 2014), the video series implemented under the concept “from little to big” will be appropriate here. In order to boost the audience’s interest in the whole story and to increase a number of shares, the videos should be published two times a week on the Adidas YouTube channel as well as on its Facebook page. In addition, through adidas.com the brand can recommend watching these videos on its YouTube channel. Promotional pictures and commercials related to new collections or limited editions also belong to this group. Lastly, “Hero” content which refers to the big occasion or the brand’s moment of triumph (Google, 2014) is proposed to be implemented in the form of live-event which will be supported by the “Hub” type of content published on YouTube and Facebook. For instance, the author suggests organizing a football championship among the amateur teams which will be sponsored by Adidas. The winners will be given a chance to play in the final with Manchester United as it was mostly searched by Internet users. The teams can receive coaches in the face of the famous football players. This event can be filmed and delivered to the audience through YouTube channel in the live format as well as in the form of videos which can be also published on the case brand’s Facebook page. The idea behind is to engage with the target audience, show the brand’s perception of the game, and to give sportsmen a chance to share their experience with others.

Conclusion

To conclude with, the author defined the content marketing as a discipline, its main distribution channels, and advantages for the brands over traditional way. The following strategic elements were described: goals, mission statement, buyer persona, and the process of unique brand storytelling. In addition, the ways of alignment of the core parts of content marketing strategy were introduced, for instance content plan (Figure 1, Appendix), channel plan (Figure 2, Appendix), and distribution channel matrix (Figure 3, Appendix).

To build buyer persona profile for the case brand the sample of male and female students of the European universities aged from 18 to 35 was examined. The data collection method applied was questionnaire which was created on the Qualtrics online platform. Survey was distributed through social media channels and by emails. 120 students responded to the questionnaire, among them 58 males, 58 females, and 4 people did not specify their gender. The majority of respondents resided from Czech Republic and Germany. Besides, 25% of students pointed out that they are not employed, and 75% claimed that they work mainly in business, finance, marketing, and sales related fields.

The consumer analysis showed that Adidas audience gains information mostly from social networks, companies' websites, magazines, and video channels. The majority of participants prefer Facebook and YouTube to other social media channels. All participants do sports, mainly running, training, and cycling. The biggest part of the sample is motivated by the will to keep fit, boost energy, clear mind from the routine problems, or have fun. However, it is difficult for them to do sport regularly due to the lack of time or motivation to start doing the exercises, and to cross personal limits. Success for them is mainly associated with recognition, achievement of goals, and with money. All the identified characteristics of Adidas target segment reflected in the buyer persona, in particular 23-years old Czech guy Joseph who studies and works in Germany. In addition, the content marketing funnel with three level of likelihood was created for him.

Then the existing content marketing strategy of the case brand was analyzed. Firstly, adidas.com was examined with the help of Alexa.com and Google Trends and compared with the main competitor's official website nike.com. The output showed that in spite of the fact that Adidas has to improve its visibility on the search engines, especially Google and Yahoo!, it is strengthening its position on the European market. In addition, four groups of mostly searched keywords were analyzed on BuzzSumo web platform in order to determine the types

of content as well as specific topics customers are interested in. As a result, the Internet users mostly prefer the video type of content and they share the entertaining and engaging information mainly through Facebook. Also the audience's interest in adidas limited edition and new collections, sporting events, particular athletes, and hip-hop, rap, and pop performers was identified. It contributed to the creation of the keywords bank and the content topics under the content plan developed for Adidas.

In order to measure the performance of Adidas Facebook page and YouTube video channel such KPIs as a number of subscribers, views, likes, dislikes, shares, and comments were evaluated. These parameters were compared to the competitor's social media channels. Based on the outcome of the analysis, the author developed specific recommendations for each social network mentioned above and proposed to employ "Hygiene, Hub, Hero" content strategy.

To sum it up, the established goals have been fulfilled. Also the results of the analysis will be directed to the interviewed Adidas employee for consideration.

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List of Figures

Figure #	Title	Source	Page #
1	The sales funnel	Pulizzi & Rose, 2011	16
2	The content marketing	Pulizzi & Rose, 2011	16
3	The Content Marketing Brand Hero's Journey	Pulizzi & Rose, 2011	22
4	Adidas's regional markets, \$bn 2001 and 2007	Christensen, 2009	36
5	The Adidas Group's revenues in \$bn 1997 – 2007	Christensen, 2009	36
6	Global brands architecture and differentiation	adidas Group, Global Brands Route 2015, 2010.	38
7	Demographics of adidas.com users related to the Internet average	Alexa.com	43
8	Answers to the question: "Please, choose maximum 4 information sources that you use more often"	author, N=120	45
9	Sport brands which respondents follow on social media channels	author, N=120	46
10	Respondents' preferences in sports	author, N=120	49
11	Motivations for doing sports	author, N=120	50
12	Challenges of doing sports	author, N=120	51
13	Perception of success	author, N=120	51
14	Evaluation of adidas.com on Alexa web analytics platform	Alexa.com	52
15	Organic keywords for adidas.com	Alexa.com	54
16	Trends for retrieval requests "adidas" and "nike" from 2004 to 2015	Google Trends	55
17	The content marketing funnel for adidas customers with three levels of conversion likelihood	author	66

List of Tables


Table #	Title	Source	Page #
1	Demographic characteristics of the sample	author, N=120	44
2	Average percentage of time a day particular number of respondents spend on the offered social media channels	author, N=120	45
3	Content providers that customers trust more when they make buying decision	author, N=120	47
4	Frequency of doing sports	author, N=120	48
5	The sites users visited immediately before adidas.com and nike.com respectively	author, based on Alexa.com	53
6	Analysis of retrieval requests “adidas” and “nike” from July, 2014, to July, 2015	author, based on Google Trends	54
7	Top 5 pieces of content for “adidas” keyword from July, 2014 till July, 2015	author, based on BuzzSumo Pro	55
8	Comparison of Adidas and Nike official Facebook pages (27, July, 2015)	author, based on Facebook.com	58
9	Audit of Adidas publications on the brand’s official Facebook page from April, 2015 to July, 2015	author	60
10	Comparison of Adidas and Nike YouTube channels (27, July, 2015)	author, based on youtube.com	61
11	Comparison of videos for FIFA World Cup 2014 by Adidas and Nike (27, July, 2015)	author, based on youtube.com	62
12	Analysis of Adidas “Take it. Take today” campaign on YouTube (27, July, 2015)	author	63
13	Content plan for Adidas	author	67

List of Appendices

	Title	Source	Page #
Figure 1	Content plan	Odden, 2012	80
Figure 2	Simple version of the channel plan	Pulizzi & Rose, 2011	81
Figure 3	Distribution channel matrix	OpenView, 2013	81
Attachment 1	Questionnaire	author	82
Attachment 2	Interview questions	author	94
Attachment 3	Adidas Facebook page content analysis from April, 2015 to July, 2015	author, based on Facebook.com	95

Appendix

Figure 1: Content plan.

Situation	Your company sells a series of time saving & scheduling applications for smart phones.
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase product awareness • Grow networks • Increase citations in media & social • Increase sales
Persona Overview 	<div> Name: Joe Small Business Owner Title: CEO Industry: B2B Software Sales </div> Pain Points <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal Budget • Would like an assistant but cannot afford costs • Works 60-80 hours per week • Has trouble managing his calendar for meetings and other obligations
Brand Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEO • Content Planning • Social Media Strategy
Search Keywords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual Assistant • Apps for phone • Help Me Organize
Social Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time saving tips for business owners • Get organized in 10 minutes a day • Time is Money: Tips on increasing efficiencies at a minimal cost

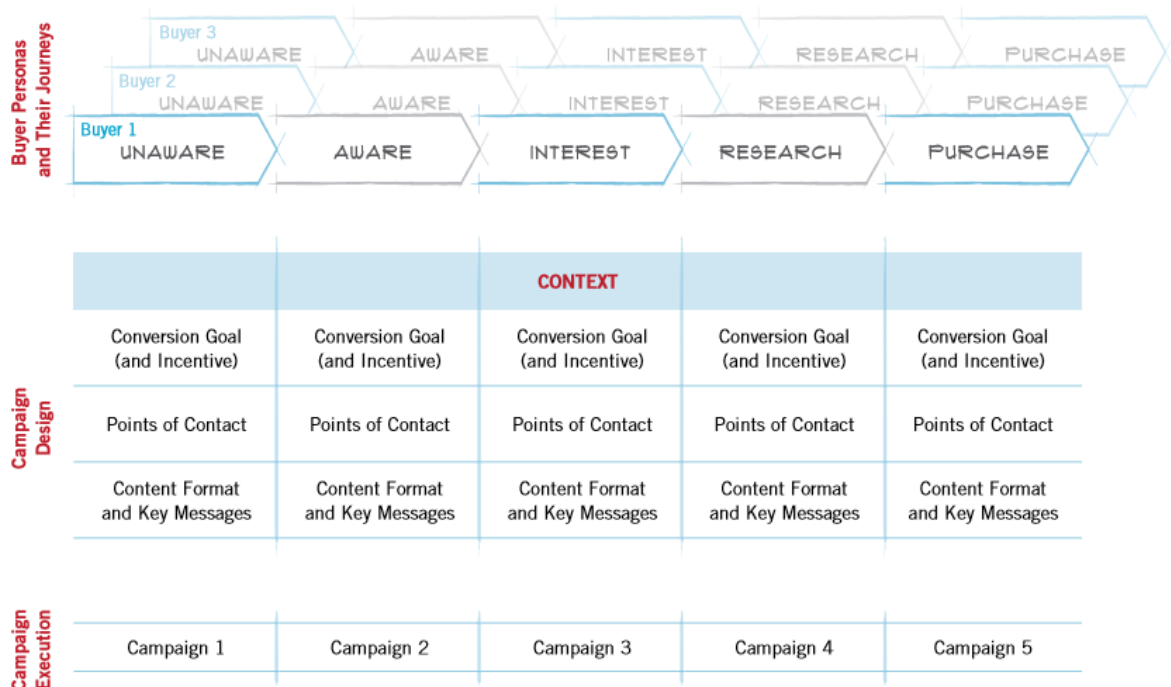
Source: Odden, 2012.

Figure 2: Simple version of the channel plan.

CHANNEL	NAME	STRUCTURE	TOPE	DESIRED ACTION
	Main Corporate Site	News Section - 250-Word Blurbs announcing new items	Professional	Click to blog (all phases)
	Product Micro Site (New Blog)	Blog with 500-750 word posts	Casual/ conversational	Subscribe Phase 1 - Add "White paper download Phase 2"
Blog	Main Corporate Blog	Cross Linking - Making sure existing posts are linking into new Micro site	N/A	Link to blog posts
	Sales Twitter Channel @Sales	Conversational	Friendly - Focused on being our "broadcast" platform and online conversation. Add to existing Twitter content.	Click through to blog posts. RT's of our information.
	CRM Twitter Channel @CRM	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Linked In	New Linked In Group	Asking questions to generate conversation	Follow and join group on Linked In - Click through to blog

Source: Pulizzi & Rose, 2011.

Figure 3: Distribution channel matrix.



Source: OpenView, 2013.

Attachment 1: questionnaire.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey. It is aimed at measuring the level of your interaction with content marketing of a sport brand, identifying your interests and motivations for doing sport. It will take only 5 minutes of your time. We would like to learn more about you and your experience. Please, answer openly and truly.

Q1 Please, choose maximum 4 information sources that you use more often.

- Magazines
- Newsletters from companies
- White paper series
- Companies' Websites
- Mini sites with specific content
- Blogs
- Forums
- Video channels
- Ebook series
- Webinars
- In-person sources
- Social media

Q2 What percentage of your time a day do you spend on these social media channels?

- FACEBOOK
- TWITTER
- INSTAGRAM
- YOUTUBE
- LINKEDIN
- PINTEREST
- GOOGLE +

Q3 Do you follow social media publics (for ex. groups, video channels, and etc.) of any sport brand?

- Yes
- No

Q4 If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, then, please, specify the name of the brand and the social media public you follow. You can mention up to 3 options.

Q5 What content providers do you trust more when make a decision about purchase of sport goods? Please, organize the options from 1 (most trusted) to 5 (less trusted).

- Family and friends
- Thought leaders (for example, bloggers)
- Company which sells the sport goods you want to buy
- Sportsmen' expert opinion
- Other people

Q6 Which of the following mostly describes you as a decision maker?

- I make a final decision fast based on my experience, short information, and individual assumptions.
- I look for the arguments and the evidences in different information sources. And then I make a final decision pretty fast.
- I usually reevaluate information before coming up with a final decision. Thus I require more time than others.
- It is difficult for me to make a final decision. Therefore I usually delegate it to others.

Q7 Have you ever bought any adidas products?

- Yes, I have.
- No, I have not

Q8 If you answered "No, I have not" to the previous question then please skip this question. Which of the following statements characterize your "journey" as an adidas customer? Please, group them respectively.

***Problem - in this case - unsatisfied need/ challenge you faced.**

1) This is about me:

2) This is not about me:

- Search for information about the brand and its products on the internet;
- Provide personal information and subscribe for content offered by adidas;
- Search for content provided by adidas that offers problem-solving solutions;
- Evaluate and compare problem-solving solutions provided by adidas and its competitors (for example, Nike);
- Make a decision about the purchase from adidas based on gathered information;
- Share personal experience with others through writing reviews and comments below adidas posts on different social media channels;
- Maintain loyalty to the brand and/or a particular product;
- Generate brand related content in the form of photos, videos, blog posts, and etc., and distribute it among friends.

Q9 How often do you do sports?

- Never
- Less than Once a Month
- Once a Month
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Week
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Daily

Q10 If you answered "Never" to the Q9 then skip this question. What sport activities do you prefer doing? Please, choose maximum 3 options.

- American football
- Badminton
- Baseball
- Basketball
- Boxing
- Cycling
- Football
- Handball
- Outdoor
- Rugby
- Running
- Swimming
- Table tennis
- Tennis
- Training
- Volleyball
- Wrestling
- Other

Q11 If you answered "Other" to the previous question, please, specify the sport activities you prefer doing.

Q12 If you answered "Never" to the Q9 then skip this question. Please, tell us what motivates you to do sport?

Q13 If you answered "Never" to the Q9 then skip this question. Please, tell us what do you find the most challenging in doing sport?

Q14 What does success mean to you?

Q15 What is your gender?

- ---Select---
- Male
- Female

Q16 What is your age?

- ---Select---
- 16 - 20
- 21 - 25
- 26 - 30
- 31 - 35
- 36 and over

• **Q17 Please, select your country of residence.**

- Afghanistan (1)
- Albania (2)
- Algeria (3)
- Andorra (4)
- Angola (5)
- Antigua and Barbuda (6)
- Argentina (7)
- Armenia (8)
- Australia (9)
- Austria (10)
- Azerbaijan (11)
- Bahamas (12)
- Bahrain (13)
- Bangladesh (14)
- Barbados (15)
- Belarus (16)
- Belgium (17)
- Belize (18)
- Benin (19)
- Bhutan (20)
- Bolivia (21)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina (22)
- Botswana (23)
- Brazil (24)
- Brunei Darussalam (25)
- Bulgaria (26)
- Burkina Faso (27)
- Burundi (28)
- Cambodia (29)
- Cameroon (30)
- Canada (31)

- Cape Verde (32)
- Central African Republic (33)
- Chad (34)
- Chile (35)
- China (36)
- Colombia (37)
- Comoros (38)
- Congo, Republic of the... (39)
- Costa Rica (40)
- Côte d'Ivoire (41)
- Croatia (42)
- Cuba (43)
- Cyprus (44)
- Czech Republic (45)
- Democratic People's Republic of Korea (46)
- Democratic Republic of the Congo (47)
- Denmark (48)
- Djibouti (49)
- Dominica (50)
- Dominican Republic (51)
- Ecuador (52)
- Egypt (53)
- El Salvador (54)
- Equatorial Guinea (55)
- Eritrea (56)
- Estonia (57)
- Ethiopia (58)
- Fiji (59)
- Finland (60)
- France (61)
- Gabon (62)
- Gambia (63)

- Georgia (64)
- Germany (65)
- Ghana (66)
- Greece (67)
- Grenada (68)
- Guatemala (69)
- Guinea (70)
- Guinea-Bissau (71)
- Guyana (72)
- Haiti (73)
- Honduras (74)
- Hong Kong (S.A.R.) (75)
- Hungary (76)
- Iceland (77)
- India (78)
- Indonesia (79)
- Iran, Islamic Republic of... (80)
- Iraq (81)
- Ireland (82)
- Israel (83)
- Italy (84)
- Jamaica (85)
- Japan (86)
- Jordan (87)
- Kazakhstan (88)
- Kenya (89)
- Kiribati (90)
- Kuwait (91)
- Kyrgyzstan (92)
- Lao People's Democratic Republic (93)
- Latvia (94)
- Lebanon (95)

- Lesotho (96)
- Liberia (97)
- Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (98)
- Liechtenstein (99)
- Lithuania (100)
- Luxembourg (101)
- Madagascar (102)
- Malawi (103)
- Malaysia (104)
- Maldives (105)
- Mali (106)
- Malta (107)
- Marshall Islands (108)
- Mauritania (109)
- Mauritius (110)
- Mexico (111)
- Micronesia, Federated States of... (112)
- Monaco (113)
- Mongolia (114)
- Montenegro (115)
- Morocco (116)
- Mozambique (117)
- Myanmar (118)
- Namibia (119)
- Nauru (120)
- Nepal (121)
- Netherlands (122)
- New Zealand (123)
- Nicaragua (124)
- Niger (125)
- Nigeria (126)
- North Korea (127)

- Norway (128)
- Oman (129)
- Pakistan (130)
- Palau (131)
- Panama (132)
- Papua New Guinea (133)
- Paraguay (134)
- Peru (135)
- Philippines (136)
- Poland (137)
- Portugal (138)
- Qatar (139)
- Republic of Korea (140)
- Republic of Moldova (141)
- Romania (142)
- Russian Federation (143)
- Rwanda (144)
- Saint Kitts and Nevis (145)
- Saint Lucia (146)
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (147)
- Samoa (148)
- San Marino (149)
- Sao Tome and Principe (150)
- Saudi Arabia (151)
- Senegal (152)
- Serbia (153)
- Seychelles (154)
- Sierra Leone (155)
- Singapore (156)
- Slovakia (157)
- Slovenia (158)
- Solomon Islands (159)

- Somalia (160)
- South Africa (161)
- South Korea (162)
- Spain (163)
- Sri Lanka (164)
- Sudan (165)
- Suriname (166)
- Swaziland (167)
- Sweden (168)
- Switzerland (169)
- Syrian Arab Republic (170)
- Tajikistan (171)
- Thailand (172)
- The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (173)
- Timor-Leste (174)
- Togo (175)
- Tonga (176)
- Trinidad and Tobago (177)
- Tunisia (178)
- Turkey (179)
- Turkmenistan (180)
- Tuvalu (181)
- Uganda (182)
- Ukraine (183)
- United Arab Emirates (184)
- United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (185)
- United Republic of Tanzania (186)
- United States of America (187)
- Uruguay (188)
- Uzbekistan (189)
- Vanuatu (190)
- Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of... (191)

- Viet Nam (192)
- Yemen (193)
- Zambia (194)
- Zimbabwe (195)

Q18 Please, choose one of the job categories which mostly describes your current employment.

- ---Select---
- Not employed
- Accounting/ Finance (1)
- Administration and Secretariat (2)
- Art/ Design/ Architecture (3)
- Banking/ Financial services/ Insurance (4)
- Customer service (5)
- Economics/ Business (6)
- Education/ Social Policy/ Training (7)
- Food industry (8)
- Health and social care (9)
- Legal services (10)
- Manual work/ Manufacturing/ Service industry (11)
- Marketing/ Sales (12)
- Media/ Advertising/ PR (13)
- Other (14)
- Pharmaceutical (15)
- Publishing, press, and printing (16)
- Research and Development (17)
- Restaurant/ Catering (19)
- Telecommunications (20)
- Tourism and accommodation (21)
- Transport/ Logistics/ Supply (22)

Attachment 2: interview questions.

My name is Karina. I am a Double-degree Master student of International Business. I am currently working on my master thesis “Content Marketing Strategy in business: the case of adidas”. I would be glad if you could spend 10 minutes of your time to answer the following interview questions which are very important for my analysis. Your expert opinion and contribution will be highly appreciated.

Answers for the interview questions may be kept anonymously, if you wish so.

Please, write your answers below the questions and then forward the MS Word file to mysina.karina@yandex.ru

- How can you describe Adidas as a brand? What story does the brand tell to the audience?
- Who is the perfect buyer for Adidas? What are his/her needs and pain points?
- What does the Adidas’s consumer buying cycle look like? Which stages of the buying cycle are seen to be the most challenging for customers?
- How do you organize a digital content planning? Which tools do you use and why? Do you use any content agencies’ services for the purpose of content creation? Which content distribution channels do you find the most engaging?
- How do you define and measure the success of digital marketing strategy?
- What will the Adidas as a brand look like in five years time?

The results of my analysis can be sent back to you if you wish. Your feedback will be also very valuable for me.

Best Regards,

Karina Mysina

Attachment 3: Adidas Facebook page content analysis from April, 2015 to July, 2015.

Audit of adidas official Facebook page. April, 2015 - July, 2015.					
Size of time interval (in number of days)	Content type	Specified content	Likes	Shares	Comments
-	long video	adidas Climachill commercial	4,712	905	166
4	short video	"Take today" commercial	1,342	306	110
1	long video	adidas: Here's to the Takers	153,802	8,664	1,634
3	promotional picture	adidas Football Predator Instinct boots	2,332	160	111
4	promotional picture	adidas Football boots, Limited edition	2,145	186	121
2	promotional picture	adidas Originals ZX FLUX with a link to possible customization of sneakers	1,890	90	105
3	promotional picture	adidas Ultra boost running shoes	2,729	139	116
2	promotional picture	the best fitting football boots from adidas football Limited edition	4,252	182	160
2	promotional picture	new adidas Ultra Boost for women	1,175	46	91
2	announcement of adidas related event	meet your favourite basketball player in adidas store, Munich	234	12	50
0	long video	adidas Climachill commercial	4,746	237	123
1	announcement of adidas related event	running maraphon in London	1,875	49	174
5	sportsman related post	congratulations to NBA player of the year	783	16	101
4	promotional picture	adidas go app	671	24	156
9	promotional picture	adidas Football No Dye pack Limited edition	3,697	170	200
2	promotional picture	adidas Ultra boost new design	1,604	57	126
3	long video	adidas Football revolution video with hashtag "be the difference"	1,293	258	246
4	promotional picture	adidas Originals Stan Smith shoes	2,398	165	162

3	promotional picture	adidas Football X15 and ACE15 boots	1,439	58	106
0	short video	adidas Football ACE15 commercial	849	132	156
0	short video	adidas Football X15 commercial with a slogan "Destroy order. Smash defenses. Create victory"	1,322	229	628
5	promotional picture	new adidas Golf boots	2,263	132	257
9	promotional picture	adidas Originals Pride Pack	2,558	158	83
3	promotional picture	adidas go app	814	28	68
4	promotional picture	new uniform for Real Madrid C.F.	1,086	90	45
0	promotional picture	adidas Golf apparel	559	22	32
0	promotional picture	uniform for German Women Football team	1,197	25	52
2	promotional picture	new adidas Yeezy boost	2,109	96	106
2	promotional picture	new adidas running Ultra boost	875	20	90
6	short video	new adidas commercial for Yeezy boost by Kanye West	679	74	66
0	promotional picture	adidas Football ACE15	2,649	69	50
1	promotional picture	new adidas Basketball crazy light boost	1,004	35	43
0	non-branded world wide discussed event	adidas celebrates "a victory day in the fight for equality"	3,042	217	126
2	announcement of adidas related event	announcement of upcoming event in cooperation with Parley for the Oceans	1,153	42	51
1	announcement of adidas related event	announcement of current event in cooperation with Parley for the Oceans	600	46	45
0	promotional picture	adidas concept shoes created from Ocean garbage	1,865	177	101
0	promotional picture	from presentation of adidas concept shoes created from Ocean garbage	918	57	93

1	announcement of adidas related event	about past Parley for the Oceans event	629	12	157
1	promotional picture	uniform for Arizona State Sun Devils	918	67	300