How Internet Marketing Tools Influence Customer Relationship Management

----- An analysis based on webinar

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to present how online marketing tools influence customer relationship management (CRM) in a Business to Business (B to B) company. After reviewing the relevant theories, a frame of reference for client relations through the internet is selected from the research of Bauer et al (2002). Six key characteristics of internet were discussed in order to reveal their impact on CRM. Meanwhile, three variables, which are commitment, satisfaction, and trust, are explored to measure the concept CRM. Both qualitative and quantitative research are used in this study, through analyzing the company’s internal documents, the authors come to a conclusion that the internet tool could improve customer satisfaction, commitment and trust, so as to improve customer relationship.

Key words:
Internet marketing Tools, Customer Relationship Management, Commitment, Satisfaction, Trust, Webinar, Multiple method
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1 Introduction

In this part, the background information of this study will be provided. After explaining the importance of investigating the phenomenon, the research question is displayed, which leads to the purpose of this study. Succeedingly, the delimitation is presented along with an outline of whole article.

1.1 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Building customer relationship with partners is essential for any B to B business; it has not been a new concept for the academic world (Kandampully, 2003). Wilkinson (2001) states many examples of different networks and customer relationship between providers and sellers in the trading history. Customer was seen as a significant asset to any profit organization or non-profit organization (Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000). A harmonious customer relationship is a highly competitive edge for the company in the market; no matter from a market share view or from profit point of view (Kandampully, 2003).

More and more organizations become customer-oriented (Peppard, 2000; Lee-kelley et al., 2003). These organizations start to realize the importance of taking CRM into consideration. Kandampully (2003) emphasises that a relationship entails a strategy and long term development plan within the company (Gummesson, 1994; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Researchers in marketing field have a consistent point of view that good marketing management requires building long-term relationship (Houston & Gassenheimer, 1987; Zineldin, 2006; Lee-kelley et al., 2003). A number of reports revealed that it is more economical to carry out a retention strategy than to pursue a new customer (Peppard, 2000). Reichheld (1996) states concretely that 5 percent of customer retention could increase the average lifetime of customer at the rate of 35 to 95 percent, so as to enhance the profit of the company.

1.2 Internet and CRM

There is a common agreement among different definitions of CRM that it integrates technology. Payne and Frow, (2005, p. 168) emphasise “a key measure of CRM’s success is viewing CRM as a technology initiative”. They believe that CRM is an issue associated with information technology (IT). Meanwhile, Clemons, Reddi and Row (1993) state the impact of technology on customer relationship, IT increases ability of information processing and reduces the opportunism risk, and they also argue the inter-organizational relationship would be integrated. Therefore, high
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Technology advancement is a great impetus for the relationship establishment and reinforcement among different types of organizations. Internet business environment has established what makes today distinguished from the past is the transaction to e-system (Peppard, 2000; Lee-kelley et al., 2003). As a new competitive advantage, the requirement for managing the customer relationship through internet is rapidly increasing (Pan & Lee, 2003). Conducting CRM to a computer platform is vital to company’s development and efficiency (Peppard, 2000; Pan & Lee, 2003; Scullin et.al, 2004).

IT has created many new business relationships and has helped business exploit their existing relationships. Database is critical to customer relationship management (CRM), as all the analysis based on CRM rely on the collected data. By using internet as a tool, once a customer comes into contact with an organization, his or her data would be brought together and analysed immediately, including an analysis of account profitability (Donaldson & O’Toole, 2007). Thus, using internet to increase database and maintain the relationship could be seen as a significant strategy for the company’s advancement.

In addition, when internet meets CRM, there is a newly arisen concept called e-CRM which considered as:

“the marketing activities, tools and techniques, delivered over the Internet (using technologies such as Web sites and e-mail, data-capture, warehousing and mining) with a specific aim to locate, build and improve long-term customer relationships to enhance their individual potential” (Lee-Kelley et.al., 2003, p. 241).

1.3 Internet marketing tools

Internet is not only a place for buyers and sellers to discover product information; it also plays a role of intermediary (Bailey & Bakos, 1997). Therefore, the buyers and sellers could be matched on the internet. To accelerate the match, online marketing tools were implemented.

The internet marketing strategy is vital for achieving goals. However, whether the internet activity fulfilled the initial goal is uncertain. A critical influential factor is the instruments which execute the internet activities. Therefore, internet marketing tools were generated to accelerate the internet marketing activities. “New types of intermediary have evolved that sort information and bundle our needs and wants on the web. They act as “hubs” to buyers and sellers” (Donaldson & O’Toole, 2007, p. 198).
Despite the flexibility and efficiency, budget is always a key factor for the marketers to consider when adopting a marketing tool. For these conventional tactics such as TV commercials, radio broadcasting, billboard, or brochures, it sometimes refers to a high expenditure and difficult to control. However, there are other internet tactics could be applied, for instance, internet banner ads, webcasts, or webinar; they are always within the budget (Caldanaro & Pait, 2001).

- Webinar

The explanation of webinar in this article was based on a world leading webinar platform provider Citrix’s Whitepaper 2008. Webinar is an abbreviation of web seminar, which was type of online conference. It provides participants and hosts a platform to communicate. These days, as a forefront media, webinar grows fast and plays a significant role among various internet marketing tactics. The survey, which was taken by Citrix elaborated “over half of the respondent (52 percents) intend to use Webinar as a marketing tactic” (Whitepaper of Citrix, 2008, p. 4).

1.4 Problem discussion

As discussed above, although internet supports CRM performance and a majority of firms have realized the urgency to adopt internet into business. The implementation of internet activities in practice is not satisfied. The Times 2001 (as cited by Lee-Kelley et al., 2003, p. 239) states that “almost two-thirds of British companies [e-business] have learnt nothing about their customers’ performance and behaviour online” and “the future of e-consumer relationship management (e-CRM) is being seriously undermined because of the ignorance.” Another explanation of the difficulty to apply internet in business is that the system is “complex” (Lee-Kelley et al., 2003). Moreover, to build “required technology infrastructure quickly and cost-effectively” is a big challenge (Pan & Lee, 2003, p. 240). Hence, it arouses a desire to go to the topic that when the time goes by, how internet marketing system works nowadays. Meanwhile, in order to make a long-term progress, investigating how to improve CRM is essential to an organization. Therefore, it is very necessary to research the relationship between internet marketing tools and CRM.

1.5 Research Problem

This report tends to explore the relationship between the internet marketing tools and CRM. The research question is formulated as blow:

*How internet marketing tools influence customer relationship management?*
1.6 Research Purpose

The purpose of the report is trying to explore internet marketing tools’ impact on CRM. With a rapid development of internet in business field, there is an emergency to investigate the relation of internet marketing tools and CRM so that can keeps pace with the further tendency. Moreover, through is study, specific advice will be given to the organizations that are using or intend to use internet as a marketing tool to build CRM.

1.7 Delimitation

First of all this study is focus on one selected company--SGS China (SGS is the world’s leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company, its full name is “Société Générale de Surveillance”). The reason is that one of the authors has been working for this company. Nevertheless, the utilization of the internet marketing tools in other organizations are investigated.

Another limitation is that this paper restricts its research field to webinar. Since webinar was the primary internet marketing tool in SGS China, the authors narrow drown the research scope to webinar. However, webinar is one of internet marketing tools; there are various internet marketing tools taken in companies such as website banner, online media release, multiple media game promotion, etc. Besides webinar, other internet marketing tools’ performances are not evaluated in this research. Therefore, it makes this research lack of comprehensiveness to cover all the internet marketing tools.

1.8 Research Outline

In this section, the outline of the study will be presented. The whole research is structured into six chapters which can be seen as followed:

*Chapter 1*- the research background and the research problem are provided, as well as the research purpose and the delimitations.

*Chapter 2*- the theoretical framework along with the literature review is presented.

*Chapter 3*- this part contains research methodology which is about how the study formulated and all the detail such as data collection, data analysis, and research criteria are displayed.

*Chapter 4*- conducts findings from the empirical data which enclose to the research
objective.

Chapter 5- analysis the empirical data in order to answer the research question.

Chapter 6- provides the conclusions and contributions of the research.

Chapter 7- addresses the implication and contribution.
2 Literature Review

Previous literature has examined internet marketing tools and CRM from different perspectives. The following items are the literature which was reviewed by the authors.

- Thompson (2005) investigated the effectiveness of internet marketing tools in Business to Consumer environment.

- Avlonitis et al. (2000) clarified the use of internet in customer-oriented strategy from Business to Business perspective.

- In the field of e-CRM, there are researcheres briefly addressed using internet as a tool to operating CRM (Gilbert et al., 1999; Geiger & Martin, 1999; Luck & Lancaster, 2003; Caldnanro & Pait, 2001).

- Others specifically analyzed e-CRM’s impact on satisfaction with a focus on retail website (Feinberg & Kadam, 2002).

However, this study has been few study focuses on specific internet marketing tool, as well as combine it with CRM analysis. In this article, webinar was chosen as the study object. According to review the previous literature, the authors analyze how the internet marketing tool impact on CRM. The following sections would present a concrete elaboration.
3 Theoretical Frameworks

A theoretical framework will be brought out in this section after reviewing the previous studies of our research field. Six representative traits of internet are considered in order to explore their influence on customer relationship management. Three variables which refer to commitment, satisfaction, and trust are involved to measure CRM.

3.1 Theoretical framework

As discussed above, the theoretical framework was selected from the study of Bauer, Grether and Leach (2002).
According to Bauer et al. (2002), internet marketing has several internal characteristics, such as: *constant availability of information; Efficient transfer of information; Direct addressing of information; Interactivity; Individuality; Integration of transaction*. These characteristics make internet as a distinguished channel from the traditional marketing channel. As a whole package, they impact on customer relationship management. However, it raises a question, how could the influence be weighed? As an abstract concept, CRM is different to measure directly. Bauer et al. (2002) bring three constructs into customer relationship management which are satisfaction, commitment and trust. Through measuring these three concepts, CRM could be weighed. In another word, if the level of satisfaction, commitment and trust are increased, it could be considered that CRM was improved. These measurements were widely used by many scholars, as Svensson et al. (2009), Garbarino and Johnson (1999) state in their studies that satisfaction, commitment and trust are critical elements to measure the customer relationship.

Webinar is an internet based marketing tool, thus the characters of internet marketing tools can be generated from the fundamental characters of internet. Therefore, this framework is suitable for webinar. Moreover, this framework could be applied for all the internet activities. The following sections are going to elaborate the framework.

### 3.1.1 Constant availability

Bauer et al. (2002) emphasize the importance of constant availability of information and claim that it should be given special attention. It is always critical that the company could provide consistent information at anytime while the customer is in anywhere. Traditional marketing tool has many restrictions regarding to the delivery of instantaneous and consistent information. The customer has difficulties in judging the information validity and hard to reaching it when it was needed. Howard (1983) argues the significance of information consistency in marketing management in the study. It would leave the customer a good image of the company, as well as easy for the customer to updated information of a certain company.

### 3.1.2 Efficient transfer of information

According to Ainscough and Luckett (1996), there are several efficient ways for the information transfer and searching on the internet, as they state World Wide Web is a splendid source of information on a great deal of topics. Since it has its extraordinary character for the information transfer, Ainscough and Luckett (1996) also argue that internet is an excellent promotional tool in several ways. As Bauer et al. (2002) explored, the efficient transfer of information could increase customer commitment.
This is because that along with the rapid development of technology, customer could easily get the information and understand better about the corporation, thus lead to satisfaction.

3.1.3 Direct addressing of information

Nowadays, a great number of companies would establish their own official website to enhance the communication with the target audience and existed customers. World Wide Web leads to a huge usage among non-scientists, non-military officials. It was soon introduced to commercial world, and the fast growing technology allows users to share texts, photos, audios and video through the pages. Companies publish their official information through official website so as to show its authority (Tam, 1999).

3.1.4 Interactivity

The internet has been seen as the most cost effective tool. As Watson et al. (2000) state communication is the key for company, the feedback and response from customers are crucial for the company to adjust its marketing strategy and outlook the blue print. Internet provides a cost-effective platform for companies and customers to keeping communication and being more interactive with each other, thus a win-win situation can be reached. For instance, advertisements play a vital role in the internet (ibid.).

3.1.5 Individuality

The mass media brings single information to the public, while the internet could provide a great deal of information to every specific customer, this service could be a tailored service to individual customer. The tailored services and information could be more suitable and valid for the customer to solve their current problem. According to Hagel and Armstrong (1997), internet creates such environment for both companies and the customers where the customer could control the services and potential services. Thus, it brings a great positive power to customer relationship. According to the statistics result, it shows connection with commitment, satisfaction and trust (Bauer et al., 2002).

3.1.6 Integration of transaction

As a muti-media platform, internet provides plenty of information to customer. This integration service could add procudet value and expend the scope of target customer. Customer awareness would be stimulated due to this tracts. Meanwhile, this characteristice as well as made internet impact on “market size and stracture, business buying and selling behavior” (Lichtenthal, 2002, p.3). According to Bauer
et al. (2002), on the one hand, this construct plays negative role in satisfaction increase. On the other hand, it builds up commitment and trust.

As a communication tool, internet has impact on CRM. The six characteristics discussed above are the traits of internet. They influence CRM as integration. Key components of CRM, commitment, satisfaction and trust will be introduced in the following section.

### 3.1.7 Commitment

The definition of commitment has been interpreted in several ways in pervious study. As Anderson and Weitz (1992, p. 30) state “commitment to a relationship entails a desire to develop a stable relationship, a willingness to make short-term sacrifices to maintain the relationship, and a confidence in the stability of the relationship.” Morgan and Hunt (1994) also hold the same view that commitment is a desire of one party to stay in the relationship with another party, and try to make effort in order to maintain the relationship. It was seen as a significant factor of being in a successful relationship (Dwyer, Paul & Sejo, 1987). In Gundlach et al. (1995)’s study, a commitment should be seen as a sort of form of investment from a party. According to Bauer et al. (2002), as soon as the commitment is reached both two parties will become activity to develop the relationship, the interest of sharing information increased as well. In addition, when it comes to a decision-making, the partners will start to consider the mutual benefit.

### 3.1.8 Satisfaction

Satisfaction is defined as common measurement to evaluate the customer perceived value (Keiningham et al., 2007). In Svensson’s (2009) study, satisfaction was seen as a significant construct in business relationships. Maintain a positive customer relationship and make the customer satisfied was taken as one of the essential task in any organization’s operation. Thus, increase the customer’s satisfaction would be critical for any organization. In this study, customer satisfaction was considered as an important element in B to B business. Bolton and Lemon (1999) also state that a telecommunication subs cription services would cultivate a positive overall satisfaction on customer relationship.

### 3.1.9 Trust

Moorman, Deshpande and Zaltman (1993, p82) state that trust is “a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence”. Berry (1995) states that trust is an essential segment of successful relationships. According to Geyskens and Steenkamp (1995), if an organization has trust to its partner, it would provide cooperation and attribute in a long run. Thus enhance the strength among the partners
was seen as an essential task in a business. Ruyter et al. (2001) prove that the relationship characteristics are positively related to trust; furthermore, trust is positively related to the intention of stay. Therefore, strengthen the trust between customer and company is highly significant.
4. Methodology

In this chapter, the design of the thesis and the data collection procedures will be introduced. By using deductive approach, a multiple method which combined both quantitative and qualitative research is adopted. Moreover, the discussion of sampling and research criteria are also involved in this part.

4.1 Research Strategy

There are two main research strategies which refer to quantitative research and qualitative research. Quantitative research is emphasizing on testing and verification. It focuses on fact or reasons for social event; hence it usually keeps distance from data so it could be objective. With a property of result oriented, the approach is logical and critical (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005, p. 86).

Qualitative research was defined as a method that often applies to explore a social phenomenon (Reiss, 1968). As manifested by Ghauri & Grønhaug (2005, p. 86), the essence of quantitative method lies on the understanding. It focuses on understanding the respondent’s or informant’s point of view. Case study was often adopted so that provides a subjective insider’s view. Compare to result oriented of qualitative, it was considered as process oriented.

However, there is a multiple research method which mixed qualitative research and quantitative research. As Jack (1979) clarifies in his article, this combined strategy was first raised by Campbell and Fiske (1959), then carried out by Denzin (1978), who conceptualized it as the “between (or across) methods” type. The utmost benefit gained from this type of method is that it gives the authors confidence to generate the research results (Jack, 1979).

This thesis was carried out to explore how internet marketing tools impact on customer relationship management. We shed light on one selected company and go deep into its marketing department. The way we collected data as well as the data analysis use a qualitative research approach. However, the way we interpreter the article is quantitative. This study emphasizes on testing the theory. With a guidance of an existent theoretical framework, collected data is analyzed. Furthermore, the conclusion is drawn by comparing with the theoretical framework. Through this process, a new insight of the selected theory is accomplished.

The whole research is designed by following the steps as below. First of all, empirical data is provided by SGS China. Secondly, we start to search theory in this field. After reviewing relevant literature, a theoretical framework was generated basing on the previous studies. In order to test the theoretical framework, we extract the relevant
information among the numerous data, after words; find a proper way to analyze data. Finally, through the findings, a conclusion could be drawn.

4.2 Research Approach

Deductive approach is adopted in this study. As Bryman and Bell (2007) presented, deductive approach starts from a theory based view, it emphasizes theory testing and revision. In this paper, a theoretical framework was formulated after reviewing the relevant theories within the field of internet marketing tools and customer relationship management. Subsequently, the data was provided by SGS marketing team. Through all the documents provided by SGS, findings were drawn. By looking through the empirical findings, a final conclusion is drawn; meanwhile, the revision of theory is achieved.

4.3 Data Collection

There are mainly two types of approach to collect data. One is primary data and another is secondary data. The data collected originally by the researcher for the purpose of reaching a specific goal called primary data; the data already existing and repeatedly used by another research called secondary data (Joop & Hennie, 2005).

4.3.1 Secondary Research

Instead of gathering information by ourselves, we choose secondary data which includes documentary secondary data and survey-based secondary data. Documentary secondary data includes written material and non-written material (Saunders et al., 2009). Survey-based secondary data refers to “data collected by using a survey strategy, usually by questionnaires that have already been analyzed for their original purpose.” (ibid. p. 259)

By analyzing secondary data, it saves both time and financial cost. Moreover, by using the company as a data gathering platform, sufficient and representative samples are collected. It might not be reached by self-collection due to the time limitation as well as the uncontrollable factors such as recall and non-response (Sørensen, Sabroe & Olsen, 1996). Last but not least, it provides an in-depth perspective and gives us a better understanding towards the research topic which meets our objectives.

However, considering about the benefits, some disadvantages could come along, for instance not suitable, and lower timeliness (ibid.). In order to enhance the fitness of the secondary data, we contact with SGS China. After telling the research purpose and problem to SGS China, they provided the most relevant information. Furthermore, the survey designed by SGS China was aimed at examining the effectiveness of using
webinar as an internet marketing, which is related to our research. We selected the latest data to analyze in this study.

4.3.2 Data Source

The authors selected SGS China group as a data source provider, because that one of the authors was working for the company for three years. As a Marketing Executive, she was in charge of all the internet marketing activities of SGS China SSC business unit, hence, the statistics can be completely provided.

SSC (System and Services Certification) business unit was chosen as our study object due to the fact that this business unit is virtually the only business unit using webinar as an intermediary to build up the CRM. As a newly developing channel emerged in recent years, internet marketing takes a pioneering role in the field of CRM. Few companies utilize webinar to build CRM. SSC of SGS China is the exclusive business unit to operate webinar during its business promotion, thus our data was all selected from it.

The collected data was directly extracted from SGS internet marketing performance analysis system. Two types of documents are mainly used:

- the subscription statistics monthly report
- satisfaction survey of webinar

4.4 Sampling

There are two general sampling methods which refer to: probability sample and non-probability sample (Bruce, Robert, & Stevens, 2007). The former one is defined as the sample that selected randomly and each unit has an equal chance to be involved. The later one refers to the sample which is not selected randomly (ibid.). The most commonly used samples are: simple random sample, systematic sample, stratified random sample, and multi-stage cluster sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2007)

In this research, the sample was extracted from the satisfaction survey of. All the customers who have joined webinar were involved in the webinar survey. This kind of survey was before and after each webinar. Our study period is from April 2008 to March 2009, during this time of period, there were over five thousand independent data. Considering the huge data amount; we decide to select 200 samples to analyze. These 200 samples were randomly selected from the five respondents within SGS’ analysis system. The industry distribution is displayed in figure 2.
4.5 Data Analysis

Three concepts, commitment, satisfaction, and trust are being measured in this thesis. Since we use both quantitative and qualitative research method in this study, when it comes to data analyze, we category into two parts: quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis.

4.5.1 Quantitative analysis

For satisfaction survey of Webinar, which the figures can be quantified, we apply quantitative analysis. According to the number of variables, there are three approaches to analysis quantitative data: univariate analysis, bivariate analysis, multivariate analysis. The quoted explanation is shown as follows.

"Univariate analysis: refers to analysis of one variable at a time.
Bivariate analysis: is concerned with the analysis of two variables at a time in order to uncover whether or not the two variables are related.
Multivariate analysis: entails the simultaneous analysis of three or more variables. " (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 357)
Hence, due to the restriction of the data, we apply univariate analysis here. Diagrams and tables are adopted in the study.

4.5.2 Qualitative analysis

The information and data were extracted from webinar survey, via analyzing the open questions, qualitative analysis was adopted. First of all, several key concepts are coded from reports. Succeedingly, through constant comparison, three categories are formulated; they are commitment, satisfaction and trust. After structuring the categories, the relationship of internet and each category can be explored.

4.6 Research Validity and Reliability

Validity is concerned with “the issue of whether or not an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept.” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.165) The data was extracted from the company’s monthly report and survey. Some of the confidential documents are revealed so that the real situation can be explored. Meanwhile, in the section of data collection, we select the latest source, which guaranteed the timeliness. Moreover, all the customers who have joined webinar could be the data source. In the satisfaction survey, there are questions which related to commitment, satisfaction, and trust. From the respondents’ statements, commitment, satisfaction, and trust could be directly evaluated.

Reliability refers to “the consistency of a measure of a concept” (ibid. p. 163). There are several factors would impact on reliability such as stability, inter-observer consistency.

- Stability is a standard used to check whether the measures are stable when the time goes by (ibid.). In this study, we start from the perspective of internet characteristics to investigate its impact on CRM. These internal traits will not change over time. As a part of internet, webinar’s characteristics are stable as well. Samples in this study were randomly selected, which presents the objectivity and the representativeness of the study. Thus we draw the conclusion that the result can stands time.

- Inter-observer consistency refers to whether the judgments made by observers are consisting with others (ibid.). In this research, the way we interpreta data is objective. The figures are all directly extracted from the company’s. For the respondents’ statements, we record the original words. When it comes to categories, because the satisfaction survey of webinar already has the categories of satisfaction, commitment and trust, we just apply them under the corresponding items. Hence, if one goes to the field of the relationship between the internet marketing tools and CRM, with a focus on webinar, and as well as chose SSC BU of SGS as his or her research objective,
he/she can come to the same findings. However, every researcher has their own perspective; the conclusion may differ. Our study results can keep as a reference for others.
5 Empirical Data

In this section, the company background of the data provider-- SGS will be presented at the beginning. Followed by the company profile, obtained data is displayed in forms of graphs and records of the respondents’ statements.

5.1 Company Background

SGS’ headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland. It is the world’s leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company. It was recognized as the global benchmark for quality and integrity, SGS employs over 50,000 staff and operate a network of more than 1,000 offices and laboratories around the world. It currently employs over 7,000 employees in China, cities which include Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Wuhan, Suzhou etc. SGS has ten BU (Business Unit) in China, it covers Agriculture, Mineral, Consumer Testing, Automotive, Environment, Government Institution, Life Science, Industrial, Gas, and System Services Certification. SGS China was founded in 1991 as a joint venture between SGS Group and China Standard Technology Development Corp., under the State Administration of Quality Technical Supervision.

5.2 Summary of empirical data

In order to enhance its sales and build the brand awareness, SGS China performs a series of internet marketing activities. Webinar is a critical activity to link and communicate with customers on the internet environment. The data was provided by SGS China Marketing team.

5.2.1 Email Campaign

In SGS China, E mail campaign was combined with webinar event promotion; the subscription link of webinar was always embedded in regular E mail campaign. Regular Email Campaign is a key activity for SGS China team, SGS China sends email newsletter to its registered customers, in which it releases the latest business news and new services package. Customers registered the newsletter voluntarily; SGS China provides many portals to attract its potential customers to subscribe and unsubscribe its free newsletter. Regular e newsletter subscription quantity is recorded as below:
### 5.2.2 Webinar

Webinar is the latest internet marketing tool in SGS China, which allows all the registered accounts to get on a same platform and communicate with the webinar host and other participants for free. The customers who have registered webinar, could receive relevant information about a certain subject from the webinar host. Since the activity takes place online, there is no restriction for the location of all the participants. Comparing to the onsite seminar, webinar allows more participants to join, and more cost effective than the traditional seminar, the feedback of customers is instantaneous, which is easier for the marketers to evaluate the feedback from customers, and adjust the future marketing plan. Webinar content is closely connected to SGS China business, which includes the latest management standard certification flow, the tips for the organizations to successfully pass related certification and verification, understand SGS China service package and it would promote its competitive edge for supporting the customers to entitle the certificate. There is a survey after each webinar; the purpose of taking the survey after each webinar is tracking the performance of webinar as an internet marketing tool. In the empirical data part, 200 samples were randomly selected from the document that SGS provided; the same 200 samples in the survey were analyzed in the context below.

As the key internet marketing tool, SGS China implemented webinar in May 2008. While the participants registered the webinar, it would request and record basic information of customers, it automatically converted to a form, SGS China marketing team would distribute the information to relevant offices,

#### 5.2.2.1 Constant availability

Webinar deliver constant information to the customers, all the customers who joined the seminar will get the link of the online seminar record; the customers could watch the record at any time which is good for them. SGS China webinar supports online downloading, every customer account could download the full video, and it could be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Subscriber amount</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Subscriber amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 2008</td>
<td>4605</td>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>9489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>9157</td>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>9571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2008</td>
<td>9216</td>
<td>December 2008</td>
<td>9684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2008</td>
<td>9252</td>
<td>January 2009</td>
<td>9727</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2008</td>
<td>9355</td>
<td>February 2009</td>
<td>9843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2008</td>
<td>9435</td>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>9983</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3 SGS China E Newsletter subscription record (April 2008 to Mar 2009)*
permanently kept, for the customers’ further reference. Webinar content is constantly available on SGS China official website; further documents were attached with webinar information, so as to enable the customers to always get the first hand source. Customers showed great interest in the permanently available information online. According to the documents that SGS China provided, customers are willing to see the webinar as an internet tool to help them know more about SGS China and its services; especially they prefer the convenience that webinar brought to them.

5.2.2.2 Efficient transfer of information

Due to the characteristic of constant availability of webinar, it provides efficiency to the customers whenever they would like to get the information. All the customers who joined the webinar are from all over China, largely distributed in many cities. 200 samples are selected to analyse, those 200 samples are the representative whose company is doing business with SGS or is willing to do business with SGS. They are from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Tianjin, Nanjing, Suzhou, Shenyang, Harbin, Chongqing, Chengdu, Zhongshan, Changsha, Hengyang, and it almost covers all the first and second tier cities in China. The concrete customer distribution as follow:

Consider delivering the same information in traditional method, it costs huge martial and human resources. It saves almost 30% marketing cost in 2008 by reaching the 17% sales increase of 2007 (SGS China 2008 marketing report). The efficiency of information delivery also increased SGS China customer e-newsletter registration quantity; compare to the same time in 2007, the average increasing rate is at 110% (SGS China E Marketing Monthly Report April 2008 to March 2009).
5.2.2.3 Direct addressing of information

The efficiency of information delivery brought great convenience to the customers, while enjoying the convenience, customers still consider about the credibility of the information. During webinar, all the customers get the first hand information from SGS China. Afterwards, the consultancy and service would be provided by SGS China, there have been over 10,000 subscribers of SGS China joined the event, all the subscribers get the monthly e newsletter from SGS China directly, the customer would love to receive those information could subscribe the e newsletter for free, and it would be informed once there would be an upcoming webinar available. The growth acceleration went down from January to March 2009; however, the subscription amount is still growing compare to the same month in previous year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Subscriber amount</th>
<th>Comparison with same month in previous year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 2008</td>
<td>4605</td>
<td>8% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>9157</td>
<td>114% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2008</td>
<td>9216</td>
<td>115% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2008</td>
<td>9252</td>
<td>116% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2008</td>
<td>9355</td>
<td>119% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2008</td>
<td>9435</td>
<td>120% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>9489</td>
<td>122% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>9571</td>
<td>124% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2008</td>
<td>9684</td>
<td>126% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2009</td>
<td>9727</td>
<td>125% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2009</td>
<td>9843</td>
<td>124% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>9983</td>
<td>120% growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 SGS China E Newsletter subscription record
(April 2008 to Mar 2009 with a comparison of previous year)

5.2.2.4 Interactivity

Customers always have questions and doubts about the information that SGS delivered, thus, a communicative platform is essential. There are several ways for SGS China and the online customers to have the interactive communication. During the webinar, the host would show what he is going to present on the screen, every online customer could receive the same information, and have a free discussion via the webinar platform. It could organize a series of interactive sections for the customer to raise their questions, or vote their opinion to a certain point; the host could answer the question online via either audio or text. The vote result and questions answer could be analyzed and shared immediately by the system itself. The host could convey the result to all the online participants. On webinar, a question
could be raised at any time, Communication between customer and SGS China is instantaneous and smooth.

5.2.2.5 Individuality

Customer has different concerns due to their specific circumstance; therefore, it is very necessary for SGS to answer specific question individually and provide a tailored service to every specific customer. Customer satisfaction rate was evaluated after every webinar, according to the documents that SGS China provided to the authors, every customer would state their own opinion on how they perceive each webinar after participation. The authors extracted the satisfaction feedback from the data, and analyzed the correlation content level and visiting permission. Each customer who has been on the webinar will be treated individually both online and offline, during the webinar, SGS China staff will filter the questions that the customers raised and answer it online. Should the customer would like to talk to the expert online, it could also be achieved. SGS China would carefully follow every customer who used to be with SGS China on webinar. SGS China conducts a survey after each webinar, which helps SGS China acquire each individual’s personal information. After the webinar, the customers’ feedback will be sent to the relevant offices and followed up by the local marketing team members, upon the permission from the customer; SGS China representative will pay a visit in the customer’s office. All the customers’ information is highly confidential in SGS, customers’ information is strictly kept under the confidential policy, and it will not leak to either the third party or the customer’s competitor.

5.2.2.6 Integration of transaction

Due to the convenience that webinar processes and above characteristic that it has, SGS China does not keep its services only in the internet environment, via the internet marketing tool (webinar), SGS China provides a full package of integration services, by analyzing the satisfaction level, SGS China would send its representative to have the off line meeting with the customers who have the willingness to have a further contact with SGS China. In the 200 samples, 89 of which requested a further conference with SGS representatives. In order to provide a better service, SGS China would mark those customers who seek a further service in a higher level, routinely send quarterly company magazine, which is a hard copy that records all the latest news of certification industry, SGS China project case study upon different management system as well as SGS China management certification training arrangement. Customers who get those paper magazines could easily get in touch with the representative in their own city and consult any business service information as they need.

Among the customers who do not intend to initiate a conference at that time, could choose to keep further contact with SGS China in the internet environment. An E
newsletter subscription link was provided in the end of every webinar, all the participants who joined webinar could subscribe it for free. Customers could leave their willingness to meet SGS representative during webinar or in the reply of SGS E newsletter. An offline service and free consultation will be provided afterwards.

5.2.3 Customer Relationship

Webinar in the internet environment provides a perfect environment for SGS China and its customer to communicate freely. Those characteristics of internet allow the marketers in SGS China team to maintain its customer relationship on the internet. While webinar supports to increase the sales of SGS China, it largely improves the customer relationship. SGS China CRM database was growing rapidly since webinar was implemented. SGS China releases its upcoming webinar event both on its website and monthly E newsletter, according to the E marketing report that SGS China team provided to the authors, the visiting traffic to SGS China website was soaring. Before each webinar, the registered customers could raise any question concerning the certain subject. At the end of each webinar the customer could leave their opinions and comments to SGS China team in the survey. Besides the both surveys before and after webinar, SGS China conducts interactive section to allow the customers involve in the live event as well, in order to encourage as many participants to talk as possible, SGS China provides some gorgeous presents to the customers who gives the right answer of a certain question or the customer who provided a piece of valuable advice. SGS China would receive and analyse those feedback of each webinar event. The following contexts indicate the satisfaction, commitment and trust performance from the customers who have been joining SGS China webinar.

Satisfaction

Customers reflect a high rate of satisfaction, among the 200 samples that the authors analysed, 74.3% customers are satisfied with webinar. 36.4% of the samples express that they are SGS China current customers, they are content with the relationship that they are currently having with SGS China. 44.2% of the samples sees webinar as a positive and excellent tool that connect SGS China and the customers, over 50% of the customers who joined the webinar hope SGS China could continue to operate the tool, they would like to communicate with SGS China lively on webinar. Customers indicated in the survey that they felt a positive connection and communication with SGS China team, many customers think not only the participant in their company benefit from the that webinar provided, but the customer’s whole team learnt the tips of effective management system.

As quoted from a customer “It is very convenient for us, we don’t have to go out and spend so much time in the traffic jam to attend a seminar, SGS China provide the same environment for us to talk to the professional auditor, which is really helpful for our management system improvement.”
Another customer from Hunan province states in the survey that “We are very satisfied with the free webinar, we could apply the record and share it within our team, and we wish SGS could continue to hold this event online.”

Commitment

The old customers of SGS were satisfied with the valuable services that SGS China provides and would like to take a further action. In the final part of the survey after the webinar, many customers left their valuable comments to SGS China, among the 200 samples that the authors have chosen, 87.5% of the participants would like to join the future webinar to understand more about SGS China services. In the meantime, 47.4% of the samples expresses that they would like to meet SGS China representative, and they would like to keep in touch with SGS China team on certain services. Many customers think webinar encourages the partnership with SGS China, as the customers were impressed about the professional attitude that SGS China professionals made. Their interest in meeting SGS China representatives is growing: the willingness of cooperation with SGS China was inspired. Among the 200 samples that the authors studied, 33% is the new customer, who had never taken any services from SGS before, in the 33% new customer, more than half express that they expect a partnership with SGS China.

As quoted from the customer “We love webinar as the communication tool, we have been participated this event before, and it helped our whole team to understand well the new version of ISO 9001, we could like to continue the partnership with SGS China. This lively tool is really user-friendly and we love the whole arrangement that SGS China provided to us.”

Another quote from a new customer was “This is the first time that we try to use the new tool for us, it is easy to follow and we almost got no trouble to master it in a short time, this tool is interesting to us, and we are interested in SGS’ services, hopefully we will have a happy partnership soon. We expect SGS China could improve the audio quality of webinar, which could make us get your point clearer and easier”

Trust

Many of the customers who joined webinar have been in the partnership with SGS China for many years; they were well maintained and have a routine communication with SGS China. As their commitment was compensated by excellent work from SGS China, they expect a long term partnership with SGS China. Once SGS China launched webinar as a new internet marketing tool to communicate with customers, the blue-chip customers in SGS China database were soon informed. 67% of the samples that the authors have chosen are old customers; those customers had business with SGS China before. The professionalism from SGS China impressed the customer and the quality/price rate of SGS China services were seen more much competitive
than other competitors in certification and verification industry, SGS China’s integrity also enjoy a good reputation in the field, thus, many customers have been in the partnership with SGS China for many years. 68% of the old customers think SGS China is a well trustworthy company, this is the most important reason that why they chose SGS China as their partner. In the customers’ bidding process with their clients, they were requested to pass quality management system and environment management system as well as other industry relevant system. 56% of the old customers have taken more than one service from SGS China. Customers see SGS China is a ideal partner that they are not only help the organizations to pass certain auditing, SGS China considers the best way for customers to get a cost-effective services, since SGS is the world recognized independent third party, its qualification is no doubt. While reach SGS China annual sales target, SGS China also considers reducing the customers’ cost when the customers take the certification services, webinar allows the customers to just stay in their offices and not go out to join an onsite seminar, however, they could still be informed the latest information of a certain service, which saves the customers’ time and cost on transportation. Joining webinar is totally free for all the customers.

SGS China brought up the technical advanced tool for the customers, which also impressed the customer that SGS China is not only professional in its certification verification and testing filed, but also SGS China a technical advanced image in the industry. 35% of the old customers see SGS China as a trust worthy partner according to the documents showed.

A customer who has been working with SGS China for 5 years said: SGS China always delivers its promise to us, it perfectly meets every requirement, and their suggestions are valuable for our system improvement. We would like to continue the partnership with SGS China and we all see it is our trustworthy partner.

Another customer also thinks that: SGS China is a reliable partner, it was an impressive experience on the previous projects that we have been working with SGS China, we wish we could continue this positive partnership and we love webinar, which saves us much time and sources on transportation, the specific introduction of ISO 14001 greatly helped our fresh staff to learn, learning from SGS China webinar has been a kind of training within our company.
6 Analysis

6.1 The internet

6.1.1 Constant availability

SGS China makes use of internet to conduct a constant communication with its customers. Webinar is a new tool for internet marketing, since it is very easy for marketer to save the video and provide it to the customers. Customers need information before they choose its service provider, the webinar platform, which is a stable internet medium, the customer could study the capability of SGS China and its professionalism, the significance of keeping information constantly availability has been argued by Howard (1983). The satisfaction of customers shows that the customers are pleased to have webinar and its record for their future consideration of taking the relevant services.

6.1.2 Efficient transfer of information

Webinar allows many different ways for SGS China to convey its information via internet environment. Efficiently transfer information on the internet supports SGS China accelerates its communication with the existed customers and potential customers. Internet has been seen as an excellent promotional tool (Ainscough & Luckett, 1996), its efficiency of information transferring is a significant important reason. The efficiency of webinar not only benefits SGS China but also provides a convenience to the customers. According to the data that SGS China provided, the customers on webinars are from different cities in China across the first and second tier cities. Transferring information on the internet saves the promotion cost of SGS China, in the meantime, it saves the customers’ sources as well, customers do not need to take any transportation, and they could communicate with the experts in their own offices to understand the latest ISO (International Organization for Standardization) items and certification process. SGS China marketing team does not need to assign any representative to visit the potential customer nor initiate any cold call.

6.1.3 Direct addressing of information

Customers, especially B to B (Business to Business) customers, would like to reduce the risk as low as possible. According to Tam (1999), internet has been an important consideration in the commercial world, when a company seeks a partnership. The customers are very careful in choosing partners, especially when it concerns the customers’ management system improvement. Besides the significance of having a
trust worthy partner, the customers would consider the resources cost of searching and negotiating with potential partners. Thus, via operating webinar, SGS China has taken the advantage of getting in touch with the customers who need the relevant services, SGS China is the organization that both conduct webinar to release latest industry information and operate the certification and verification services to its customers. Webinar allows SGS China connect with a board amount of customers lively, the direct addressing of information avoid any misunderstanding nor mistake that made by agencies.

6.1.4 Interactivity

According to implementing webinar as the internet marketing tool, SGS China creates a highly interactive environment with customers online. Since webinar supports different types of online communication, SGS China acquired a great deal of information of the customers, which allows SGS China host and the participants online enjoy a vivid discussion, thus SGS China would understand what is the critical concern of its customers and potential customers when they are thinking about taking any services. Depending on the questions, online voting could test how well the customers understand its new services and updated management system notification. As Watson et al. (2000) mentioned the critical status of communication in a company, the company not only needs to convey its information to the target audiences, but also needs feedback from its customers, thus, and it could keep improving its services and products. Webinar provides SGS China and its customers a free platform to discuss relevant issues. No matter the host or SGS China support team on webinar could both answer the question instantaneously. An easy technical environment makes the customer would like to bring up their own thoughts, which has always been an important source for SGS China to operate the continue improvement.

6.1.5 Individuality

Every customer’s information will be sent to relevant office for further analysis. Before webinar was operated, SGS China had already been fully informed the participants’ profiles from the registration form. Every customer is distinguished from another, Hagel and Armstrong(1997) argue that internet is an excellent environment to control every customer, it provides an opportunity to treat each customer differently; onsite seminar does not allow SGS China representative to talk with each customer. Treating customer in an individual way could help SGS China tailor a specific service package for different customers. A tailored-made service is always being highly appreciated; it used to cost SGS China a lot to well maintain a customer. Since webinar was implemented, SGS China marketing team could rate the priority of visiting the customer offline. With the priority list, SGS China team could compromise its resources on the blue-chip account.
6.1.6 Integration of transaction

Internet environment provides an integrated environment for webinar implementation and other online tools. As an integrated online services package, webinar is an important joint. SGS China makes use of email campaign to promote and announce webinar event, in the email campaign newsletter, it allows the subscriber use the link to register webinar. As Bauer et al. (2002) state, an integration of transaction could enhance the commitment and trust from the customer. From the increasingly growing E newsletter subscription amount, it could tell that great deals of customers are very interested in webinar, since the growth rate in April 2008 was stable as previous month, in May 2008, when SGS China started to conduct webinar to offer a brand new environment for customers to understand more about SGS China, the subscription amount was soaring in May.

6.2 Customer Relationship

6.2.1 Satisfaction

Due to the convenience usage of webinar, many customers show their satisfaction and content with SGS China, many customers expressed that they do not have to spend so much on time cost and transportation cost, furthermore, the information that webinar conveyed to the customers could be recorded and shared with their colleagues within the team. Satisfaction is a positive response of a working relationship (Geysken, et al., 1999), thus, from satisfaction perspective; webinar is proved to be a positive tool in enhancing customer relationship.

6.2.2 Commitment

Commitment has been seen as a desire that customer would like to work with the service provider (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). The empirical data shows that webinar plays a role as a bridge between customer and the company, its whole implementation and arrangement of webinar event impressed both old and new customers and the professionalism from SGS China team. Though there are some slight improvement that the customers expected, the customers are still very content with the value that webinar provided. Commitment is a significant point to evaluate the customers’ relationship with SGS China.

6.2.3 Trust

Enhancing the trust with customers is significant for SGS China to maintain a long term relationship with the customers. There were a number of customers have been working with SGS China for years, the new internet tool makes them see the
improvement of SGS China. Customers see while SGS China supports their advancement, SGS China also keep developing itself. 33% of the old customer sees SGS China as a trustworthy partner, and trust has been seen as an essential segment of a successful relationship (Barry, 1995). The customers would like to see the service provider invest in improving their services for the customers. Making use of the high tech tool also showed a well-developed image of SGS China, its positive improving actions earns trust from its customers.
7 Conclusions

In this report the authors analyzed how internet marketing tool influenced customer relationship, the six key characters of internet were discussed and the three measurements of customer relationship were examined.

Webinar as a new internet marketing tool has been getting popular in the business world. Different from the traditional marketing tool, online marketing tool enjoys many advantages such as low cost, instantaneous communication, user friendly functions, well structural formed customer information, and so on.

In this study, as the empirical data and analysis showed, 74.3% of the samples see webinar as a helpful tool and they are satisfied with the services that the company provided. While SGS China makes its customers satisfied, the customers are willing to make commitment to do business with SGS China, 47.4% customers would like to meet SGS China representative, as cited from the customer, that “the tool is really user-friendly, we would like to continue the partnership with SGS China”. In the perspective of SGS China old customer, SGS China was portrayed as a trustworthy company. Webinar improved the persistent communication among all the parties, which impressed the old customers that SGS China’s continuous improvement of its services. As an internet marketing tool, webinar plays a positive role in cultivate and maintain customer satisfaction, commitment and trust. Depending on the characteristics of internet environment, webinar provides many value-added services that traditional marketing tool could hardly offer at the same cost. The positive influence on the three aspects improved the relationship between the company and customer. As an internet marketing tool, webinar fully makes use of the advantage characteristic of internet. Relying on the internet environment, webinar could provide the utmost benefits to the customers, in the meantime, the internet environment also enable the company perform its technical-advanced image. Considering the analysis of customer feedback in the webinar survey, customers indicates a positive response to the webinar operation. Those positive responses result in satisfaction, commitment and trust to the company. Thus, customer relationship was improved and reinforced, and it grows in a positive direction.

In a conclusion, as an internet marketing tool, webinar supports organizations to strength and enhance its partnership with a board number of customers. While the customers are eager to join more free webinars from SGS China, they would like to subscribe SGS China E newsletter as well, which shows that they would like to be connected with SGS China in a broad way online. The six characteristics of webinar are all important in delivering information and communicate with customers, as well as building and maintain a long term relationship with customers. The authors would perceive internet marketing tool plays a positive role in enhancing customer relationship.
8. Implication and further study

This article is a practical reference for SGS China marketing team and other organizations. The contribution of the article could be guidance for SGS China team and other organizations. Webinar should be promoted when it starts to launch its new services. Webinar could be a tool that tests customers’ reflection on a certain new services, since it is the most cost effective tool in front of such amount of customers. Meanwhile, consider the customers’ suggestion; SGS China should improve the technical quality of audio broadcasting. The six characteristics could be seen as six advantages of taking webinar as the internet marketing tool, when SGS China marketing team considers improving its online services, it should start to improve from the six aspects and keep on monitoring and modifying it.

In the further studies, the authors perceive that it is necessary to evaluate other internet marketing tools and analyze the comparison with webinar. It would support the marketers to choose a suitable marketing tool to achieve the marketing goal.
References

Article:


**Books:**


