

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the years, the internet combined with other information communication technologies, has created many interesting and innovative ways to provide customer value (Strauss and Frost 2011) which are affordable especially for smaller and medium sector businesses.

The importance of developing an effective e-marketing strategy is indicated by Michael Porter (2001) who said that *'The key question is not whether to deploy Internet technology – companies have no choice if they want to stay competitive – but how to deploy it.'* (<http://www.marketing-insights.co.uk>)

Thus, this paper discuss about the relevant online e-marketing strategies that can be adopted to effectively market and promote an outdoor events organisation that operates locally. E-marketing, in particular, offers increased benefits such as online mass customisation of products and personalisation information to suit the different customer needs, convenience with the ability to reach any time form anywhere throughout the day, learning, engaging and communicating with customers through social media effectively, yet, at a highly reduced cost of marketing and customer service. Overall, this paper tries to identify how e-marketing can lead for efficiencies in supply chain and customer relationship management increasing long term revenue with added value.

To help the discussion and to come up with a suitable strategy and proposal on how a firm can successfully create a community of loyal followers online, this paper has focused on a fictional company naming "A-Ventures" operating over 15 years in the UK.

The report has identified the changing nature of consumer behaviour and how companies can reach the potential customers, attract them, and enhance their experience to retain with the firm by adding value with the aid of technology not forgetting the importance of relationship marketing. The main internet communication channels and strategies including the modern digital marketing mix and tools such as search engine optimization, search engine marketing, web advertising and usability, database marketing, pays per click and other social media marketing elements are also identified highlighting their importance. The report also emphasise the recent legal and ethical dilemmas faced by the digital marketers.

Through the use of a prototype working model of a social networking page created on Face Book and a model blog page on Blogspot, the report goes on to illustrate the strategic considerations of internet marketing in driving traffic and building up followers with recommendations for further improvements including a possible budget increase linked to aims, objectives and key performance indicators.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The events industry in United Kingdom presents an opportunity for the UK to be the global business destination of choice and at the same time, create real growth for UK events by generating business opportunities for local firms leading to the formation of vital international business and research networks (<http://www.businessstourismpartnership.com>)

According to the Events Industry Forum statistics in October 2011, sports events industry in the UK is estimated to bring an annual income revenue of nearly £3 billion by year 2015 with combined other 'invisible' benefits in the country's export earnings potential.

With over billions of people regularly using the web on a daily basis searching for products to services, entertainment, information coupled with the changing consumer behaviour and changing ways companies market to consumers and businesses, digital marketing media such as email, web, mobile, and interactive television have been increasingly used at present to endorse brands while providing new horizons to marketers to expand their reach for market growth locally as well as internationally in addition to the traditional marketing and advertising. On the other hand, this also provides new and emerging challenges for firms with the changing patterns in the marketing environment with the power shifting from companies to consumers and the increasing concerns on laws and ethics.

## **2. COMPANY BACKGROUND**

Established in year 1995, "A-Ventures" is one of the leading companies in the UK specialising in extreme sports events. With over 300 centres across the country, this organisation caters for a young market segment, aged between 18-35, who are active and outgoing and are interested in adventurous sports activities. A-Ventures specialises mainly in two types of extreme sports categories which are mountain sports including rock climbing, mountain climbing and mountain biking and sky sports including the traditional bungee jumping, hang gliding, paragliding, sky diving and hot air ballooning flight.

As part of its innovative and multi activity expansion strategy and to promote adventure sports among the young individuals, the company also offers a range of training courses to the complete beginners up to advanced learners, expert advice, and outdoor activity day-outs. Meantime, as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) the company also conducts fund raising events, such as skydives and parachute jumps with many volunteers taking part combining adventure and excitement with fund raising to help good causes. Hence, A-Ventures was able to successfully build its brand reputation in the industry over the years, coupled with its high quality and professional expertise services.

Today, with the ever increasing competition in the outdoor events sector in the UK, A-Ventures is finding difficulties to expand its reach to the potential youth customers with the vast array of choices offered and the heavy marketing communications and promotional campaigns in the industry.

When analysing the company's current marketing and advertising strategies, so far A-Ventures has focused only on off-line general traditional marketing methods as advertising on television, national press and specialist sports and youth magazines, conducting seasonal promotions and giving special package price reductions. Further, the company's existing customers tend to refer their friends and colleagues who are interested in trying out the types of sports activities offered by the company with recommendations adding vastly to the company's long term credibility.

On the other hand, with the use of information and communication technology which offers small to large scale businesses cost effective marketing and promotional strategies with strong customer relationships with opportunities to reach even those beyond local, A-Ventures can possibly consider adopting an online platform to help reach its targeted market customers and expand its growth potential.

### **3. KEY FINDINGS**

#### **3.1. External environment**

##### ***a. SLEPT***

It is important to identify the external business environment that will affect the firm through a SLEPT analysis. This will include the legal, ethical, technological, competitive, market related issues that will create A-Ventures opportunities and threats especially when adopting an e-marketing platform.

##### **SOCIAL**

The current social demographics, education levels, lifestyle, social habits, ideology, ethics and public value etc., greatly influence consumer's behaviour and attitude towards how the company will have to design its online marketing communications.

##### **LEGAL**

The recent increase of advertising standards and control procedures, data protection and taxation laws extending to online business platforms has limited the scope of online marketing and promotional activities.

##### **ECONOMICAL**

Countries vary in their level of economic development. When looking at the United Kingdom, it is regarded as a developed country, highly industrialised and use technology to increase production efficiency and as a result have a high gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Therefore, United Kingdom ideally serve for a broad range of e-marketing activities.

##### **POLITICAL**

The power and influence of the Government agencies and regulatory bodies towards the internet and information technology means will have an impact on the company's online business platform.

##### **TECHNOLOGICAL**

The emergence of the advanced technology and broadband in the United Kingdom is very high. This means more households have access to the internet with mobile and wireless internet expanding the reach of consumers even further.

##### ***b. Porter's 5 forces***

The competitive advantage of A-Ventures can be analysed by using **Michael Porter's Five Forces** analysis which can be applied to assess the competitive advantage of the overall industry or the industry attractiveness.

#### THREAT OF NEW ENTRANTS (Medium)

Threat of new entrants is medium in the outdoor sports events industry. On the one hand, everyday day new destinations are explored or developed in the local and global industry. But on the other, this sort of business requires quite a substantial initial investment to acquire necessary equipment as well as to comply with all health and safety regulations. New entrants like low price discounters catering locally may pose some challenges to firms like A-Ventures.

#### RIVALRY AMONG THE EXISTING PLAYERS (High)

Rivalry among the existing players in the overall industry is intense due to the price cutting strategies following the current economic conditions in the UK. Competitors like ExElement, Maximum Adventure Sports UK, Extreme Dreams, offering a vast array of events and product categories is a major problem for a firm like A-Ventures which caters only a niche market segment.

#### THREAT OF SUBSTITUTE PRODUCTS (High)

There are various substitute sports activities available in a global context where A-Ventures should constantly upgrade its places of events and product offerings by increasing more service facilities and constant product innovation.

#### BARGAINING POWER OF SUPPLIERS (Medium)

There are many specialist suppliers for outdoor sports events supplying the necessary goods and services for the different stages of an event; from the conceptual and planning stages, through the project design and construction to the delivery of the actual event and legacy of the event. Suppliers are part of the key players in helping carrying A-Ventures' operations on a daily basis across the country. Unless the company is having a firm relationship with its existing suppliers, the bargaining power of suppliers can be regard somewhat competitive in the industry as many suppliers in the UK tend to secure more business contracts at major events like the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and other similar events around the world, including high profile sporting events (<http://www.ukti.gov.uk/export/unitedkingdom/england/item/129489.html>).

#### BARGAINING POWER OF BUYERS (High)

As there are many alternative places and choices for outgoing adventure lovers, the bargaining power of the individual customers is also increasing where customers tend to look more value for the money they spend with the facilities provided by the firm. Given the means of ease of information with the information and communication technologies this can be regarded of extreme importance to be considered.

### **3.2. Internal environment**

#### ***a. BCG portfolio matrix***

The BCG matrix which is based on the product life cycle theory can be used to determine what priorities should be given in the product portfolio of a business. To ensure, A-Ventures long term value creation, the firm should have a portfolio of product offerings that contain both high growth products in need of cash inputs and low growth products that generate cash. The bigger the market share a product has or the faster the product's market growth, the better for the company.



continuous need to attract new people, although, referral marketing is currently used as a tactic to overcome this issue.

Finally, A-Ventures doesn't have a well-developed digital marketing strategy which makes it fragmented and consequently ineffective.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

Adventure sports is seen as a rapidly expanding sector in the sports industry internationally and is regarded as one of the best ways to spend free time, as an unusual and memorable recreation activity boosting moral at corporate events, and as a perfect gift experience for those who prefer taking challenging experiences.

Due to the latest developments and achievements in technology and equipment, the level of personal safety while indulging in the extreme activity has increased by this means stimulating demand.

Moreover, with the emergence of internet technology, A-Ventures has a vast potential to reach international customers with low cost of marketing and advertising. The recent integrated marketing and communication channels have provided favourable conditions for the organisational brand image enhancement and effective personal customer relationship management. However, the company's success in the market will greatly depend on how these opportunities are exploited.

#### THREATS

Though UK natural resources are favourable for most of the extreme sports types, more exciting and therefore more competitive sites are available all over the world such as the Himalayas and the Alps for mountain climbing, Australia for bungee jumping, France and Switzerland for hang gliding, and so on. Therefore, the business is exposed to the competitive threat that comes not only from its direct national rivals such as ExElement, Maximum Adventure Sports UK, Extreme Dreams, etc. but from its international counterparts as well.

It should be pointed out, that the success of the company depends on its ability to understand and attract the market through the marketing communication channels especially offered by the internet, since more and more people at present have an increased tendency to browse the internet for obtaining information about products and services and to make their decisions by consulting other like minded customers from across the world. The current lack of digital marketing at A-Ventures is a potential threat causing major concerns and risks for the business's future existence.

### **3.3. Current marketing strategy**

#### ***a. Segmentation, Targeting, Differentiation, Positioning***

In its first phase, choosing the value, the strategist "proceeds to segment the market, select the appropriate market target, and develop the offer's value positioning. The formula - segmentation, targeting, positioning (STP) - is the essence of strategic marketing." (Kotler, 1994). Thus, the main components of any marketing plan will typically centre on segmentation, targeting and positioning which are the three marketing strategies that should be used by A-Ventures to effectively promote the company to potential customers as a leading outdoor events company. It is also important that A-Ventures look into how it can differentiate itself with the use of technology.

Segmentation strategy plays a profound role in the success or failure of A-Ventures online strategy. From an online marketing perspective, A-Ventures can typically make use of demographic and psychographic segmentation when creating the online marketing and media communications.

Nielsen//NetRatings and Booz-Allen & Hamilton undertook a research partnership called the Digital Customer Project for the purpose of using Web-usuage tracking to better understand and target online customers. The study grouped online users in seven groups:

- **Quickies** - Quickie sessions are typically short (one minute) and center around visits to two or fewer familiar sites. These users consume bits of information, such as sports scores and stock quotes, or send email.
- **Just the Facts** -With rapid page views, users seek specific pieces of information from known sites. Perhaps they are trying to find a specific pair of jeans. Their sessions are usually transaction-oriented.
- **Single Mission** - Users want to complete a certain task or gather specific information, then leave the Internet. These users' visits involve more reading than Quickies'. Users may go to unfamiliar sites to find what they need and leave when they find it. For example, a woman may go onto a search engine to find a particular movie theatre, and then go to the site to find a movie, then book tickets, and sign off.
- **Do It Again** - Sessions are notable for the lingering two-minute page views. Most users stay on sites they have visited. Typical activities include banking, gaming, and streaming music.
- **Loitering** - Users leisurely visit familiar "sticky" sites, such as news, gaming, telecommunications/ISP, and entertainment, with longer sessions and multiple page views. Page views may consist of gathering information on a favorite baseball player in that night's game.
- **Information, Please** - Users build in-depth knowledge of a topic. Doing so may include research on a single site or a few familiar sites. These occasions are heavy on the use of directories and travel, automotive, and government Web sites, but light on telecom sites and portals/search engines.
- **Surfing** - As the name hints, this group spends the largest amount of time on the Net. Surfing results in wide but not deep explorations of sites, including shopping, online communities, and news, with little time spent at portals/search engines and education sites. (<http://www.clickz.com>)

Although, this may not be a standalone way of targeting consumers online, nevertheless, the above categorizations will allow A-Ventures to look deeper into the mindset of the consumers.

Based on the above-mentioned segmentation and the understanding of customers' requirements and company's capabilities, we believe an ideal candidate for the product must possess the following characteristics:

- Young (18-35)
- Active sports lovers and risk takers
- Technology optimists with a high level of income
- Dedicated to interactive online entertainment

- Open-minded with a high level of education

As A-Ventures is catering to a niche market segment, the e-marketing plan should be tailor made in such a way that it reaches the targeted segment in an effective and efficient manner. Also it is important to profile each target group in our scenario the young people including students and high income and understand their requirements and expectations so that the firm can pitch the related costs and benefits at the correct level.

To maximise the customer value, consumer behaviour patterns will be studied before the segmentation in which their taste and preferences, attitude and buying behaviour will be assessed to a great extent. At the same time, Pareto’s Principle can be very effectively utilised where he describes that 80% of profits usually are derived by 20% of customers. In order to determine the most important 20% of the segment who can generate A-Ventures 80% of profits online, it is vital to conduct continuous market research and understand the nature of the consumers who will purchase A-Ventures’ product offerings and develop customer relationship management strategies accordingly in the online platform.

**b. Ansoff’s matrix**

The Ansoff Growth Matrix can be considered to help A-Ventures’ positioning strategy serving as a strategic alternative in deciding about the product/service and how to use the internet to the help different market growth strategies. The output of this matrix assists in developing the future online growth strategies for A-Ventures as follows;

	<b>PRESENT PRODUCT</b>	<b>NEW PRODUCT</b>
<b>PRESENT MARKET</b>	<b>MARKET PENETRATION</b> Use internet for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Market share growth, to compete more effectively online</b></li> <li>- <b>Improve customer loyalty adding value to product/services and brand</b></li> </ul>	<b>PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT</b> Use internet for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To add value for existing products</li> <li>- Develop digital product offerings</li> <li>- Changing payment procedures, subscription</li> </ul>
<b>NEW MARKET</b>	<b>MARKET DEVELOPMENT</b> Use internet for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>To approach new geographic markets</b></li> <li>- <b>To approach new market segments</b></li> </ul>	<b>DIVERSIFICATION</b> Use internet for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Diversification to related businesses</li> <li>- Diversification to unrelated businesses</li> <li>- Upstream integration with suppliers</li> <li>- Downstream integration with intermediaries</li> </ul>



From the above diagram, it is clear that market penetration is the best strategy that should be focused by when designing the company's online marketing platform at present as it has to increase its dominance in the present markets with present product offerings using digital media.

Similarly, the different internet strategy related issues can be summarised using the classic SOSTAC(R) model for structuring marketing strategy. (Chaffey and Smith, 2009) (Appendix 1) Firstly, an online marketplace analysis needs to be performed to determine the company's online customers' behaviour, especially searching direct competitors and intermediaries that can be used to promote the product offerings. The company should then set goals for the type of outcomes that are expected to be achieved to start engage visitors with the products offered. These will usually equate to different pages on the web site which form the online value proposition. In the internet market strategy the firm needs to identify the target audiences and what to offer them online through the value added features, in other words the online unique value proposition with strategic options for customer acquisition, conversion and retention. The tactics would have to mainly focus around the key media channels for internet marketing which includes search engine marketing, online public relations, online partnerships with third parties, interactive advertising, email marketing and viral marketing coupled with traditional offline marketing communications. The actions require planning the e-marketing campaigns utilising the existing resources, and analyse the performance with the web analytic tools. (Chaffey et al, 2009)

#### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **4.1. The transformation of A-Ventures traditional business model into e-business model**

The development of online marketing strategy for A-Ventures should start from transformation of its traditional business model into e-business model where a company sustains itself in the long term by using information technology. By adopting a suitable business model to the existing operations through the Internet A-Ventures can not only sell its product and service packages online but also have an engagement with its existing and potential customers. E-business model is advised to be adopted by A-Ventures in activity as well as business process levels ([www.mohansawhney.com](http://www.mohansawhney.com)).

##### ***Activity-levels models to be developed by A-Ventures***

A certain range of A-Ventures individual business activities can be automated using information technology and the internet. The obvious advantage of this will be the consequent cost reduction due to e-business efficiencies. First of all, all the communication between A-Ventures and its customers can be done through online channel with the usage of e-mails and social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube. Moreover, content publishing will be of great value for the company as it will help A-Ventures to draw traffic to their website and provide sufficient information about its products and services. Finally, online secondary and primary sources of information can be used in the company's business intelligence activity. Online information is easily accessed and can be obtained at no cost or for an affordable membership fee or a one-off payment.

##### ***Business process-level models to be developed by A-Ventures***

It is recommended that the organization makes the use of an online **customer relationship management system** to help the involvement of the customer care life cycle. CRM software helps to build an ongoing personalised relationship with the individual customers to increase the number of

their transactions with the company. Using digital processes and integrating customer information collected at every customer 'touch point' will help Ventures to have a clear idea about its customers behaviour and preferences all stored in an electronic database with automated report generations when required. It should be pointed out that the company has a little percentage of repeated customers but relies heavily on personal referrals. Staying in touch with its past customers, A-Ventures increases the chance of attaining new clients through friendly recommendations and a word-of-mouth. Furthermore, CRM would contribute towards database marketing and overall company's knowledge management with customer account information, sales and other valuable information which will help for future decision making. Finally, by adopting a community building strategy online A-Ventures can draw the attention of special interest groups in its target market, for example groups of those who love mountain biking, sky diving, bungee jumping, etc. Thus, the company can invite users to chat and post comments and videos on the website, the company's social media network pages like Face Book or YouTube and on blogs to help create a buzz online and attract potential customers with user generated contents. This will also help to strengthen social bonds increasing customer engagement and customer relationships while building the company image to be regarded as experts in the specific areas with the increasing number of followers.

#### **4.2. E-marketing strategy. Theoretical background**

The marketing strategy becomes e-marketing strategy when marketers use digital technology to implement the strategy. E-marketing strategy in other words is the design of marketing strategy that capitalise on the organisations' electronic or information technology capabilities to reach specific objectives. (Strauss and Frost, 2011) Thus, e-marketing can be regarded as a powerful way to build brand and start and strengthen the relationship with the customers.

While the e-business strategy which is part of the corporate strategy should be designed by careful analysis of the internal capabilities and the wider environment, when designing a successful e-marketing strategy, it is important that it is consistent with the overall marketing goals and current marketing efforts the organisation. Also, marketers should deliver brand messages that capture and hold the audience attention as not only customers are in control of the internet unlike other media communications but also can widely disseminate their own views and brand experiences.

Any strategic plan tends to explain the rationale for chosen objectives and strategies, **Kalakota and Robinson (1999)** suggest four appropriate types of rationale. Firstly, the strategic rationale shows how the strategy fits with the company's overall mission and business objectives, and where it will take the firm if successfully accomplished. Operational justification identifies and quantifies the specific process improvements that will result from the strategy. For example, if a customer relationship management (CRM) software is proposed for the online marketing platform, how will that translate to increased customer retention and higher revenues. Technical justification shows how the technology will fit and provide synergy with current information technology capabilities as for example whether there is interoperability along the currently integrated supply chain. Finally, the financial justification examines cost benefit analysis and uses standard measures as return on investment (ROI) and net income. (Strauss and Frost, 2011)

The **AIDA model** can be taken as a guide for the organisation to select online and offline marketing communication tools to help create awareness, interest, desire and action among consumers. Also, the **hierarchy of effects model** of “think, feel and do”, is important as it helps marketers understand where consumers stand in relation to the purchase cycle which helps the company to select appropriate communication objectives and strategies (Strauss and Frost, 2011).

Possible e-marketing communications strategies include websites, social media, emails, bloggings etc that facilitate communication with targeted markets. The online content is critical for a company to build brand image, create awareness, and position itself in an online platform.

### **4.3. A-Ventures e-marketing strategy**

#### **a. Website**

Setting a company website is possibly one of the first things to do when entering an online market. As we have stated in SWOT analysis, A-Ventures has already created a comprehensive website which is an effective PR tool, serving as an electronic brochure with current company products information. It is a highly beneficial tool for A-Ventures since it's an affordable way of making potential clients aware of the organisational brand and the firm's scope of activities. Moreover, it is easy to update which makes the content always current and a reliable source of information for the customers. One key recommendation to be made here is the website interaction. Since the company has embarked on the way to its better understanding of the online market, it's highly beneficial to let the clients communicate with the organisation itself as well as with each other, by sharing experiences and leaving feedback. Personalisation is another key feature that could enhance website effectiveness in terms of customer relationship development. The website can be automated to greet users by name giving a personal touch to online experience with the company. Finally, we advise to position web content that can work across all platforms. From the point of view of CIM affiliate member Graham Hansell (2010) this task is essential, taking into consideration that 2011 is the year of the mobile.

#### **b. SEO**

Search marketing is becoming one of the key parts of online marketing and refers to the act of marketing a website via search engines. It can be done in several ways including listing rank improvements (natural search), paid listing purchases (paid search) and pay-per-click advertising. Search engine marketing is highly recommended for A-Ventures as it would help the company to drive qualified visitors to its website and convert them into customers.

First of all, the company should look at the ways to improve the volume and quality of its organic website traffic through SEO techniques. The simplest way to do that is to index the site based on the most popular keywords, used by people while they search for similar and related products. Wordtracker ([www.wordtracker.com](http://www.wordtracker.com)) is one of the online tools that help to discover the most popular searches for similar products for a small fee. Moreover, Google AdWords ([www.adwords.google.com](http://www.adwords.google.com)) can be used to assist the decision about the keywords to use on A-

Ventures website. It is important that A-ventures give prominence for Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) tactics in order to effectively compete on an online marketing platform with the right key word strategies in place. It should be noted that a right keyword strategy in place will also allow A-Venture’s potential customers reach the correct landing pages with the information they are looking for when browsing the web for the relevant information.

The table below outlines the most popular phrases that are used globally and locally to find similar to A-Ventures’ services.

	<b>Global monthly searches</b>	<b>Local monthly searches</b>	<b>Competition</b>
<b>Extreme sports</b>	301,000	40,500	Low
<b>Outdoor activities</b>	165,000	49,500	Medium
<b>Outdoor adventure</b>	165,000	14,800	Medium
<b>Adventure sports</b>	90,500	6,600	Medium
<b>Activity days</b>	49,500	22,200	High
<b>Experience gifts</b>	27,100	12,100	High
<b>Adventure holidays UK</b>	9,900	9,900	High
<b>Adventure weekends UK</b>	5,400	5,400	High
<b>Bungee jumping UK</b>	4,400	4,400	High
<b>Extreme sports in UK</b>	1,900	1,600	Medium

Taking into consideration the relevance of the phrases to A-Ventures’ business, the average amount of local monthly searches and the level of competition the following 5 keywords have been chosen:

- Extreme sports
- Outdoor adventure
- Experience gifts
- Adventure holidays UK
- Adventure sports

According to the SEOMoz.com 2008 industry survey the most popular SEO tactics used to help achieve greater rankings are optimizing title tags, meta description tags, headline tags and on-page keyword usage. Therefore, those tactics are advised to be implemented on A-Ventures’ website.

Moreover, high quality web content is advisable in order to create a clickable copy. In the article ‘How to create winning web content’ Kate Hilpern states that search engine experts recommend that keywords should constitute anything up to 10 per cent of the total copy. The idea of stuffing as many keywords as possible is outdated. Google is looking for context between the search someone makes and the copy it finds on the page. Thus, A-Ventures is urged to think about themes around its keywords. For example, for the keywords listed above words like ‘sky diving’, ‘mountain’ or ‘adrenaline’ should be mentioned, since this is how search engine differentiate between original and spam content. Title tags are recommended to be written with the keywords rather than the brand name. In addition to the content itself, factors such as friendly URLs, navigation, accessibility and language all have an effect on whether a link falls on the first or third page of search results.

In the case of urgent need to increase sales of the company through increased website traffic, pay per click advertising is recommended. The same keywords can be used for that purpose. Pay per click advertising may appear to be cost-effective and delivers immediate results unlike SEO campaigns. While an SEO campaign will eventually produce more website visitors of a higher quality and lower unit cost, it could be a long time before you see the full benefit.

#### **c. Viral marketing**

One of the best strategies of advertising in present times, viral marketing is the online equivalent for referral marketing where individuals forward the company's e-mails for friends, co-workers, and others in their email list. Viral marketing becomes an effective tool only if the recipients' friends are in the targeted market. As A-Ventures current strategy of getting new consumers is partly based on the references by the existing customers, viral marketing can be effectively utilised online to further enhance this experience through facilitating communication messages through email, video clips, photos allowing sharing on FaceBook or even on micro mini sites like Twitter. For example, as the popularity of implementing viral marketing campaign has taken the form of video sharing, today YouTube has become the second largest search engine in the world. A-Ventures can possibly develop on this strategy by uploading videos of its events onto their YouTube channel not only as a means to interactive communication but also to start get the messages go viral among the potential customers.

#### **d. Permission marketing**

This is another very effective low cost digital marketing method, when consumers opt-in, giving permission to receive commercial e-mail. Seth Godin in his book "Permission Marketing" explores the advantages of this technique as opposed to interruption marketing which appears to be very costly and ineffective due to the number of messages an average person is unwillingly exposed to online during the day and his/her developed ability to ignore them. The benefits of online permission marketing are advised to be exploited by A-Ventures. This method of communicating with customers is targeted at the company's advocates, people who are really interested in the dialogue. Therefore the close relationships with them could entail repeated business as well as open opportunities to attain new customers through the word-of-mouth.

#### **e. Social networks**

In her book "Know me, Like me, Follow me" Penny Power talks about the modern business landscape which is being shaped by the forces of collaboration, partnerships, reputation, and relationships. The founder of the first online business network Ecademy (1998) believes that staying connected with your customers and building long-term relationships with them through regular informal communication undoubtedly leads to brand loyalty and increased sales.

Social media is a term used to describe the type of media that is based on conversation and interaction between people online through sharing photos, video and other digital content. Twitter and Facebook can be regarded as the strongest social networks at present. And there is evidence

that since they've become so popular, there is a decline in e-mail usage. The July 2010 E-mail Marketing metrics report from MailerMailer ([www.mailermailer.com](http://www.mailermailer.com)) reveals that average e-mail open rates have fallen consistently since the second half of 2007. And a recent Nielsen study found e-mail's share of internet users' time has declined by 28 per cent since June 2009, while social media increased its share by 43 per cent ([www.nielsen.com](http://www.nielsen.com))

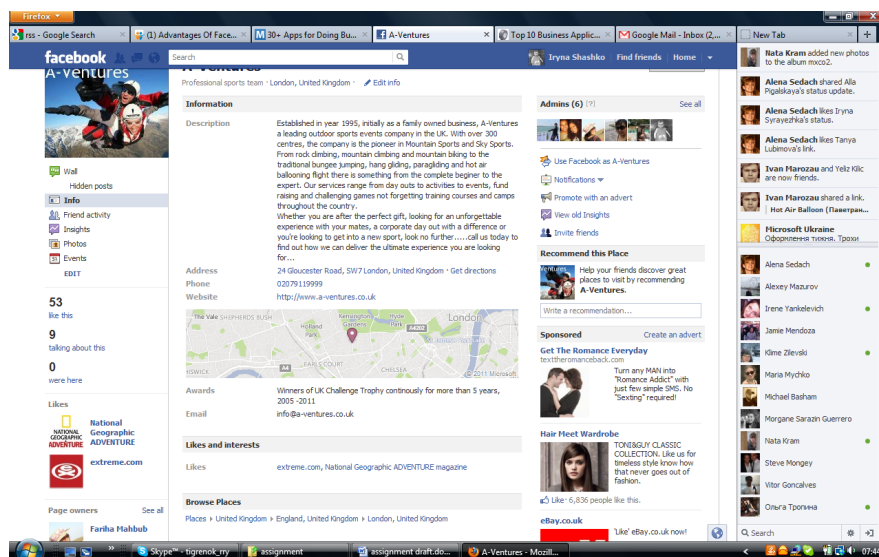
John Manning in his article "E-mail versus social media" highlights the need of today's marketers to keep their customers engaged and entertained, which is comparatively easy to do through the creation of business pages on social networking sites due to their manifold interactive widgets and apps.

A good example of effective use of social networking is the Starbucks Facebook page, with 26,514,576 fans who've connected to the brand and discuss its merits.

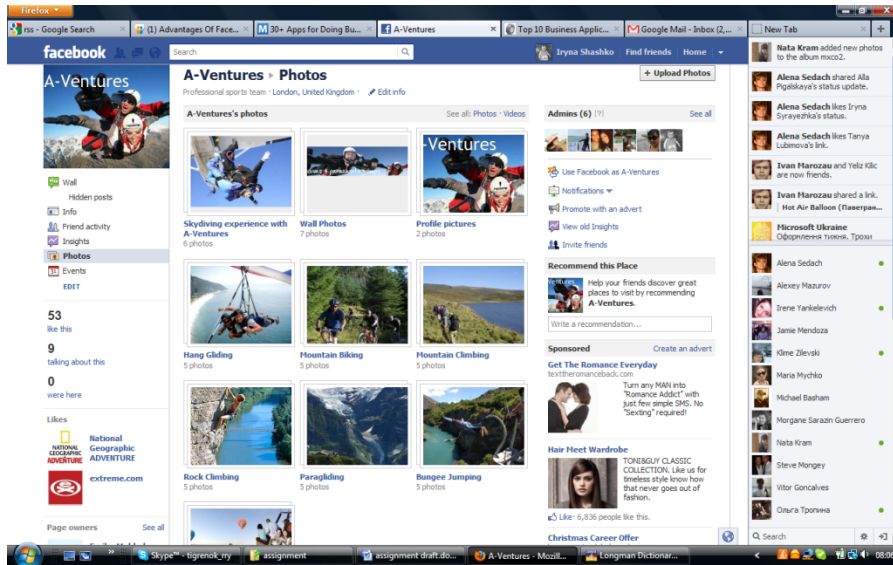
A Facebook page has been created for A-Ventures as an essential part of its e-marketing strategy. The company has chosen Facebook as a start-off of its online social networking, due to Facebook focus on the establishment of deep connections among people, which are based on emotions and mutual trust. Since the company relies a lot on word-of-mouth effect, Facebook provides a good platform for making personal referrals and recommendations of services more natural.

### Facebook applications for A-Ventures

There exist lots of applications on Facebook which A-Ventures would find helpful in increasing its brand image awareness and identity, for example, an info section on the page which provides the most important information about the business, such as business contact details, brief history, the overview of the company's products, winning awards, like and interests and so on.



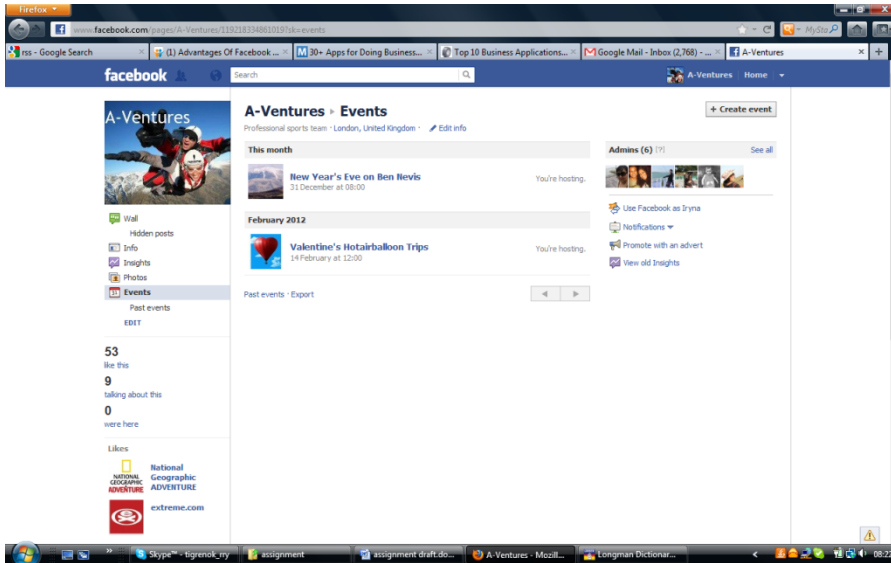
Posting videos, slides, videos, postcards to Facebook page also helps to maintain the interest in the company. An extensive photo album section has been created to help potential customers create a visual idea about A-Ventures' services.



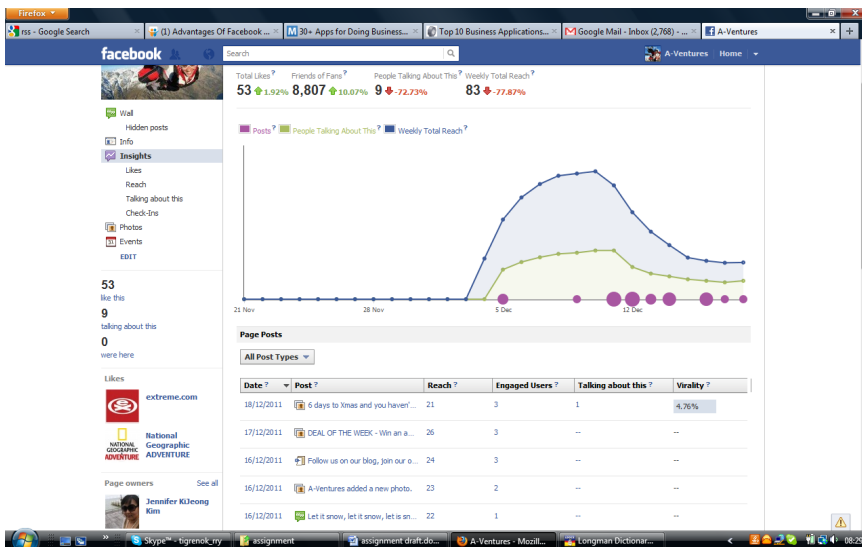
The company's regularly uploaded content provides an ongoing view of A-Ventures' profile. Posts to the organisation's wall in the form of status updates, shared images, articles, recent blog posts, result in continuous online buzz of the company's services.



Active participation of A-Ventures' in dialogues with its customers in the form of comments and feedback helps the organisation to understand its present and potential clients' expectations and build trust as well as provide help and assistance if needed. Moreover, the company has an opportunity to invite its fans to various events and parties.



Furthermore, statistic data in Facebook insights section provides A-Ventures' with valuable metric information about the number of likes, weekly total reach, engaged users, etc. We will talk about it in a more detail further down.



Facebook is found within top 5% of all Google searches, therefore plays an important role in driving traffic to the company's website, blog and other promotional sources. In the future the company is recommended to find the practical use of many other interesting applications available on Facebook to help A-Ventures' to build up the followers and consequently increase its online market share.

## f. Blogging

Also known as web logs, blogs are websites where entries are listed in reverse chronological order and readers can comment on any entry. According to blogpulse.com there are more than 24,000 blogs started each 24 hours. The popularity of the blogs is explained by their ability to build credibility for business, create traffic for your site and enforce a business brand establishment.



Regular blog posts are a reliable source of information for targeted customers as well as the means to become more visible for search engines. There are many sites where you can create your own blog. Blogspot.com has been used to create a blog for A-Ventures. Please, follow the link:

[www.a-ventures-lsbf.co.uk/](http://www.a-ventures-lsbf.co.uk/)

An effort has been made to make the blog simple, good looking and as entertaining as possible to attract our target audience. Product and industry related posts are published on a regular basis and cover various fields of possible interests of the company's clients. Google, Apple and Microsoft news gadget has been included in the blog presuming that A-Ventures' audience would appreciate the quick access from the blog to the overview of the latest world news as well as modern technological developments. The blog can be easily followed and shared.

From the business prospective, this blog can be used to analyse A-Ventures' present and potential clients: what are they interested in, what are their thoughts and ideas. A poll gadget has been installed with the purpose to find out more about A-Ventures' present and potential customers. Moreover, blog stats provides valuable analytical data about the daily/monthly number of pageviews, traffic sources, most popular posts, audience geographical coverage, etc. Please, refer to Appendix 3 for A-Ventures' blog and blog stats screenshots.

#### **g. RSS feeds**

A client-side tool with a pull strategy, RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds is undeniably one of the best tools after e-mail communication allowing users to subscribe to blogs and websites. The subscribers will receive notifications as soon as there is a new information posted either in e-mail, or an RSS feed reader where A-Ventures can possibly send RSS feeds to customer emails, Twitter, phones etc.

#### **h. Affiliate marketing**

As a further online marketing tactic, A-Ventures could also consider in getting into affiliate programs marketing online with links in thirds party websites which prospective customers visit. This can be useful especially given the fact that A-Ventures already get a significant number of new customers by existing customers referring in an offline basis.

On the other hand, the company can also consider adapting mobile marketing in future offering information on smart devices like iPhones, PDAs etc., due to the increasing use of mobile devices among the youth. If so, the websites and online services should be developed in such a way they are able to be used through smart devices with scrolling and liquid web pages that allow the information to be resized to the width of the device's screen.

## **6. PERFORMANCE METRICS**

It is vital to measure the results to determine the success of the e-marketing strategies undertaken by A-Ventures. Thus, performance metrics also called as key performance indicators (KPI) are specific measures designed to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall organisation's

operations both online and offline. Because strategy is a means to an end, performance metrics should be defined along with the strategy formulation so that the entire organisation will know what results constitute successful performance (Strauss and Frost, 2011).

The performance metrics translate the strategies into components with measurable outcomes. One of the e-marketing goals needing metrics include, attracting visitors to the website to convert them to business and building visitor loyalty. On the other hand, the metrics must be easy to understand and accessible to use for decision making. Also, the metrics should be actionable as A-Ventures can benchmark the previous period's metrics to decide where the organization stand after setting metrics goals for future, for example increasing the time visitors spend on the website.

### **6.1. WEB ANALYTICS**

Web Analytics help A-Ventures to review the user behavior on its web pages and help make changes to better meet the needs of users. For example, softwares like WebTrends, tells which sites the users visited immediately before arriving, what keywords they typed in search engines etc. By using web analytics,

A-Ventures can collect data as users click through pages and use it to optimize the online investments. Commonly collected metrics identify the tactics which generated site traffic (either by search, engines, online advertisements etc), which pages are viewed most often, how many comments were posted on a blog, and how many fans are there in the company's social media page.

### **6.2. FACE BOOK INSIGHTS and BLOG STATS**

On the other hand social media networks and blogs also provide metrics for businesses to help analysis the efficiency of the customer engagement. For example, A-Ventures can make use of Facebook Insights or its blogs stats to have an insight of the metrics around the content. By understanding and analyzing trends within user growth and demographics, consumption of content, and creation of content, A-Ventures is better equipped to analyse whether they reach the targeted segments and improve their business and create better experiences on Facebook and on blog. Please, refer to Appendix 2

### **6.3. THE BALANCE SCORE CARD**

Further, the Balanced Scorecard, which is an enterprise performance management system, can also be regarded as a good framework for understanding e-marketing metrics (Strauss and Frost, 2011). It is used to align business activities to the vision and strategy of the organization, improve internal and external communications, and monitor organisational performance against strategic goals. It suggests to regard the organization from four perspectives, namely customer, internal, learning and growth, and financial and to develop metrics, collect data and analyze it relative to each of these perspectives.

<http://www.balancedscorecard.org>).

A-Ventures can possibly make use of this model by applying for e-marketing to identify measurements on customer loyalty, retention, life time value, customer browsing patterns,

appropriateness of selected targets etc. Customer engagement online is an important metric involving the number of comments, photos, or other user generated content posted. Internally, the company can measure target market surveys, number of complaints, amount of time taken to answer customer e-mails, number of problems or issues covered through the website, percentage time of uptime server, number of updates per day etc. The learning and growth measure which falls under human resources can measure number of new service products to market in a year, number of new service features not offered by competitors, percentage sales from new services, number or types of improvement over time etc. From a financial perspective, A-Ventures can measure the profits and return on investment apart of the market share percentage, dollar volume of sales from time to time and costs of advertising per customer.

#### **6.4. TOOLS OFFERED BY THIRD PARTIES**

Moreover, A-Ventures can possibly make use of other tools offered by outside parties to help measure its brand awareness online. For example, **BrandsEye** is a tool that comprehensively tracks every online mention of the brand, while having the capability to generate a precise score that accurately reflects the state of the company's online reputation. (<http://www.brandseye.com>)

#### **7. BUDGET**

The key in any strategic plan is to identify the expected returns from an investment to develop a cost/benefit analysis to measure whether the efforts were worthwhile. A-Ventures would probably use a sales forecasting method for estimating the website revenues in the short, intermediate and long terms. This is because estimating the website traffic overtime affects the expected revenue the company can generate from the website. However, it should be noted that the many intangible benefits of e-marketing strategies are difficult to measure. For example, putting a financial figure on the value of increased brand awareness from a website is a very challenging task yet essential for the firm.

The money saved through internet efficiencies is considered as soft revenues for a firm. For example, A-Venture can save the cost of printing and postage of direct mails by the use of e-mails.

On the other hand, e-marketing incur many costs including costs for employees, hardware, software, programming, website building, hosting, maintenance, search engine optimization etc., and may also incur some traditional marketing costs as the cost of offline advertising to draw traffic to the website.

#### **8. ETHICAL AND LEGAL ISSUES**

Interestingly, A-Ventures can always use the data collected by the company side push tools and metrics to effectively conduct personalised e-mail marketing communications based on what the customer viewed on the website. For example, cookies are small files written to the user's hard drive after visiting a website and when the user returns to the site, the company server looks for the

cookie file and use it to personalise the site. Behavioural targeting will occur, on the other hand, when software tracks a user's movement through a website and then sends appropriate web content at a moment's notice. By identifying the nature of consumers relying on other customer recommendations, collaborative filtering software gather the recommendations of an entire group of people and present the results to a like minded individual (Strauss and Frost, 2011).

However, this sort of modern technology presents radical challenge to marketing ethics. For example, the ownership of intangible data or intellectual property, the role of privacy in a virtual environment, the extent to which freedom of expression should be allowed, the use of data including methods of collection are some of the critical ethical issues that has arisen. Often visitors are generally unaware that marketers are collecting data and using these technologies to customise offerings. Further, the organization will also have to take into consideration the new UK regulations governing the use of digital and social media which gives certain implications from a marketing perspective.

Websites like Facebook have come under fire for using the personal information of their users in advertisements and sharing with third parties. Recent legislations have tried to address some of these issues which in turn build new challenges for marketers. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) which is UK's independent regulator of advertising across all media, has extended its remit (CAP Code) significantly to deliver more comprehensive consumer protection online. The new remit which was introduced in March 2011, will ensure the same high standards as in other media. The implications this will have on an e-marketing perspective will include the fact that communications on A-Venture's website will be subject to the [standard ASA regulations](#) which aim to control marketing communications on all UK websites, regardless of sector, type of businesses or size of organisation. Further, communications in other non-paid-for space i.e. social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter will also be governed. However, the company will not be responsible or comments posted by third-parties but of those under the control of company employees. In the search engine marketing point of view while natural search results that turn up via a Bing or Google search will not be included within the CAP Code, however paid ads like Google are a form of advertising and fall within the remit of the code. Also, the promotional videos such as adverts or content aimed at selling a product or search are covered by the code, but, editorial video content intended to communicate an opinion are not. (<http://www.smartinsights.com>)

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has recently published new guidance for online marketers with amendments to the 2003 Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations. According to the new law, firms should obtain consent to store for cookies on user or subscriber devices by providing clear and comprehensive information about any cookies the firm is using. This will give serious implications for A-Ventures when using cookies for analytical purposes to count the number of unique visits for the website and for cookies that are used to recognise return users where the greetings could have been tailor made for example. (<http://www.smartinsights.com>)

While e-mails potentially been regarded as spam, which doesn't build relationships but instead focuses on customer acquisition, companies like A-Ventures can adapt responsible marketing where

customers agree to receive e-mails for which they have opted in, with the chance to be taken off the list through unsubscription at any time.

If A-Ventures is considering to adopt e-commerce payment facilities to register and make payments online, then the organisation will also adhere to the e-commerce laws in the UK.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

E-marketing has become an integral part of the businesses' marketing operations in recent years with products, marketing communication messages, dynamic pricing all tailor made to individuals and delivered over the internet. Marketers should make use these emerging opportunities which help increase value and reduce costs.

By online and offline strategy integration evident in multichannel marketing, firms can offer customers more than one way to approach such as allowing to subscribe for site content, download widgets, add content to wikis, message boards, and corporate boards and the corporate blogs, view video clips through their site as well as through iTunes and YouTube.

By engaging in community building tactics such as websites, blogging etc, firms like A-Ventures can create social bonds that will enhance customer relationship while building the company image as expert in the knowledge area. The efficient use of technology and CRM will allow the company to leverage resources by investing more in the most lucrative customers as technology and data collection techniques will allow companies to identify the high value customers and respond with offers in real time over the internet. On the other hand, the marketers must be agile and flexible for blog posting and responding to consumer generated media in social networks as well. As content changes rapidly and moves around blogs and social network pages in a flash, fresh, relevant, and interesting content makes potential customers engaging.

In the long run, while an efficient and appropriate e-marketing strategy will increase the revenue streams of the organization, however, it can also lead to decrease value if the websites are complex, information is hard to locate, and technical difficulties interrupt data access for customers.

The overall success depends on continuous evaluation of the implemented e-marketing strategy. Although e-marketers pay special attention to information-gathering tactics using website forms, feedback e-mails, online surveys etc., to collect information about customers and prospects, performance metrics are more useful tools in facilitating the analysis to ensure the company meets the set goals. The company should also not forget to pay attention for ethical and legal norms when undertaking e-marketing.

Finally, whereby globalization has changed the way marketers conduct business and the significance advances of information and communication technology have created a wealth of opportunities for firms, A-Ventures, by adapting an e-marketing strategy can further consider to attract customers from Europe more cost effectively. The company can as well as looking into conducting events overseas looking at the market demands analysed through its online data. However, the firm should be alert to the significant differences that will influence the e-marketing strategy.