A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master Degree in

Management from the NOVA – School of Business and Economics

MARKETING PLAN

FOR ONLINE ACTIVITY OF

ROTA VICENTINA

BOOSTING DIRECT WEBSITE SALES

Direct Research

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A Project carried out on the Master in Management Program, under supervision of Professor

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Abstract

The nature tourism experienced a great expansion of its market with the appearance of different lifestyles.

In this Work Project a study regarding the website direct sales of Rota Vicentina was developed. Its website shows the idea of being solely an information structure and not a purchase one, leading to a current absence of online sales. Hence, it is suggested the modification of its business model, using different instruments and channels. Some digital marketing recommendations were developed in order to boost website sales, such as a platform for online reviews, remarketing campaigns and social media activity.

Keywords: Rota Vicentina | Digital Marketing | Online Distribution Channel | Optimization

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To Marta Cabral

       for the time dedicated and knowledge transmitted

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1. Introduction

Over the past years our society has experienced great technological advances, having affected in several ways on people's lives. From the purchase of products to the way we live, communicate, travel, and learn, among others, the changes have been possible due to technological advancements brought to our society. Due to this fact, the businesses are always trying to keep up with this change in peoples' behavior by modifying or adjusting their vision. Thereby, the online network has become an important component when it comes to outline a business strategy and somehow a way to optimize companies' distribution channels.

In the tourism sector, the internet turned into a very powerful tool. Nowadays, the online information has become the preferred source when planning a travel. A change from traditional Travel Agencies to Online Tour Agencies has been observed in the last years. Hence, in this Work Project it was developed a profound study and research regarding e-commerce and digital marketing in order to analyze Rota Vicentina's online activity.

The aim of the Work Project is to create a Marketing Plan for the online activity of Rota Vicentina by developing several digital marketing initiatives with the main goal of having representative sales made directly through its own website. The inefficiency of the website to drive their visitors to buy its products represents itself a big challenge for the company. Moreover, its structure suggests that it is a website which only provides the possibility to share information and ideas, with the exit page never been considered as the purchase one. The association has registered sales mostly through the other distribution channels as well as via direct call. Therefore, the creation of an efficient website is essential to decrease the dependency and eliminate the commissions associated with the other channels.

2. Methodology

This Work Project takes into account all the information provided by one of the co-founders of the association, Marta Cabral, and by the responsible for the Digital Marketing area,

Frederico Honrado. The collected information was useful to understand the structure and purpose of the Rota Vicentina's website, while at the same time to identify the problem that the association is facing. Moreover, some Google online tools, mainly Google Analytics were helpful, in a first stage, to guide and gather information about customers and website performance. Furthermore, the constant guidance of the supervisor professor, Luís Correia da Silva, and former Master colleagues were valuable to structure the project and to provide some insights regarding the tourism industry and digital marketing. Finally, the research through the internet was an important tool to obtain information, while supporting all the statistical data used in this thesis.

3. Internal Analysis

3.1 Rota Vicentina

Rota Vicentina is a non-profit association, founded in June of 2013 by a group of more than 100 individuals, entities and companies, created to promote Nature Tourism in Alentejo and Vicentine Coast. The project consisted in the implementation of trekking trails along the Southwest (SW) coast (a total of 400 km) and its integration into the local tourism and community as well as its presentation at the national and international levels. In the implementation phase, the local association *Casas Brancas* was the coordinator of the project, in a partnership with the association *Almargem*, the local municipalities and parish councils, local entities and companies. These partnerships were essential to understand the potential of each region as the associates shared their experience and knowledge regarding the activities and the potential market.

Rota Vicentina aims to serve the public interest and, at the same time, to be competitive, dynamic, proactive and market-oriented to attract visitors to the region and members. The implementation of the project took into consideration several objectives; engage in sustainable development by promoting a form of environmentally-friendly tourism, ensure the continued

protection of local heritage by giving it a tourism-related purpose, stimulate the tourism during medium/low seasons by creating new business opportunities and consolidate the network between companies, institutions and the local population.

3.2 Marketing Mix

Product/Service: Rota Vicentina is integrated in a Nature protected area within SW Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Nature Park. The area offers diversity in its landscapes, a wealth of unspoilt nature, a strong presence of local traditions and an important historical and cultural heritage. Rota Vicentina developed several itineraries along SW region, providing to hikers a range of possible routes with different levels of difficulty and characteristics. Hence, there were created 3 types of routes: the *Caminho Histórico* - comprises 230 km with mountain ranges, valleys, rivers and creeks; the *Trilho dos Pescadores* – comprises 120 km along the coastline; and *Percursos Circulares* – comprises 46 km in 5 routes with short walking paths. Moreover, the association provides all the information needed for the hikers about the itineraries, from the signs and waymarks to supplementary services such as accommodation, traditional restaurants and transportation facilities. Therefore, the association sells several trekking packages including accommodation, restaurants, walking guides, activities and luggage and passenger transfers. Additionally, the lodging facilities included in each package can be also booked individually in the website.

Distribution: Rota Vicentina directly sells its services to the end-customers through their website and direct calls. Moreover, relatively to Business-to-Consumer (B2C) model, its services are also offered in several national and international Online Tour Agencies, such as Portugal Nature Trails and HilltopTreks from Ireland. Finally, they also provide their services to Business-to-Business (B2B) players, which are represented by Tour Operators such as Citur. Exhibit 1 represents a flow-chart of the mentioned distribution channel.

Price: The prices of the packages available in Rota Vicentina's website were defined by the association and take into consideration all the services offered in each one. Therefore, the tour operators mentioned above can settle their own prices, packages and services included. The packages differ in price according with the number of days, included activities, guided or not, type of accommodation, number and type of meals and transportation needed. The price ranges from 385€ per person, a self-guided package that includes the accommodation for 7 nights and luggage transfer, to 1668€, p.p a complete package that includes an integral guided route across Rota Vicentina (from *Porto Covo* to *Cabo de São Vicente*) and in addition of the above mentioned services, includes dinners in traditional restaurants and picnics. Moreover, regarding the price charged per night in the different accommodations, the website offers the same value charged in each place.

Promotion: Rota Vicentina uses several advertising marketing channels. Thus, one can consider the ones that are managed by the association – E-commerce website, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube videos; and others as national and international articles, travel magazines such as "Life&Leisure" from New Zealand and TV news.

Process: In the domestic market the end-consumer tends to seek information about Rota Vicentina in its website and directly book via telephone or through other channels, although there is the possibility to buy in the website. In the international market, the customer that is unaware of the brand tends to book through local Online Tour Operators. Furthermore, when it comes to a group travel, the customer tends to book through a direct call to the association, since it provides complete information regarding some specifications which are easier to understand by directly contacting the travel organizer.

People/Departments: The non-profit association, Rota Vicentina, has only 2 years of activity and it can be considered as a small business. There are 3 people full-time involved in the project and there are also local partners which do not work exclusively for the association.

In the past year, a professional to develop and improve the E-commerce area was hired with the main objective of increase the brand awareness in the digital world.

3.3 Customers and Competitors

The customer analysis was based on data provided by Google Analytics and on historical data of the association. The data provided by Google Analytics, stated that about 34% of the visitors were aged between 25-34 years old and the main markets were Portugal (52%), Germany (11%) and Netherlands (5%). Additionally, the top sources used to access the website was Google, through organic search (60%) and direct (20%), with the majority accessed via Desktop (72%). According to the data provided by the association, a large percentage of the consumers had already experienced long distance trekking routes, with the particularity of facing this type of trips experiences several times a year in different countries. According to historical data of the association, the recent customers were characterized has having more than 50 years old. However, they use other channels to get knowledge and acquire the product rather than Rota Vicentina's website. Therefore, according to this data, one can distinguish two different customers. Firstly, the customers that have already experienced the supply of Rota Vicentina but do not use its website to acquire the product and, on the other hand, it is also possible to highlight a potential market, according to the information provided by online tools. Therefore, in this paper the potential customer/market is the one that faces the highlighted problem and so it will be the one to take into consideration.

There are several motivations behind the customer decision when it comes to make this walking holidays. The interest of exploring unspoilt nature and a well preserved environment, together with the sense of physical well-being and fitness are the main motivations for this type of tourism. In the past years, the last mentioned motivation has become an important trend in the society, leading to an increase in the practice of physical exercise (Espinoza, 2002). Moreover, the customer is also driven to discover different regions and lifestyles, taking

advantage of the cultural and historical heritage.

Regarding competitors, one can consider some national and international destinations which offer a similar product, such as the well known *Camino de Santiago* that has gained market power over the last years.

3.4 Rotavicentina.pt

The website of Rota Vicentina was created in 2012 with the main goal to raise awareness regarding the project by providing all the information needed about the trekking routes, while selling several trip packages. According to the data provided by Google Analytics, the website had around 200.000 users, since its implementation. Despite the number of visitors to the website, the number of conversions' percentage was zero. Moreover, the Bounce Rate – percentage of single page visit - was around 40%, illustrating the previous highlighted problem related with the inefficiency of attracting only the potential customer together with the website structure. As a solution to the problems mentioned above, at the beginning of September of 2015, the association launches a new website, aiming to turn the website an efficient purchase channel. The site was allocated in a central reservation platform, Guestcentric, responsible for the channel management tool of the site. Moreover, the association wanted to make their site a credible one to the end-consumer when it comes to plan and book its travel.

4. External Analysis

4.1 The Tourism Industry and Nature Tourism

Over the years, tourism has become one of the fastest growing economic sectors and industry in the world. The diversification and the emerging of new destinations have made tourism a key driver of the world's socio-economic progress. Tourism's contribution to the global economy has also increased their expression, representing in 2014, 9% of global GDP (WTTC, 2014). Regarding investment, this sector received a worldwide amount of US$754 billion in 2013, providing employment to more than 100 million people (WTTC, 2014). This

trend has also resulted in a positive growth in the number of tourist arrivals as well as in generating receipts. The international overnight visitors have increased by 4.3% and the worldwide generated receipts by 3,7% in 2014, compared to the year before. The forecast, for the next years, points to an annual growth rate of 3% to 4% in this sector, in global terms. In Portugal, the annual growth in these two indicators was more expressive, as the registered values suffered an increase of 12,3% in both cases. (UNWTO, 2015). According to a worldwide study about the motivation of travelling, more than a half of the world population travel for holidays/leisure (53%) with the remaining traveling for visiting their family or friends (27%) and for business or professional purposes (14%). (UNWTO, 2015)

One can distinguish different sub-sectors of the tourism industry which differ on the motivation and the activities undertaken by the consumer. In this case, Rota Vicentina is inserted in the nature tourism sector. It is defined as a responsible travel to natural areas that aims to conserve the environment and improve the welfare of the local economy. Furthermore, this type of tourism can be defined as soft or hard depending on the intensity of the experiences that the traveller is motivated to do. The first one includes activities that require a moderate level of physical involvement, with the travellers hiking and enjoying the environment and landscape. The second one involves activities with higher level of physical involvement and it is more challenging for the participants, such as rafting and climbing.

The market of nature-based tourists has been growing in Portugal and in Europe in general. The environmental trends experienced in our society contributed to this evolution. In 2013 was registered about 12.000 international travels, in which the main motivation of the visit was the enjoyment of the landscape and nature[1]. Thus, the nature tourists represented 4% of the total European travels[1]. Moreover, the three top markets that more contributed for the total Portugal nature tourism total receipts were United Kingdom, France and Netherlands[1].

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[1] (IPK International, 2013)

Moreover, according to study carried out for the period 2013-2015 predicts an annual growth of 5% in this market. (Turismo de Portugal, 2012).

In the recent past years, the tourism sector has been strongly connected with e-commerce industry and with the boom in the social media world. In 2014, the Internet represented the main distribution channel for travellers with 66% of online booking, while Traditional Travel Agencies had only a share of 24% of the market. Consumers are increasingly using the internet to collect information on destinations and to buy tourism products. Online Social Media Networks have become an important tool not only before but also during and after the travel. In Europe, 61% of the travellers use social media to research information and book a travel (ITB, 2014). This fact enhances the disintermediation process that has been verified in many sectors and industries.

4.2 Distribution Channels

A distribution channel is the network of intermediaries through which a good or service pass until it reaches the end consumer. This process can be held in a direct or indirect form, with the last including wholesalers, retailers, local distributors and online travel agents. In the tourism sector, it is considered one of the major components as it clarifies the effectiveness of reaching the prospective consumers. The indirect distribution channels, in this specific sector, befall when the end-consumers have to rely on different intermediaries in order to acquire their product or service, such as Traditional Travel Agencies, Tour Operators and Online Tour Operators (OTAs). Regarding the direct distribution channels, there are no intermediaries between the supplier and customer as they are made such as via website or even by direct contact via phone.

Using intermediaries may represent a favourable option to the strategy of a business. Intermediaries have the responsibility of promoting the product, thus they have to bear the costs of this investment which so, are not supported by the company. Moreover, in some cases the

intermediaries have already notoriety and knowledge in the market, thus representing an added value in an initial stage. Finally, they can easily reach several customer segments and specific markets at a scale that would be difficult for the companies achieve by themselves. In this industry, the intermediaries have a strong bargaining power over the business.

Despite the identified advantages of having intermediaries in the distribution channels, it has been verified a disintermediation in some business models by having their own distribution channel, which in the most cases involves creating their own website with direct web sales. The ultimate objective of this process is to eliminate commissions which allow the company to have more control and higher volume of sales. Nowadays, there are several online tools that make this process easy and economic. This process is more common for new business or concepts, as it is the example of Rota Vicentina.

5. Rota Vicentina Market Analysis

5.1 TOWS Analysis for Rota Vicentina Market

In order to better understand the environment where the association operates, others factors must be analysed. Therefore, a TOWS analysis was designed to acknowledge the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the studied industry, while creating strategic views of the business by matching with each one. Exhibit 2 shows the analysis of Rota Vicentina market.

Conclusion

The internal and external analyses of a company indicate the opportunities that a business has when making and planning strategic decisions. Concerning the previous analyses, one can conclude that Rota Vicentina has potential to grow in this market by analysing the recent trends in our society and its evolution. There is a potential market that can be explored, at the national and international levels. Then, this work project proposes the change of Rota Vicentina's

business model by presenting some initiatives described in the following part of the paper. Firstly, the problem will be defined and then a marketing plan will be developed.

6. The Problem

According to the analysis developed about Rota Vicentina, it is evident the absence of direct website sales and, as mentioned above, the fact that this channel implies a payment of less commissions for the association, it is imperative to value the channel in order to increase the sales.

Regarding the information provided by the association and Google Analytics, the profile of the actual website visitors are essentially: single page visitors in which there is no interaction with the website; multiple page visitors that never came to enter in the packages page. In both of the cases, it represents a problem to Rota Vicentina as the website traffic is not aligned to attract only the potential customers. Secondly, hence in the website, the visitors have the curiosity to get to know more about Rota Vicentina the without realize its final purpose, which is to allow the potential customers to book/buy its services (packages). The possible reasons identified for this trend may be related with the structure of the website and its content. The customers find in the website a space where they can gather just only information regarding the project and Vicentine Coast's area, without considering it as purchase channel or a way to know any available product/service. Therefore, there is the possibility that some of the Rota Vicentina's website visitors end up to find the project an interesting one, which leads people to book or search the possible accommodations in the regions in which the trekking routes are inserted, after leaving the original website.

The Rota Vicentina partners have clear advantage when the customers book the provided services through their website rather than other online channels, such as Booking.com. The commission paid to Rota Vicentina is 3%, while in the Booking.com case the commission paid is at least of 15% of the total revenue amount.

As mentioned above, the power of some intermediaries to reach different customer's segments and specific markets is tremendous, which consists an important aspect to take into consideration. Booking.com is the perfect example of a channel that every year invest billions of dollars in online advertising (Schaal, 2012), managing to have a huge bargaining power. The customers are used to use this channel when booking a place to stay due to its reputation, which is seen as a reliable way to purchase. Therefore, the association should focus on the advantages that its product offers, when compared to use this type of channels to plan a trip.

7. Marketing Plan for Rota Vicentina's online activity

A Marketing Plan for Rota Vicentina's online activity was developed given the highlighted problem, market opportunity and potential market mentioned above.

7.1 The Opportunity

According to the previous analyses of the nature tourism market, it is possible to identify a potential market opportunity given its positive evolution, with the consolidation of the idea behind the nature tourism market. Thus, nowadays, it can be identified a potential market that Rota Vicentina is not reaching through there channels.

7.2 Objectives

Rota Vicentina's website has already an extended portfolio of regular users (not buyers) on their website and so, in order to convert them into buyers, the association should develop several digital marketing activities. The initiatives, since these users are aware of the brand, should be conducted in a way to make them know the several products that the association has to offer. Additionally, for those who are not aware of the existence of the association but have characteristics of potential customers, the initiatives should be implemented in a way to make them interact with the brand. So, one can differentiate two type of objectives: first, increase the website traffic of the target market and then, hence in the site, convert them in actual customers. The first objective can be achieved by using some channels and online tools – Facebook,

Instagram and Google AdWords. The second one is related with the structure of the website, by turning it more dynamic and efficient when it comes to convert the potential customers. The success of both of these objectives imply the coordination and evaluation of some initiatives.

The objective of this initiatives is to increase the website sales and consequently the Return on Investment (ROI) optimization, by making this channel represent at least 50% of the Rota Vicentina's activity, in the coming years.

7.3 Initiatives to increase Website sales

In order to achieve these objectives, some online initiatives should be developed related with reaching the potential customer and website's structure.

7.3.1 Create Awareness

The potential customers described in the following initiatives were defined concerning the provided data by Google Analytics and online information regarding this market. This data indicates a potential customer aged between 25-34 years old that is interested in outside activities and enjoys getting in touch with the nature. Initially, the initiatives should be focus on targeting the domestic market and on three international potential markets. The last ones, according to the data above mentioned should be United Kingdom, France and Netherlands.

Social Media

*Facebook***:** It has several functionalities that can help to generate traffic into a website. Depending on the objective that one defines for the posts, Facebook presents the best practices and advices, such as increasing the number of clicks in the website or the website conversions. In this case, the suggestion is to create posts/ads with appealing photos of the trekking routes and then put the so called "call to action button" linked directly to the website. This buttons can be "learn more" or "buy now" depending if the objective is to create awareness or for selling purposes, respectively. On Facebook ads it is possible to set a target market, by ages and location, allowing to reach the potential customer. Moreover, in order to create awareness for

the project, this social media is the perfect tool. The development of online challenges around Rota Vicentina can also be a viable approach. An example of action that can be performed in this context is to challenge Rota Vicentina's Facebook members to create an original t-shirt related with the project.

*Instagram***:** Instagram has become a powerful social media in this last years. The number of Instagram users increased substantially since 2013, growing from 90 million users to 400 million, in September of 2015 (Statista, 2015). This social media allows the association to post on a regular basis appealing photos of the project such as, hikers in the different stops, close to the waymarks of Rota Vicentina or key places of the path. The objective is to show the beauty of the landscapes and the joy and advantages of doing the different paths walking. The aim of this action is to give a greater visibility to the association by increasing the number of followers and by trending some key hashtags (see Exhibit 3 examples of possible hashtags). Thus it will achieve potential customers and then conduct them to the website.

Google AdWords

Google AdWords is an online advertising tool that allows companies to create relevant ads by using strategic keywords (words or expressions) related to their business and attract potential customers to their website which are using Google search engine. The model used in this platform is pay-per-click (PPC), in which companies bid on the keywords and pay for each click on their ad. Therefore, when one is typing in Google using specific words, a process called auction is started for matching those terms with the mentioned keywords. The ads that matched are ranked based on a combination of factors, quality and relevance, concerning the size of the bids that each company is willing to pay for each click on their ad. Then, the ads are shown in the Google search engine. There are two ways to use these keywords. Exhibit 4 contains an example of how Google AdWords works.

Negative Keywords: The creation of an ad should be focused on a targeted segment, which in this case is the nature tourism lovers, and so the company should avoid the ones that do not belong to the segment and who would click on the ad anyway. This type of visitors represent additional website costs, which are not likely to generate sales to the association. Therefore, Rota Vicentina should use negative keywords that prevent its ad from showing when a word or expression it specifies is searched. Rota Vicentina is associated with middle and high quality level when it comes to the accommodation that is included in their packages. For instance, a negative keyword that can be used is *"Costa Vicentina acampar"* or "*Vicentine Coast camping*" in order to avoid the ones that are looking for cheap accommodation, with the quality and comfort not being on the top of the priorities.

*Generic Keywords***:** It can also be done the opposite strategy by bidding the words or expressions containing the name of the association or related to its activity. Thus, the association should use the keywords such as *Rota Vicentina* and also *Vicentine Coast* or *Southwest coast Portugal*. Moreover, words or expressions related with the project might be advantageous when it comes to reach the ones that do not know its existence, for instance, *nature tourism Portugal* or *trekking Portugal.* The objective is to connect to the ones that are searching in Google this specific words, where an ad created by the association would appear. This strategy allows to reach the visitors that are perceived as being possible actual buyers, since they demonstrate in a certain way interest in the products/services provided by the association. Rota Vicentina may bid more generic words, such as the ones related with the locations where the paths pass on, which can catch the attention from those who do not know the brand but may be potential customers.

*Remarketing Campaigns***:** An online advertising method used by an increasing number of business is the Remarketing campaigns via Google AdWords. This tool allows to reach the internet users who have previously visited a certain site by showing them relevant ads tailored

to those website pages when they are later searching in the web. Thus, this strategy is important for the users that hence in the website leave without buying anything as the remarketing helps to connect again with these potential customers. In the exhibit 5 it is represented a simple scene of how this process works.

E-mail Contact

Finally, it would be interesting to create awareness on customers that can be interested on Rota Vicentina's product as a complementary one. One can consider the customers that are interested in a specific activity related to nature tourism, for instance the birdwatching activity. It has clubs around the world which organize group trips in-country and out. For these matters, along the Vicentine Coast there are two identified places for the activity, in *Lagoa de Santo André* and *Península de Sagres*. The main objective is to reach these customers by firstly raise awareness to the possibility of realize the activity in this two areas in Portugal, followed by an invitation to do the routes of Rota Vicentina. Moreover, this strategy can be applied in other activities, such as surf trips, climbing groups or bike tours. Thereby, it should be identified the interested groups in the potential markets and contact them via e-mail, by presenting them the places of interest and its characteristics, and secondly the Rota Vicentina project.

7.3.2 Website

The final purpose of the website is to be able to sell, and so its structure should be in a way that visitors understand what Rota Vicentina has to offer. The following initiatives should be undertaken in order to provide to the customers the best online experience from the moment that they enter in the website until they leave, with a clear design structure and a simple booking process.

Site Speed Improvement: The time that a page takes to load is an important indicator of any website user experience and is becoming a significant factor when it comes to search engines metrics. Over 40% of the visitors tend to leave a website if it takes more than 3 seconds

to load. (Aragon, 2013) Moreover, according to a study, the site speed also influences other indicators as the loading time increases it is expected a decrease of 11% in page views, 16% in the level of satisfaction and loyalty and 7% in conversions. (Dooley, 2012). In Rota Vicentina website the average loading time is 10,4 seconds (data of the 1st of September of 2015) which represents a large number according to the data mentioned above. Google Analytics provides some advices and techniques to optimize the loading time of a site, which should be considered by the association. The images should be compressed in order to reduce its size, without losing the quality since the pictures of Rota Vicentina are one of its strengths. Additionally, other initiatives related with cached pages, prioritize the above-the-fold content and compression should be also taken into consideration. The first ones allow a greater site speed for the visitors that enter in the website for the second time. When a visitor enters for the first time in a website, all the elements are stored in its hard drive in a cache so that for the next time the user visits the same website, the browser can load the page without having to send another HTTP request to the server. The prioritization the above-the fold content can make the visitor interact with the website while the whole page is loading, improving the user experience. Finally, it can also be done a compression of CSS, JavaScript and HTML saving several bytes of data and speed up the download time, analyses and execution of the website.

Front page: The front page of any website is one the most important aspect when considering the customer experience. Therefore, in order to understand the efficiency of a front page, it can be used an indicator, available in data provided by Google Analytics, called Bounce Rate – percentage of single-page visit, without any interaction with the page. When there is a high rate one can interpret it as a sign that the visitors which enter in the website are not interested in the content or, when interested, they do not understand its purpose. In this case, it is clear the absence of the idea that besides a website which only provides information and ideas it is also a purchase channel, where the customer can actually buy a product/service. Therefore,

in order to call to action and create soon the idea to the customer that they have the possibility of buying a product (even if in the beginning they do not know what exactly), the website should have in the front page a button with direct access to the page where the visitors can buy the packages. The button should say "Book your trip!" or "Book now!". Moreover, in each page this button should appear with the same format, such as in a page containing an article published in their website, mentioning a specific route from Rota Vicentina.

Open Website Reviews: In Rota Vicentina website there is no place to customers' reviews, which can be a useful tool in order to help the website visitors in the decision process of buying certain product/service. As mentioned above, the internet has become one of the principal trustful sources to customers evaluate a brand and its product/services. It is also known that 63% of the customers are more likely to make a purchase from a website which has user reviews. Moreover, the business that integrate the option of ratings and reviews leads to an increase on the number of visitors in the website and the time that they spend browsing it, which can result in about 18% growth in the volume of direct sales (Charlton, 2015). A substantial proportion of online buyers (29%) consider that a key factor that make them book a holiday trip via website are positive reviews (Digital Visitor, 2011). Therefore, the association should develop a procedure that allows the actual customers to share their experience and express their opinion about what the brand can offer. This reviews will be important to prospect customers as it can eliminate any doubt that they may have regarding the product and help in the product's selection process. Hence, Rota Vicentina should provide a space for customer's review, while at the same time enable an option to rate from 1 to 5 stars the whole experience. Moreover, beside this new updates, the association should also provide a space for a short description of the experience "*Describe your experience in one word",* as the product offered is better described when using words.

Create value to the customer: In order to engage the visitors and convert them into actual customers there is the need to convey to them the value offered in Rota Vicentina's website. Therefore, by analysing the business model of the association and its website, it is possible to highlight some points that may be considered. Firstly, Rota Vicentina offers the possibility to their customers of booking only one night in their accommodation partners. This turns to be an advantage comparing to the others online channels such as Booking.com and TripAdvisor in which in most of the times it is necessary a reservation of minimum two nights. Thus, this advantage can be used by the association in order to catch the attention of the customer and make them interested to understand the value of its product. Moreover, the association offers in their packages the option of baggage transfer from one accommodation to another, which is crucial when it comes to long distance trekking routes. The association should enhance this factor of differentiation to their visitors by sharing some messages behind this idea, *"We take care of everything!"* or *"With Rota Vicentina, you travel without complications!"*. Finally, Rota Vicentina provides a service of guiding the walkers in their paths which share the knowledge and the uniqueness of each region. A guide can provide a more enriched experience and so it can be considered a valuable option that is not offered elsewhere.

Identified some key points of the product offered by Rota Vicentina that make it unique, it is necessary to take advantage of them and communicate to the customers. Thus, in each package page the association should give some featured to the aspects above mentioned and try to grab the attention of the visitor. There are different ways to do this. One can pass to put these characteristics in Bolt Font or in a larger font size and colour. On other hand, it also can be done a box with the following title "Your Best Choice" under the advantages highlighted above.

7.4 Implementation and Evaluation

Communication: The initiatives that involve an external communication are the ones developed via Facebook, Instagram, online reviews, as well as the ones which are involved with

the idea of creating value to the consumer. These initiatives are going to be transmitted to consumers through its own Rota Vicentina' online channels and in its partner's websites – not only in the accommodation partners but also in the local council's websites. More detailed information in exhibit 6.

Minute and Men: The implementation of the suggested initiatives will follow the Gantt Chart detailed in exhibit 7 and will take place at the beginning of 2016. The strategy for the following years should be adjusted according with the results obtained in the year before. Each initiative will be divided in three phases, the development, communication and the operation. Its implementation will be carried out by a specialist in Digital Marketing.

KPIs: In order to evaluate the efficiency of these initiatives it is necessary to identify the indicators that give the proper information about its performance. Firstly, to evaluate the awareness of the initiative, the KPIs that should be analysed are the Bounce Rate, average time spend on the website and number of pages visited. Furthermore, in order to understand if the website is able to convert the visitors in actual customers, the KPs that should be used are the volume of the direct website sales and the ROI.

Costs: The implementation of the proposed initiatives involves some incremental costs to the association and in Exhibit 8 there is a detailed costs projection for the next 5 years.

Future: Rota Vicentina should adjust the initiatives according to the results and customer's feedback concerning the period before. After the test year, the association should invest in other markets beyond the ones settled for that period. Moreover, when defined the optimal structure of the website, other initiatives could be developed, such as extending the advertising strategies for mobile devices or the creation of a website blog, for instance.

8. Final Considerations

In the tourism sector, the internet became one important source of information and a helpful tool to customers when it come to organize a travel. It is important that businesses to understand

that although it is possible to develop online initiatives in order to provide a better customer experience in a website, having a quality product/service is the base of everything. The customer satisfaction is essential for the success of any business and the internet is just part of a travel experience.
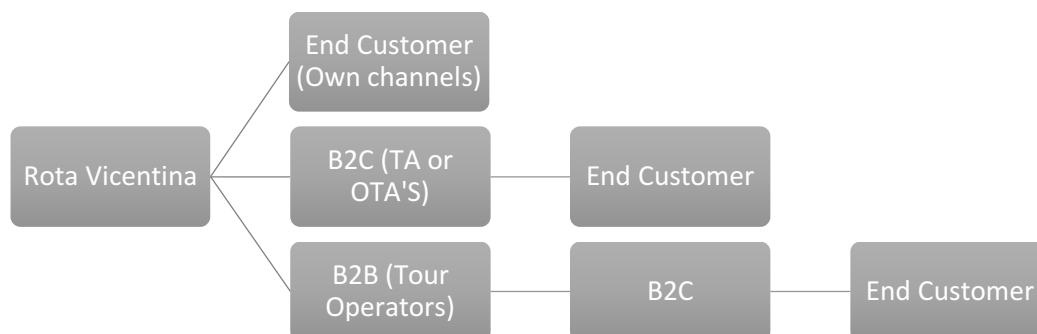
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10. Appendix

### 10.1 Exhibit 1 - Rota Vicentina's Distribution Channels

10.2 Exhibit 2 - TOWS Analysis of Rota Vicentina Market

|	**External Opportunities (O)**	**External Threats (T)**
	1. Increasing number of customers that use the internet to book their travel and to seek for information about the different options. (Stevens, 2012) 2. The increase preoccupation of the population about health and well-being. 3. Increasing awareness to issues related to environment, nature preservation, biodiversity and social responsibility (Gamito, Silva, 2013).	1. The climate change has caused coastal erosion and so the deterioration of the landscapes (Bell, Tyrvainen, Sievanen, Probstl, Simpson, 2007) 2. The increasing urbanization 3. The increase number of online frauds (European Central Bank, 2014)
Internal Strengths (S) 1. Strong relationship with the local partners where the paths were stablished. 2. The characteristics of Southwest landscapes, the natural and historical heritage.	**SO** **"Maxi –Maxi" Strategy** 1. Advertising strategy that calls to the practice of outside activities and exercise, by creating a direct connection to Rota Vicentina project, the walking paths. 2. The images/photos of the landscapes can be the key to communicate the product that is offered by the association and so it should be used to attract the potential customers.	**ST** **"Maxi-Mini" Strategy** 1. Local strategies to promote the sustainable and responsible tourism policies. 2. Invest in web security software
Internal Weaknesses (W) 1.Lack of knowledge in Digital Marketing area 2. Website inability of converting the users in actual buyers as well as the inexistence of online opinions about the product 3. Rota Vicentina' sales are strongly dependent on the online communication and its reputation.	**WO** **"Mini-Maxi" Strategy** 1. Stablish agreements with the website of local councils and some tourism blogs with the objectivo of giving a recommendation of the project and so generate reputation 2. Invest in some marketing initiatives using online tools in order to reach the potential customer.	**WT** **"Mini-Mini" Strategy** 1. Adoption of techniques that can improve and monitor the performance of Rota Vicentina online marketing 2. Creation of the option of website reviews in order to gain some reputation among customers and in a way to demonstrate that it is a reliable website.

10.3 Exhibit 3 - Instagram Hashtags

Related to the brand		**Related to the idea**
#rotavicentina	#costaportugal	#twostepstofreedom
#historicaltrail	#caminhohistorico	#tryfreedom
#fishermantrail	#caminhopescadores	#outdooractivity
#southwestcoastportugal	#costavicentinaportugal	#portugallandscape
#walkingtrails	#caminhospedestres	#caminharaoarlivre
#tripwithrotavicentina	#rotavicentina**odeceixe**	#natureturismlovers

## 10.4 Exhibit 4 - How does Google determine which ad is shown where?
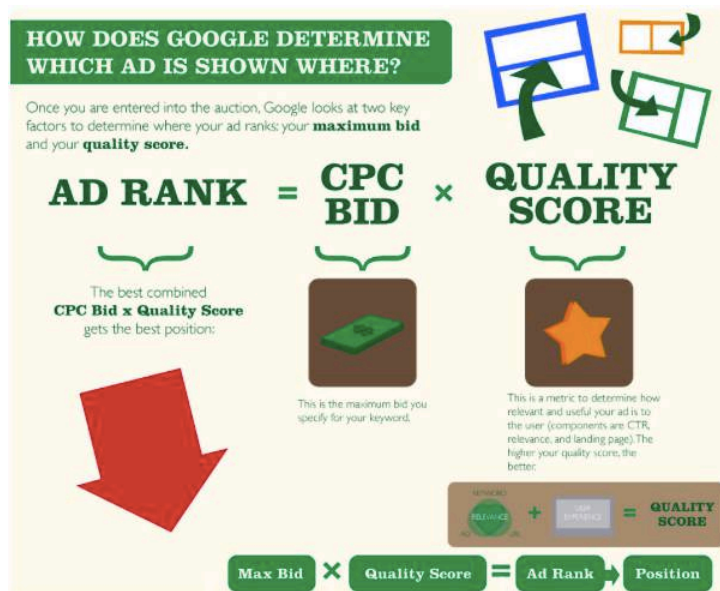
10.5 Exhibit 5 - How Remarketing Works?
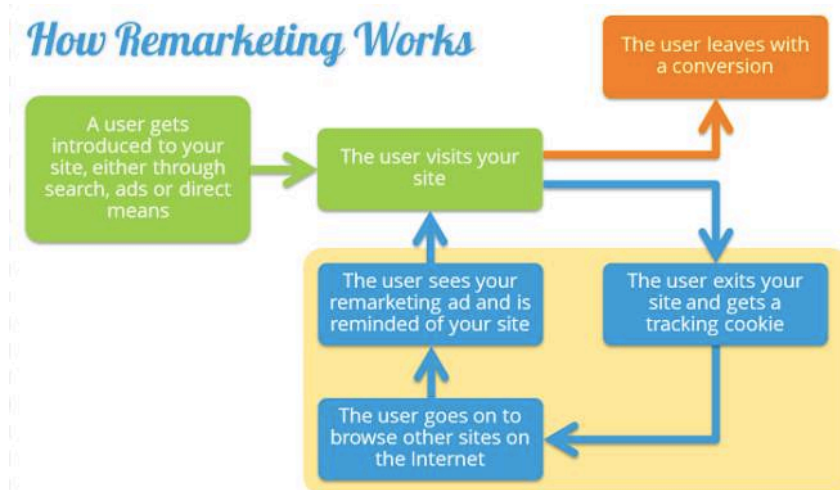
10.6 Exhibit 6 - Communication Plan for the Proposed Initiatives

Initiatives	Type of communication	Purpose	Channel	Frequency
Facebook	Photos/videos and contests	Attract the potential customer to the website	Own channel and partners channels	Weekly
Instagram	Photos or videos	Create awareness about the project	Own channel	2 times per week
Other initiatives	Punctual highlights	Create value to the customer	Own channels and partners channels	Ongoing

10.7 Exhibit 7 - Gantt Chart with the implementation of the initiatives
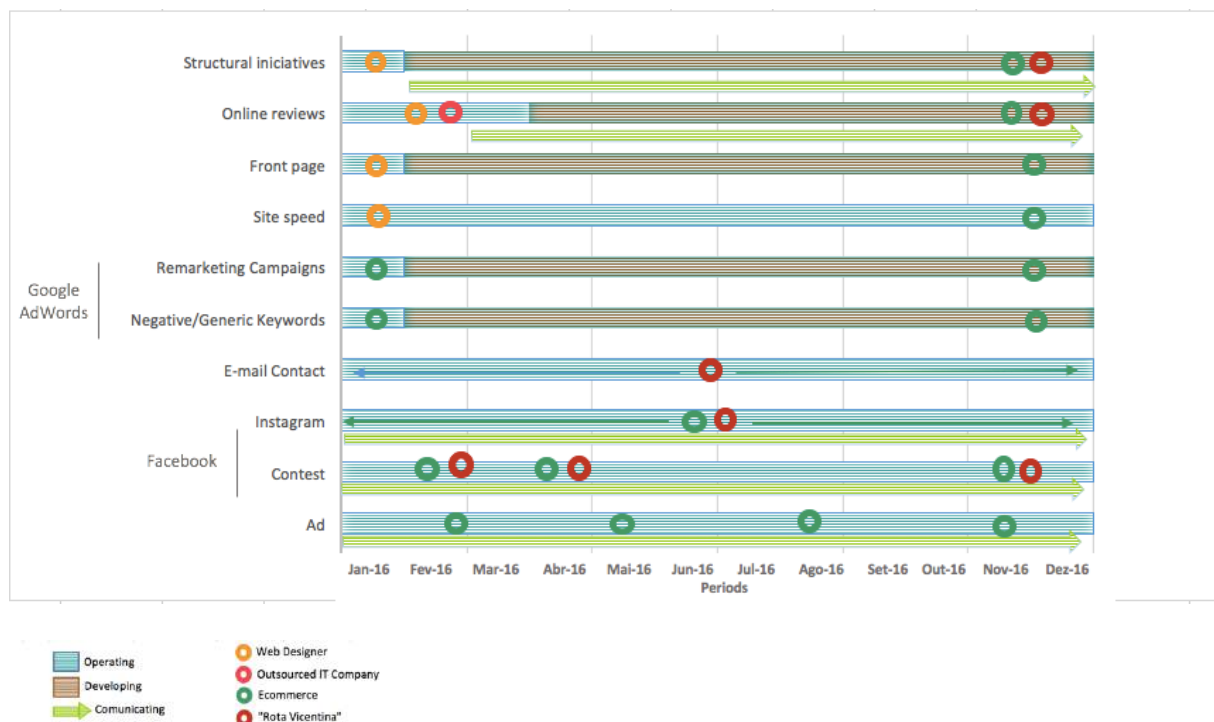
10.8. Exhibit 8 – Online Marketing Investment for the next 5 years

Initiatives	Years	1	2	3	4	5
Social Media	Facebook	10€ (a) * 4 posts (b) * 12 months = 480€	15€ (a) * 4 posts (b) * 12 months = 720€	15€ (a) * 4 posts (b) * 12 months = 720€	20€ (a) * 4 posts (b) * 12 months = 960€	20€ (a) * 4 posts (b) * 12 months = 960€
	Instagram	No incremental costs involved	No incremental costs involved	No incremental costs involved	No incremental costs involved	No incremental costs involved
Google AdWords	Keywords	1500 clicks per month * 0,30€ (c)* 12 months = 5,400€	2000 clicks per month * 0,25€ (d)* 12 months = 6,000€	2500 clicks per month * 0,25€ (d)* 12 months =7,500 €	3000 clicks per month * 0,20€ (d)* 12 months = 7,200€	3500 clicks per month * 0,20€ (d)* 12 months =8,400 €
	Remarketing	100 clicks per month * 0,20€ (c) * 12 months = 240€	125 clicks per month * 0,20€ (d) * 12 months = 300€	150 clicks per month * 0,20€ (d) * 12 months = 360€	175 clicks per month * 0,20€ (d) * 12 months = 420€	200 clicks per month * 0,20€ (d) * 12 months = 480€
	E-mail Contact	No incremental costs involved	No incremental costs involved	No incremental costs involved	No incremental costs involved	No incremental costs involved
Website	Site Speed	No incremental costs involved	-	-	-	-
	Front Page	No incremental costs involved	-	-	-	-
	Online Reviews	Outsourced service: 500€ (e)	-	-	-	-
	Other	No incremental costs involved	-	-	-	-
	Free lancer in DM	**250€*12 months = 3,000€**	-	-	-	-
	Full-Time employer in DM	-	**800€*12=9,600 €**	**800€*12=9,600€**	**800€*12=9,600€**	**800€*12=9,600€**
	Σ Δ costs	**9,620€**	**16,620€**	**18,180€**	**18,180€**	**19,440€**

a) Budget settled for each ad
b) 1 post per week
c) Average Cost per Click resulting from a campaign developed in order to test the initiative potential
d) Adjusted Cost per Click taking into account the results of the year before
e) Value provided by ThinkOpen, website designer