



Work Project

IBM ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGY

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19th May, 2016

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Program: MSc. Management

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Masters Degree in Management for the NOVA - School of Business and Economics.



1. ABSTRACT

This project has been carried out in cooperation between IBM Client Center Moscow and a team of CEMS Students at GSOM. The first part is to do research on where a target group of CIO's, Chief Engineers and IT Managers are active online and are discussing business pain points, this is done across several industries. The second part is focusing on the development of a strategy, that when implemented, can fulfill IBM Client Centers strategic goals. There is furthermore in this paper included an academic discussion where entrepreneurial frameworks from NOVA courses are discussed and linked to the Business Project. Finally, there is a personal reflection that seeks to improve future team performances.

MARKET RESEARCH - STRATEGY - ONLINE ADVERTISING

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3. INTRODUCTION

As we are living in the digital era, almost all information around us right now is online and its prevalence increases day by day. It has an influence on all spheres of our life, and surely it affects all types of business functions. Companies have to change the business models they are used to in accordance with the new challenges and opportunities. The online presence of a company - its website and appearances on the different online resources - could nowadays even be considered the “face” of the company.

The IBM Client Center Moscow, part of IBM Russia, was established as recently in the summer of 2015 and provides various industry solutions for the companies operating in different industries. Currently, the Client Center is not represented online on a level that fits the company's overall image and goals. The IBM Client Center Moscow is missing out on all the opportunities that an online presence and communication represent. The target of our team for the CEMS business project was to create a plan of a web campaign for the IBM Client Center. In the following parts the project description, the research we conducted and our suggestions are presented.

a. Client

IBM (International Business Machines) Corporation was founded in 1911 in Endicott, USA. Its initial name was CTR and it was formed as a merger of 3 companies The Tabulating Machine

Company, International Time Recording Company, and Computing Scale Company. The company produced a wide range of products, for example, coffee grinders, employee time-keeping systems and punched card equipment. In the year 1924, the company changed its name to IBM. Nowadays, IBM provides different services such as business consulting, technology, financing, etc. Also, IBM is one of the world leaders in the production of a wide range of software. In 2015, the company was recognized as number one in a Thought Leadership ranking amongst other consulting companies. IBM first entered the Russian (Soviet) market in 1974. In 1991, it was one of the first foreign companies to found branches in Russia and also one of the first with 100% foreign capital. In 2015, the IBM Client Center Moscow was launched. It is a part of a network, which consists of more than 50 centers worldwide.

b. Market overview


IBM Client Center is active on the software market and has the purpose of translating specific business needs of the clients into a solution that can be developed in using the software competencies that IBM process. IBM is currently going through a big transformation phase where central parts of the business must be transformed from a desktop or local server approach to a cloud-based business model. This means that there has been a rapid shift in the required solution that the customers want and a lot of new players have entered the cloud market such as Dropbox and Amazon. Software development is no longer something that is only done in large companies, many small companies have also formed in Russia and do now provide industry-specific software solutions and compete directly with IBM.

The Russian economy is tied up to the oil and gas price as 70% of the exports comes from this area, and with the reason drop in oil and gas prices have resulted in a drop in GDP and a general downturn in the willingness to invest in software. On top of the drop in the oil price Russia have experienced sanctions from a large part of its closest trading partners, following the involvement in the Crimea conflict. Furthermore, China has also seen a downturn in the growth rates, this affects Russia negative as it is the largest trading partner.

c. Current client situation

Having had its grand opening as recently as summer 2015 the IBM Client Center Moscow is rather young compared to its 50 international peers. The Client Center has a very wide range of solutions it can offer due to its individualized approach to each customer. Yet the focus of the Client Center is certain – creating technologically advanced industrial solutions for Russian companies in non- IT specialized industries such as banking, government, energy and utilities, telecom, retail, metals and mining, oil and gas.

So far the marketing strategy of the IBM Client Center Moscow has been mostly reliant on industry specific events and direct communication with the highest level of management of companies in the target industries. This strategy has worked well in the past, but is fairly expensive and limits the ability to have continuous communication with customers. While the management sees potential in various social platforms as an additional communications channel, the possibilities that could present themselves for the Client Center by adding online marketing to their communication strategy have never been fully explored.



To have a better grasp of the opportunities that online marketing could present for the IBM Client Center Moscow in-depth research into the online communication platforms and various social networking sites in Russia is required. This would provide a better understanding of the most efficient way to reach the desired target audience and the issues that the target customers are facing in their respective industries. For a complete picture of the business-to-business online marketing landscape, the digital marketing strategies of competitors should also be taken into account to provide both best practice examples and a benchmark for future online communication. Working with the insights gained from the research of both customers and competitors, it will be possible to create a strategy for a campaign to efficiently promote the IBM Client Center Moscow online. In a best-case scenario, the new digital communication channel should help increase awareness of the IBM Client Center amongst Russian top managers in the target industries. The potential customers should be made aware of the industry solutions the Client Center can provide and see it as an industry solutions pioneer. The campaign should also enable IBM to gain new buyers for its solutions, by allowing for an easy follow up to connect with interested companies.

d. The business project challenges

IBM Client Center Russia is a new business function and they don't have an extensive amount of data available on what drives online conversions. This is because the website and online marketing today is outsourced to Bratislava . As it is not possible to access the website or extract detailed data it is very hard to do a proof of concept and create data that proves efficiency.

4. REFLECTION OF WORK

As IBM is challenged on the Russian market due to the collapse of the economy, increased competition and a high penetration rate IBM need to strengthen their marketing strategy. In IBM Client Center there is a need to research with a fresh set of eyes and create an overview of where the target group is active. IBM also need an overview of how this target group can be engaged to contact IBM and then finally converted into a lead.

a. Problem definition

The main goal of this project is to establish an online presence for the IBM Client Center Moscow and develop a digital marketing strategy for it with a special focus on web-campaign creation. Core project objectives can be represented by the four following targets:

1. To explore competitors of IBM Industry Solutions. (companies, platforms, topics).
2. To analyze online communication platforms where the target audience is socializing.
3. To search for new customers.
4. To create a web promo campaign to raise awareness of IBM Digital Client Center in Moscow.

In order to achieve these objectives it is necessary to first establish a basis of relevant knowledge and expertise of the market. Therefore, and initial in-depth research on the company, customers

and competitors have been carried out. Once completed, we used the collected data to answer the research questions.

b. Methodology

After identifying the goal and objectives of the project, the research started with data collection.

Data collection was divided into two parts - the first is the case study research that provides practical examples and recommendations on how to develop an online marketing strategy as well as the literature review of the scientific papers on the topics relevant for the research. As we wrote above, the selected frameworks are SOSTAC and RACE. They helped us not only in the development of the strategy but also in structuring our report.

The second part of the data collection was a collection of the data from websites, online journals, forums, LinkedIn groups and other sites for online communication where individuals within the target industries are discussing pain points and major problems that could be solved using IT services as the ones IBM provide. In the project, we used mainly qualitative methods because the data that we collected is not numerical or standardized. A qualitative method is the only possible method to analyze such data sets. For this purpose, we applied the netnography research method. This method gave us the option of exploring the industry, the competitors and possible target groups in depth.

i. Hypothesis

As IBM have asked for research and strategy within the online marketing area, the following main question has been developed. Looking back, we did not have a hypothesis to test instead of we had the main research questions to guide and keep us on track.

How can IBM Client Center create awareness amongst the right target group online and increase lead generation?

The following sub questions have been developed to break down the main question into parts that can be executed with a more specific focus. These questions are formulated specific from the initial project formulation received from IBM.

1. Who is the competitors of IBM's industry specific solutions?
2. Where do the target audience of IBM meet and socialise online?
3. How can IBM Client Center attract the target audience to IBM Client Center's website?
4. How can IBM Client Center create awareness amongst the target group online?

When all the questions have been covered a the main question is ensured to be responded to in a in a broad and precise manner.

ii. Analysis

The analysis started with research of the relevant literature, to gain insights in best practises and and to find proper framework that the rest of the project can follow to insure that all areas are covered and that there is no blind spots left out. The following papers were reviewed:

1. Content Marketing Strategy : Seven Steps to Success by *Bosomworth D. & Bateman S.*
2. 7 Steps to Digital Marketing Strategy by *Chaffey D. & Bosomworth D.*
3. 7 Steps to B2B Digital Marketing Strategy by *Power R.*
4. Digital marketing planning template by *Chaffey D.*
5. 7 Steps to Social media strategy guide *Chaffey D. & Simms R.*
6. PR Smith's SOSTAC® Guide To Your Perfect Digital Marketing Plan by *PR Smith*

These papers were highly useful and practically oriented, and helped us to find the most applicable theoretical frameworks for our project. To structure the report the SOSTAC and RACE strategic planning frameworks have been selected as main frameworks, which helped us to structure the report and to develop the strategy.

SOSTAC® is a “planning process framework to help structure and manage the implementation of plans” (*Chaffey D. & Bosomworth D.*). Firstly this framework was suggested by PR Smith for digital marketing communications planning

Each of the elements of the framework, plays a crucial role in the entire strategy and without them, the strategy will not succeed.

- **Situation analysis:** The main question, which should be asked here is “where are we now?”. At this stage many different forms analysis should be done.
- **Objectives:** The question here is where do we want to be?. The most important objectives, which should be formulated must focus on the increase of revenue.

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- **Strategy:** This part of the framework should answer the question how do we get there? Here is a vision developed and a picture of initiatives to be launched should be clear.
 - **Tactics:** In this part of the framework, the usage of tactical tools is defined. These tools should be selected in accordance to the goals that should be achieved.
 - **Actions:** This part refers to action plans, change management and project management skills. This part helps to assure that the selected tactics are meeting the highest standards. This selection is very important, because in case when everything is done properly, a competitive advantage could be achieved.
 - **Control:** This section correlates with the KPIs, which was already discussed above in the section Objectives. In the campaign plan, it must be set, when they should be measured (daily, monthly, quarterly, etc.) and also a plan of possible actions in case if indicators are too high or too low should be developed.

In order to improve the performance with the SOSTAC framework, the researchers suggest to incorporate another framework, called RACE, into it. The RACE framework helps marketers to manage and increase the commercial value, received from digital marketing. This combination will allow to create a comprehensive strategy. The structure is as following, each stage of SOSTAC is reviewed from the perspective of the components of RACE:

- **Reach:** Build awareness of a brand, its products and services on other sites and in offline media and build traffic by driving visits to web presences.
- **Act:** Engage audience with brand on its website or other online presence.

- **Convert:** Achieve conversion to marketing goals such as new fans, leads or sales on web presences and offline.
- **Engage:** Build customer relationships through time to achieve retention goals

The combination of the SOSTAC and RACE frameworks provide a structure that is then used for carrying out research, analysis and strategy development.

Next part of the analysis phase was to conduct research on where the target group are present online, this is done by assessing each industry individual and discovering what web pages there is out there to support discussion and knowledge sharing. Here below there is a model outlined for how the online research are carried out.

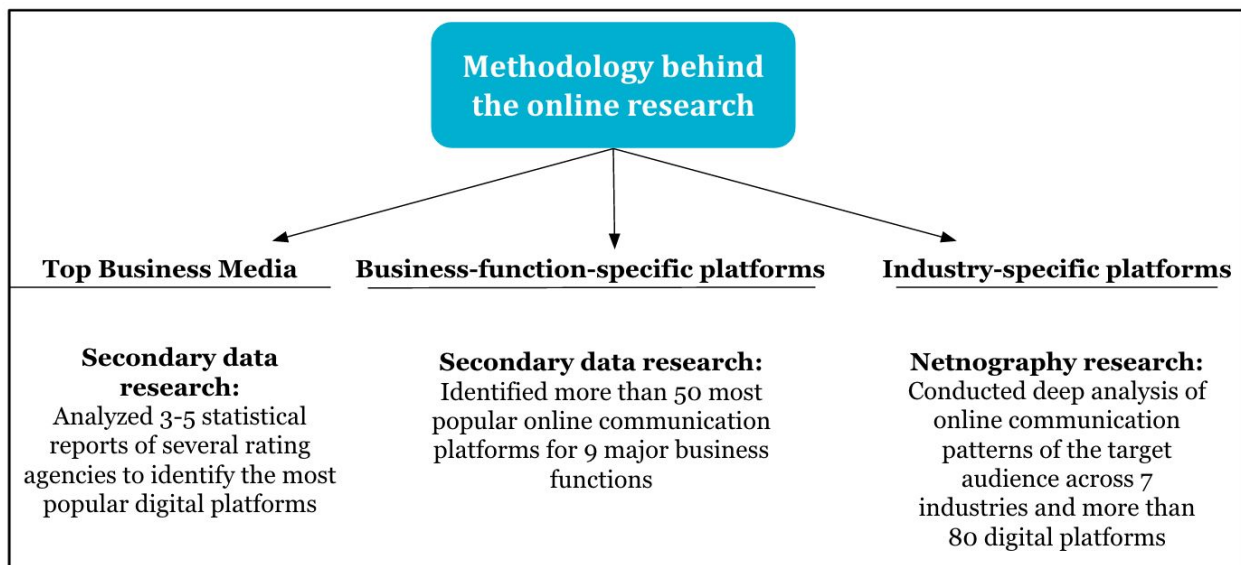


Figure 1. Method behind the online research.

iii. Methodology

In order to reveal the most important and popular digital communication platforms of the IBM Client Center target audience we have divided all identified sources into three major groups.

The first group consists of the top digital media used by the Russian business audience, the second category is comprised of the Internet communication platforms where representatives of different business functions are present (e.g. CFO, CIO, CMO, Chief Engineer and Chief Technologist, etc.) and finally all identified industry-specific platforms belong to the third group.

We strongly believe that CxO's might be present across all three media groups and that only such a holistic approach can provide us with valuable outcomes.

The methodology behind this research is above all based on the netnography approach. Through thorough analysis of quantitative and qualitative data on the Internet and deep listening of the “voice” of the target audience present in these platforms we were able to identify the most popular industry- and business-function-specific communication platforms and reveal all major pain points discussed there.

Besides, secondary data analysis has been also applied as one of the supporting research methods of this study. For example, we resorted to the analytical reports of *Rambler* and *Yandex Metrics* to make our quantitative research more specific and used *Medialogia* ratings as a reference to justify the choice on selected media.

c. Recommendations for the company

Based on the research and diagnostics of the current situation, the target group and the appropriate online channels that is suggested, a strategic action plan has been developed. The strategic plan is developed to support the implementation and execution of a digital marketing strategy at IBM Client Center.

i. Vision

The model used for the strategy is shown here below, two theoretical frameworks and a topline vision developed by us.

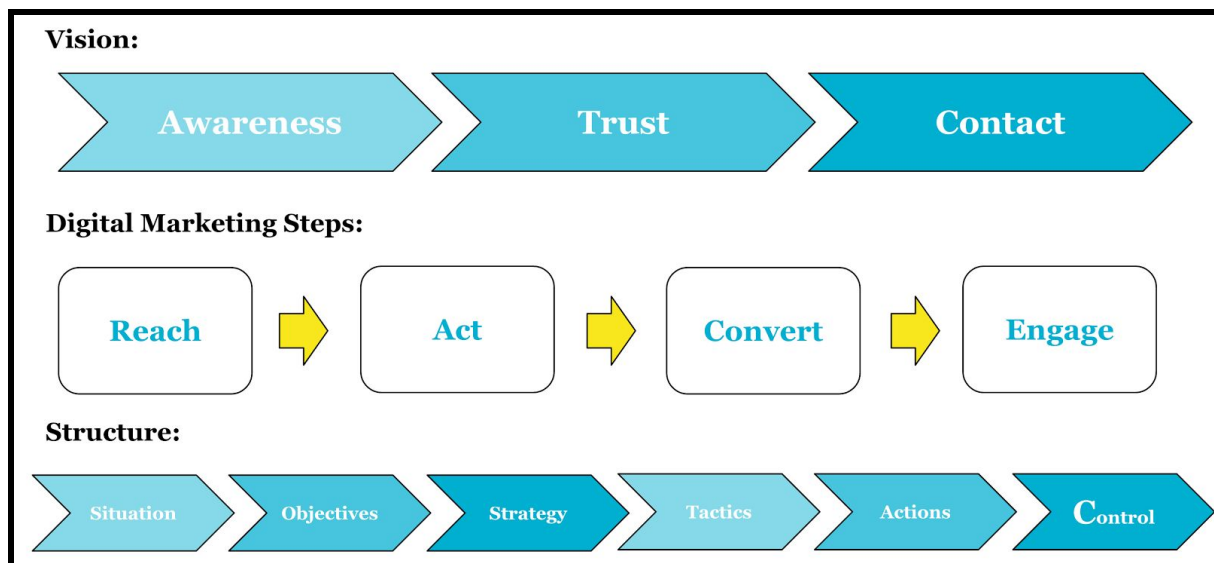


Figure 2. Digital Strategy Formulation. *Source: Chaffey D. & Bosomworth D, and own top level vision.*

On the highest level, the vision is defined by the three key words Awareness, Trust and Contact. They serve as a soft guideline, that comprehends the whole purpose for implementing a digital marketing strategy at IBM Client Center.

- **Awareness** is because the IBM Client Center as a brand should be known in the market and amongst the target group, and as the Client Center is founded recently there is a large potential for making the products and services known.
- **Trust** is important in all long-term business relationships, and here there is a specific focus on convincing the target group that IBM Client Center has the potential to become a trusted business partner who can add substantial value to their industries and solve very complex problems. As IBM delivers very unique solutions that are tailored the individual business needs, this trust is necessary to be build up before the target group with take their pain-points to IBM and allow IBM Client Center to formulate possible software solutions that can solve those pain-points. The trust is built through content marketing, that has the ability to explain what value IBM can create for it's clients.
- **Contact** is included as a final word in the overall vision as that is the conversion that IBM should seek to maximise. The target group should be motivated to interact with IBM either through phone, email, download of content, meetings, conferences and seminars. The online marketing strategy focused primarily on converting visits on the website to contact information left in a form there.

To make sure that the purpose of the strategy is easily understood everyone in IBM Clients Center should know these three words and respond to the question “What is the purpose of our digital marketing strategy?” With the response “To build awareness amongst our target group, to develop an understanding of us as a trusted business partner and to encourage them to contact and interact with us” It is the job of IBM senior management to develop this common understanding of the strategy before any projects or actions are taken. If this common understanding of purpose is not developed there is a very high risk that the implementation of the project will fail and the intended value creation will never happen.

ii. Implementation

The models and frameworks mentioned earlier have been transformed into a clear strategy plan where the star-chart form has been selected as the model to structure and communicate the identified initiatives. The start-chart is a easy to use framework from the balanced scorecard, but it has a lot of advantages compared to the balanced scorecard as it is simple to develop, simple to communicate and thereby has a lower failure rate during implementation. The Star-chart can when a final version is agreed upon be printed out signed by senior management and put on the wall where it is easy for every employee in the organization to see what the objective is and how to get there. The star-chart is developed to ensure IBM Client Center a successful execution of the digital marketing strategy, it can be seen on the next page.

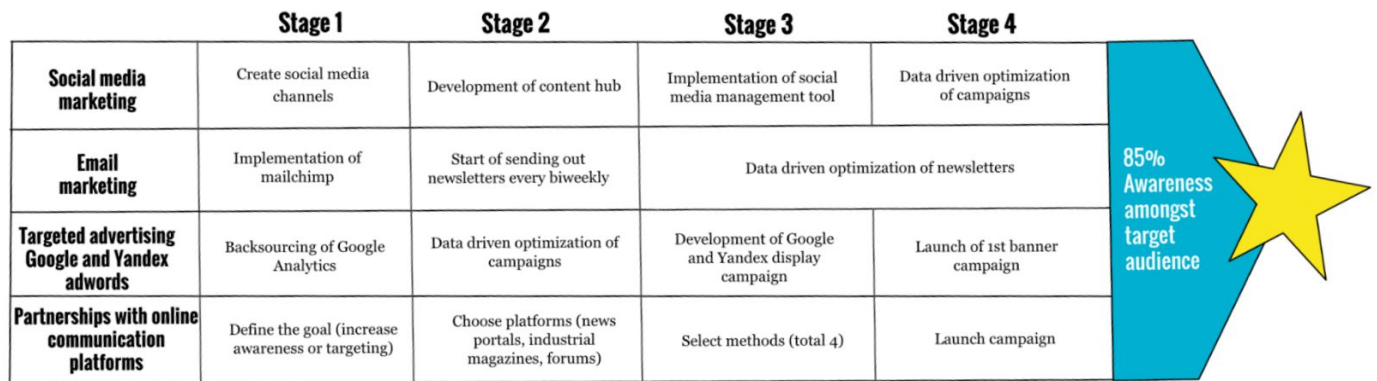


Figure 3. Star Chart. Source: Authors own

In the case of IBM Client Center, there are four areas with main importance, they are presented to vertically to the left of the model. Horizontally is the time frame of implementation and here it is left to IBM internally to define a time span. It is recommended that the time span should not be more than a year, and therefore to replace the stages with quarters. To the far left the target is defined and it is an ambitious but realistic target, that states 85 % of the target group should have awareness of the brand IBM Client Center within a year. And this is where the star-chart get its name from because the implementation brings the business closer to the stars. Along the horizontal axis from the focus areas to the final goal, there are initiatives presented that support the final goal.

Social media: In the first stage, it is all about ensuring that there is developed good looking and informative profiles on Social Media as they do currently not exist. Next step is then to develop a content hub that can provide content for posting. In the third phase, a social media management tool must be selected and implemented to support and measure all initiatives launched. In the last stage, there is data to measure the efficiency of the campaigns, this data is then used to improve the campaigns and maximize towards conversions.

Email marketing: In this track the first step is to implement an email marketing tool, here MailChimp is the best one. On the second stage procedures and content is ready so newsletters can be sent out to each specific industry. MailChimp supports the process and makes it less time consuming.

Targeted advertising Google and Yandex adwords: When talking about a digital marketing presence it is impossible not to mention Google and Yandex AdWords. As the search engine's own almost 100% of the Russian online advertising market they there must be an active presence there. The first step is the back-sourcing of Google and Yandex analytics and Google and Yandex AdWords to be managed internally in IBM. Adwords and analytics must be in house to make data-driven optimization possible in the second stage. In the third stage, the online presence is expanded to also comprehend a Google and Yandex display campaign, which can be promoted on websites where the target audience is active. A display campaign requires great visual content and structured approach to be successful, therefore on stage is allowed to this specific task. In the last stage, the display campaign is launched and monitored.

Partnerships with external online communication platforms: Industry specific journals, forums and news sites are important to establish relations with as the target group uses these online platforms to find inspiration on how to solve their business problems. IBM Client Center should at first stage define the goal of the cooperation, and determine if they want to target a specific group or they want to increase awareness amongst the target group there. In the next stage the channels are selected, in the third stage the method is selected and in the last stage, the campaign is launched and monitored.

The strategy implementation will be successful if the advice given to IBM are followed closely. The most critical part is to ensure commitment for all involved stakeholders. To ensure this, the strategy and purpose must be explained carefully, so the whole organization understands it and agrees on the direction.

Secondly, IBM Client Center must become data driven in their approach to marketing to always be capable of justifying the marketing spending through documented value creation.

d. Concerns

IBM Client Center has to change its configuration and become more analytical in its approach to marketing in order for them to invest in the marketing channels with the lowest acquisition rate. The management and implementation of new systems that supports the strategy will also require development of the organizations skills to become more IT savvy. And as mentioned the senior management in IBM Client Center are facing a challenge of communicating and selling the vision for this strategy to the organization. on.

e. Individual contributions

I have been active at all meeting with the academic advisor, company representative and team workshops, therefore my opinions, knowledge and ideas are reflected throughout the whole project. However as we all have individual strengths and weaknesses there is some areas where I have put a special effort, these areas are:

1. Development and description of strategy model.
2. Development of star char implementation plan, and strategic initiatives in each area. In depth analysis of email marketing, targeted online advertising and KPI's.
3. Slides for midterm and final presentation.
4. Leading and managing meetings with company representatives and academic advisors.

As my Russian language skills are very limited I was taking on other tasks apart from the research on russian online forums, so this is an area where I was less active.

5. ACADEMIC DISCUSSION

IBM Client Center is a newly developed business function that connects clients with highly specific engineering competencies within IBM. Therefore, they need an entrepreneurial approach to succeed. Not only do they have to go new ways they also have to rely on an overall entrepreneurship alike strategy. In the following part, a scientific and academic research will be presented and linked with a field of special interest from Master in Management at NOVA.

a. Link with MSc. Management field

As my favorite subject at NOVA was entrepreneurship, and I gained practical experience in the field of entrepreneurship during my semester in New York with the Manhattan Project. Here I did an internship in a Wall st. Real Estate startup. And as IBM Client Center is a new autonomous business function responsible for driving sales there is a strong link between the two areas. IBM Client Centers number one objective is to prove that the new function can attract new customers that will consider IBM a business partner instead of a one-time vendor of software, this requires a very strong strategy with the same considerations as an entrepreneur has in a startup.

b. Relevant theories and empirical studies

In the field of entrepreneurship, one of the most modern and used frameworks are the Business Model Canvas developed by Osterwalder, Pigneur & al. (2010). It is a framework that can be used to develop and document new business models. It is a visual chart with elements describing 9 elements that the new company must consider when developing new strategies; those are the firm's value proposition. The 9 areas are key partners, key activities, value propositions, customer relationship, customer segments, key resources, channels, cost structure and revenue streams. The left side of the model is product oriented and the right side of the model is sales oriented, in the middle bridging the two areas are the value proposition. The framework is often seen used as a model with 9 boxes, each of the boxes contains a part of the business model that has to be considered in a new venture strategy.

The book *Business model generation: a handbook for visionaries, game changers, and challengers*, is cited 3256 times on Google Scholar, and that proved that the model is credible and useful, and it is amongst the preferred material to be used when teaching entrepreneurship at NOVA.

Another model that is often used is the waterfall model W. Royce (1970), it consists of five linear steps, that is Requirements, Design, Implementation, Verification, Maintenance. It is often used to develop advanced software solutions, as the feedback loops to ensure a product does not pass to the next stage without being ready. It was first published in 1970 and is, therefore, a widely used model that is thoroughly tested. On Google Scholar, it is cited 3684 times.

The two models mentioned are both highly respected and cited amongst other credible researchers, but they do not fulfill the same goal. In this case, the business model canvas has many advantages over the waterfall model. The first one is that IBM Client Center do not set up their business linear or develop a product. Instead of they try to execute a sales and marketing strategy and that requires that a variety of supporting strategies are in place at the same time. The waterfall model also has a very long time horizon and IBM Client Center do not have that, they need to start making conversions right away and here the business model canvas can be used to develop a strategy with just that focus.

When IBM Client Center are applying the Business Model Canvas they have to be aware that it like all other frameworks have shortcomings. The first is that it does not include IBM's overall corporate strategy, and that is critical as they two units are highly dependable on each other. The second is that that it does not have an implementation aspect like our proposed star chart. It means that it does not allow the strategy to be broken down into smaller pieces that can be executed properly. The third and last point that has to be considered is that not all not all 9 area should have the same emphasis as IBM Client Center should put more emphasis on the right part of the model that focuses on the market.

c. Implications for theory and future research

As as unity IBM and IBM Client Center needs to think as a and perhaps they need to pick elements from the Business Model Canvas and adapt to their situation and include implementation factors and corporate strategy factors. It would require a strategy workshop,

where top management would define the product mix, product management would give inputs on the competencies and IBM Client Center would deliver market insights. There are many other great strategy development models out there that also could be relevant for IBM, e.g SWOT and Porter's 5 forces that also could be implemented and used.

6. PERSONAL REFLECTION

As the business project has been carried out as a team performance the only way to create a high performing team is if everyone pitches in and adds to the table. No matter how good a performance that has been done, it is always important to look back and reflect on what could have been done better, this section is about reflections up on that.

a. Personal experience

The team was very diverse both according to culture and skills, as we were 3 Russians from Siberia, Caucasus and Moscow. And even though Russia is one country there is a lot of differences culturally across the 11 time zones. The last member is from Austria, and again reflects a different culture.

i. Key strength & weaknesses developed doing the work project

My own strength and weaknesses stem from my skill set and my personality, and as I have a bachelor in engineering I often have a different and more technical approach to strategy development compared to my peers that studied business for 5 years straight. But in this project,

it has been an advantage as online marketing is often very technical if it should be made data driven. Google Adwords, Social Media Management tools, and Email management tools are quite technical but knowledge about it is vital when formulating strategies. Another strength that I have discovered is that I'm good at making conference calls efficient, as I in my previous jobs had a lot of conference calls and it takes time to get comfortable with this way of communicating about complex topics. Especially if there is a bad connection or it is in the beginning of a project where the scope and persons on the other end are still new.

My weakness is that I become bossy when there I get under time pressure and I tend to structure too much. That can be a problem when working with Russians who tend to have a more chaotic way of working with more things going on at the same time. It is about partly about cultural understanding and about taking it easy and not panicking when a deadline is close. I will also work on becoming a better listener, as a team works it is all about thinking like one and reflecting on other people's ideas and building on to them. Sometimes I tend to promote my own ideas too much and instead of I should be more focused on what inputs the other team members has.

ii. [Plan to develop areas of improvement](#)

I will continuously reflect and evaluate my own performance and look for areas of improvements, and as an input to reflection, feedback is important. Therefore, I will ask my team members for feedback within how I structure work and also how I understand and respect their culture. In regards to becoming a better listener, it comes with practice and awareness, I will try

to step back more often and take a second to think about what the other person actually said, and how I can use it to build on.

b. **Benefit of hindsight: What added most value? What should have been done differently?**

There is no doubt that we are a high performing team with the right mix of social and professional time spent together, this is also reflected in the feedback from the academic advisor and IBM that gave us 100 out of 100 points. I have been in many other situations where the team performance have been bad but this is not one of them. And therefore, there is not much I would have done differently.

But it does not mean that nothing has been learned, a good team performance like this one is an excellent experience that I will try and imitate in my team works going forward. Even though it is hard as not everything is in you own powder, a lot also relies on the other team members experience, personality and motivation.

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