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Título: A LINKEDIN CONTENT PLAN FOR A CLEANTECH STARTUP ANNEA, PORTUGAL

Nome do candidato(a): Dana Sultanova (№ 90855)

Mestrado em Marketing

Orientador(a): Dr. Maik Reder, CEO of ANNEA.ai GmbH

Co-Orientador(a): Professor João Guerreiro, ISCTE Business School, Departamento de Marketing, Operações e Gestão Geral

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# Acknowledgements

## Abstract in Portuguese

A pandemia do Covid-19 teve um impacto significativo no mercado B2B, transferindo numerosas reuniões e conferências presenciais para o espaço digital. Esta nova realidade poderia ser benéfica para os startups ágeis uma vez que estas se livraram dos elevados custos de viagem e poderiam ser criativas e proactivas nos meios de comunicação social. O LinkedIn, sendo a plataforma mais reconhecida para a captura de leads B2B, tornou-se uma plataforma de partilha de conteúdos B2B.

Este projeto é elaborado em colaboração com uma empresa alemã do setor de cleantech, ANNEA. O objetivo é desenvolver um plano de conteúdo do LinkedIn e analisar a sua eficiência. Neste projeto, foi introduzido o conceito de inbound marketing. Foi utilizado como base teórica para a criação de conteúdos B2B. O LinkedIn Sales Navigator foi utilizado como um instrumento de apoio à abordagem de social listening, que faz parte do conceito de inbound marketing. Após o desenvolvimento e implementação do plano de conteúdo do LinkedIn, as principais métricas do LinkedIn foram reunidas e analisadas.

A análise mostra que a taxa de compromisso aumentou após a implementação da abordagem descrita (em 60%). Contudo, outras métricas importantes como Reacções e Cliques diminuíram, enquanto que as Acções se mantiveram ao mesmo nível. Os tópicos com melhor desempenho foram recomendados para a continuação da criação de conteúdos. Estes incluem sustentabilidade e energia verde. Também se recomendou a utilização de mais conteúdos visuais em mais publicações e a apresentação de mais exemplos de utilização de energia verde por famílias e indivíduos.

**Palavras-chave:** marketing B2B; planeamento de conteúdos LinkedIn; inbound marketing; marketing digital de startup de tecnologia; criação de conteúdos B2B; social listening.

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**Abstract in English**

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the B2B market significantly, transferring numerous in-person meetings and conferences into the digital space. However, this new reality can be really beneficial for agile startups and small companies, as they can decrease the high travel costs and can be creative and proactive on social media instead. LinkedIn, being the most recognised platform for B2B lead capturing, has become a B2B content sharing platform as well.

This in-company project is carried out in collaboration with the German cleantech startup ANNEA. The purpose of this work is to develop a LinkedIn content plan and analyse its efficiency. In this project the inbound marketing concept was introduced. It was used as a theoretical underpin for B2B content creation. LinkedIn Sales Navigator was used as an instrument to support a so-called social listening approach, which is a part of an inbound marketing concept. After the LinkedIn content plan for ANNEA was developed and implemented, the main LinkedIn metrics were gathered and analysed.

The analysis shows that the engagement rate increased after the implementation of the described approach (by 60% from October 2020 to June 2021). However, other important metrics like Reactions and Clicks decreased, while Shares stayed at the same level. The best-performing topics were found and recommended for the further content creation. They include sustainability and green energy, as well as offshore wind energy development. It was also recommended to use more visuals in further posts and showcase more examples of green energy usage by households and individuals.

**Keywords:** B2B marketing; LinkedIn content planning; inbound marketing; tech startups digital marketing; B2B content creation; social listening.

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# 1. Introduction

Social Media Marketing has become a significant part of the digital marketing strategy for many companies in B2C market quite a long time ago. B2C companies use their social media accounts to increase brand awareness, engagement rate and even increase sales (Graesch et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, B2B companies are more conservative when it comes to their marketing strategy: the majority still relies on cold calls, events, conferences, and personal references. Those methods are effective, but they should not replace the digital presence of a B2B company, especially during COVID-19 when the online presence is crucial for every single enterprise (Yadav, 2021).

Therefore, social media marketing becomes more and more important for B2B market, but it requires different approach and different social networking platforms. Nowadays LinkedIn is the most used tool by B2B marketers: it is used by more than 95% and they manage to generate an impressive number of leads for the sales pipeline (LinkedIn Corporation, 2021).

Startups have also started to use LinkedIn as a content sharing platform and as an opportunity to find and engage with the potential buyers. However, the majority startups have very limited resources and cannot afford paid LinkedIn ads and campaigns, which are the most expensive comparing to other social networking platforms (Velocity Consultancy, 2020). Therefore, their LinkedIn marketing strategy should be mainly focused on organic traffic and content. There are numerous discussions among B2B marketing professionals about which tools are the most efficient and what types of content can help different startups to connect with the decision makers (Lee, 2021).

Considering this, here I propose my Master's thesis theme to revolve around a LinkedIn marketing strategy, specifically content creation, for B2B tech startups and how they can grow using LinkedIn social network platform as a marketing channel. The problem that I faced at the company at which my project was developed, is that there was no defined marketing strategy for establishing the online presence. I had to define the most efficient social network platform, according to the business specifications and purposes, that would initiate the sales and support brand establishment.

## 1.1.    Company Introduction

ANNEA.ai GmbH is a clean tech startup that provides predictive maintenance and asset performance optimisation platform for the renewable energy industry. The company started with a PhD work of Dr. Maik Reder, one of the founders and the current CEO. There were more than 5 years of research with leading European universities and wind energy companies within the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme.

A LinkedIn content plan for a cleantech startup ANNEA, Portugal

The ANNEA.ai GmbH was officially registered in 2019 in Hamburg. In 2020 a Portuguese branch was opened. The company's vision is to save resources for a more sustainable planet and the mission is to make machinery more efficient through predictive maintenance and underperformance detection. The main product is a fully automated predictive maintenance software that autonomously forecasts the health status of wind turbines, PV inverters and other machines in the renewable energy sector. ANNEA.ai GmbH has clients and pilot projects in Europe, Russia, Korea, Kazakhstan, and Morocco. ANNEA focuses on the wind energy industries (onshore and offshore). However, the business is currently expanding to the solar energy sector.

ANNEA's positioning corresponds to the conditions of the young B2B market in which the company operates. Predictive maintenance is a relatively new field and there are not many proven market leaders and experts yet. Due to this, a significant part of the ANNEA marketing strategy is educating clients on predictive maintenance and AI applicable to the renewable energy industry. An educational approach was chosen by the management of the company as a pillar of the positioning message. It includes publishing articles and posts that explain the technological side of predictive maintenance, introduce the steps of its implementation and show benefits for the clients. The content should provide information that ANNEA's potential clients and other stakeholders would like to learn about the industry, product and market. The main objective of educational marketing is to establish a thought leadership on the market and to educate potential clients on the value of the results that they can get with the ANNEA platform.

According to this approach, the placement channels (current and potential) are:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Outreach | Where do clients see us for the first time? Website; LinkedIn; News Portals; Conferences and Trade Shows; Startup Programs; Webinars; Magazines; Facebook; Twitter; Influencers; Cold calls; Recommendations; XING, employer's personal connections. |
| 2. Lead Capture | How can we get the contacts? Website Contact form; LinkedIn Sign-up form; Sign-up forms in Blog; Download Infographics/Reports/ White Papers on the website; Business cards from conferences; Personal contacts; Calls and emails from actively searching people. |
| 3. Prospects warm up | How can we prove that we are the best? Newsletter; Brochures; LinkedIn/XING posts and videos; Blog's articles; One pagers; Live demonstrations; LinkedIn Pulse; 4 types of Customer concept, office visits, Pilot Project (or POC ideally paid). |
| 4. Deal | How do we close a deal? CRM; Prepared Sales Representative; Marketing KIT; Presentations; Business offer; Quotation, office visit. |
| 5. Triggers | How do we do up-sales and cross-sales? Service calls; Software Trainings; Office visits, Account managers (proposing upgrades etc.) |
| 6. Loyalty | How do we assure client loyalty? Special pricing on other products; Customized features; Asking for the feedback, successful account management. |
| 7. Recommendations | How do we stimulate a client to recommend us and in which way? LinkedIn recommendations; Personal Introductions; Perform together on conferences... |

*Figure 1 - ANNEA Marketing Channels*

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Due to COVID-19 and the global pandemic situation, the ANNEA management team made the decision to focus on online marketing channels, especially social networks. Three social platforms were analysed and compared according to ANNEA's business goals: Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook.

Being a startup, ANNEA has some limitations in work force. Therefore, only one social network had to be chosen in order to ensure high-quality and ongoing publications. The justification of this choice is shown in the literature review.

## 1.2. Thesis objectives

With this thesis, I am hoping to find highly ranked scientific articles to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of LinkedIn on the brand awareness of tech startups, to define the theoretical concept for content creation, and to improve LinkedIn marketing strategy and content planning of the startup ANNEA. The topics to explore include social media marketing, LinkedIn as a B2B marketing platform, principles of developing a social media marketing strategy for B2B technical startups, content creation in a B2B market, inbound marketing methodology and strategies. The aim of the thesis is to develop a LinkedIn content plan for ANNEA, analyse its efficiency and provide the recommendations for ANNEA for the further social media content creation.

The goals to achieve with publishing content on LinkedIn are as follows: to increase brand awareness, to establish thought leadership in the market by educating the followers, and to increase the followers' engagement level.

One of the key tasks to be accomplished in this project is to identify the theoretical underpins for a B2B startup social media marketing content creation and perform their practical implementation in a tech startup ANNEA. Therefore, the research question is: what does ANNEA have to post on its LinkedIn profile to achieve increased brand awareness, establish thought leadership in predictive maintenance market and increase the rate of engagement?

The thesis includes the following chapters: literature review, methodology, implementation, conclusion, limitations and bibliography.

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## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Digital Marketing

The information age has completely changed the way marketing works: it is not just about trade shows, TV and radio advertisement, and billboards anymore. Digital marketing disrupted marketing concepts in all markets: B2C, B2B and B2G. Nowadays, it is all about marketing to current and potential online clients, via the Internet (Miller 2012). Digital marketing campaigns help to attract Internet users, retain them and convert to loyal customers. A profound analytical study on effective digital marketing actions is presented in García et al. (2019). Digital marketers became frontline employees in the majority of successful companies. Nowadays, they are the ones who shape the perception of the products and services and communicate it to their clients. Meanwhile, the clients also changed their behavior: more and more people all over the world do the online research prior to making a purchase (O'Connor, 2015). This is particularly the case of the generations Y and Z, whom Michael Moon named three-handed: "they have a digital third hand" (Moon, 2008).

### 2.2. Social Media Marketing

Digital marketing includes many channels, instruments and tools that marketers can use online. Profound research is presented in Brosan (2012). Social media takes the third place with 13% of the overall marketing budget consumption. Social media was introduced in the early 2000s as a new tool of communication. The main feature that this tool brings is an active interaction among the users (Singh & RatnaSinha, 2017).

Social media marketing was enabled by Web 2.0. This term appeared in 2005 and was defined as websites and services that have content generated by their users, rather than special content creators or editors (O'Reilly, 2005). This important change also meant that apart from the links between web documents, the online "links between people appeared" (Murugesan, 2007). Following this trend, Web 2.0 enabled connections not only between friends and colleagues, but also people started to connect online with events, brands, companies etc. (Rainie at al., 2012). Therefore, people started to receive news and updates from the connected entities, and they could associate themselves with any entity they wish (Newman et al., 2016). Very quickly, companies noticed a great potential for developing their businesses through the web space, and that was the beginning of the social media marketing (Berthon et al., 2012). Figure 2 shows that Web 2.0 serves as a technical infrastructure for consumer-generated content-creation. It is shown, that, coming together, Web 2.0, Social Media and Creative Consumers, took the power of publishing from the corporations and firms. It has become possible to share ideas, opinions and products' feedbacks, moreover, creating valuable digital content. Therefore, it was a dramatic shift that made social media and social networks so powerful.

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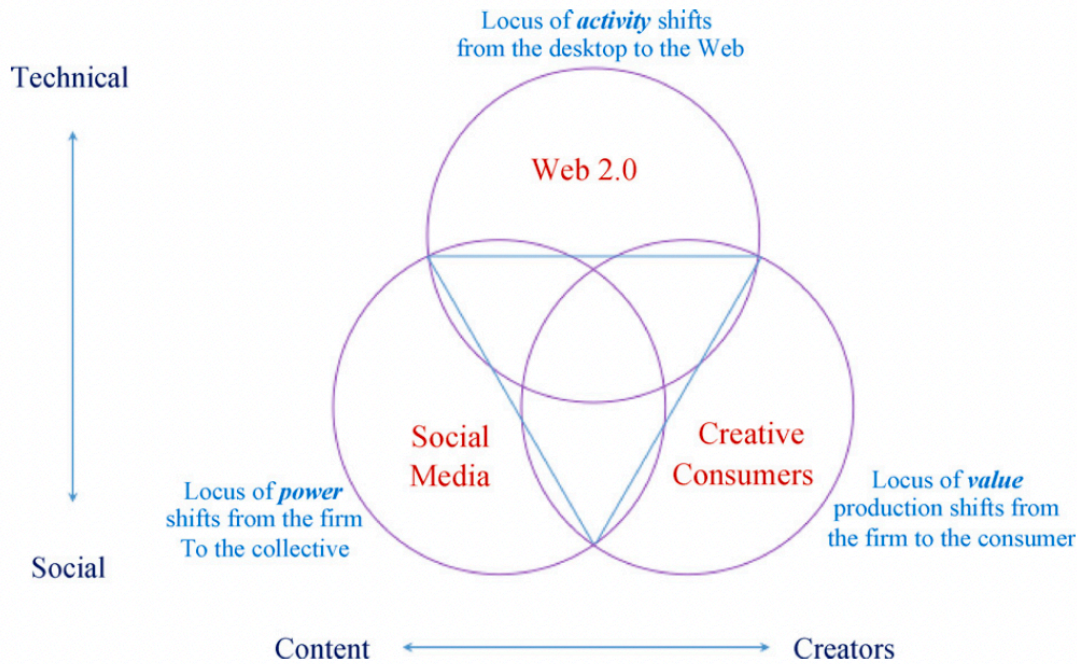
*Figure 2- Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers (Berthon et al., 2012).*

The most important feature of social media is that the content is generated by users. It makes social networks extremely personalized and this is the reason why so many users feel such a strong connection with them which can even grow to an addiction. According to Weller, (see Weller, 2015, p. 281), "social media research represents a kaleidoscope based on thousands of individual pieces, originating from different perspectives and disciplines, applying different methods and establishing different assumptions about social media usage". The behavior of social network users aligns with the reciprocal action theory. It is based on social norms, and it explains the feeling that people have once they receive something, and they want to return "good for good" and response in proportional to what they receive (Bagozzi, 1995).

In order to estimate the influence of social media on brand loyalty Bader M. A. Almohaimmeed (Almohaimmeed, 2019) developed a questionnaire and distributed it to 500 randomly selected customers. The antecedents of his study were corporate reputation, frequent social media updates, content of social media, social media motivations and brand communications. The model and the results of hypothesis testing are presented in Almohaimmeed (2019). The study he conducted showed that social media marketing has a significant impact on brand loyalty and customers' purchase intention.

If used efficiently, social media can bring numerous benefits to a company: attract new customers and increase the level of engagement with the existing ones (Newell et al., 2015). Also, it can significantly improve communication with stakeholders (Murphy et al., 2013), and provide a better understanding of products and services (Huang, 2010).

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**2.3. Social Media in B2B Market**

The B2B market has an established traditional approach of building a long-term relationship with a client through numerous presential meetings (Athaide et al., 2019).

However, the situation is changing, and more and more B2B companies started to use digital marketing tools (Sundström et al., 2020). There are two main reasons why B2B companies started to implement digital marketing into their marketing strategies: firstly, because their competitors do it, and secondly, because their customers expect it (Miller 2012).

A human-centered approach still works the most efficiently for the majority of B2B companies and it should be combined with digital channels and tools. This approach will help to improve customer experience and will enable steady business growth (Britt, 2020).

However, instead of popular exciting interruptive digital marketing techniques, B2B digital content marketing is proposed to be non-interruptive (Holliman, 2014). Digital marketing techniques can be divided in two types: outbound and inbound marketing techniques (Pateman, 2011).

While Outbound marketing focuses on pushy messages to potential customers and is also called interruption-based marketing (Pateman, 2011), inbound marketing activities are based on potential customers' interests that attract them, answer their possible questions and solve their possible problems (Hubspot, 2021). B2B digital content marketing appeared to be "an inbound marketing technique" (Holliman, 2014) that gives a positive effect through social media.

A model of social media implementation to a B2B company's marketing mix was developed and explained by Maryam Lashgari (Lashgari M. et al., 2018). The findings showed the importance of roles of personas in B2B companies.

Content is a core of a digital marketing strategy for the majority of the companies, and it is extremely important in the B2B market due to its professional environment (Yaghtin et al., 2020). Creating marketing content in a B2B market means "creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome" (Holliman & Rowley, 2014, p.285).

Figure 3 shows how content marketing is implemented and used in B2B market. It is highly dependable on the account employees (existing and potential clients' decision makers) and should trigger their engagement (Wang et al., 2017). A service provider has to perform content marketing activities that would trigger engagement behaviors of the account employees. They might include personal invitations, activities that require registration (to capture leads' contact information), as well as open-access activities. Account employees, in turn, will influence purchase decisions of the account (client company). For the scope of his project, only open-access activities (digital content on LinkedIn) will be analysed.

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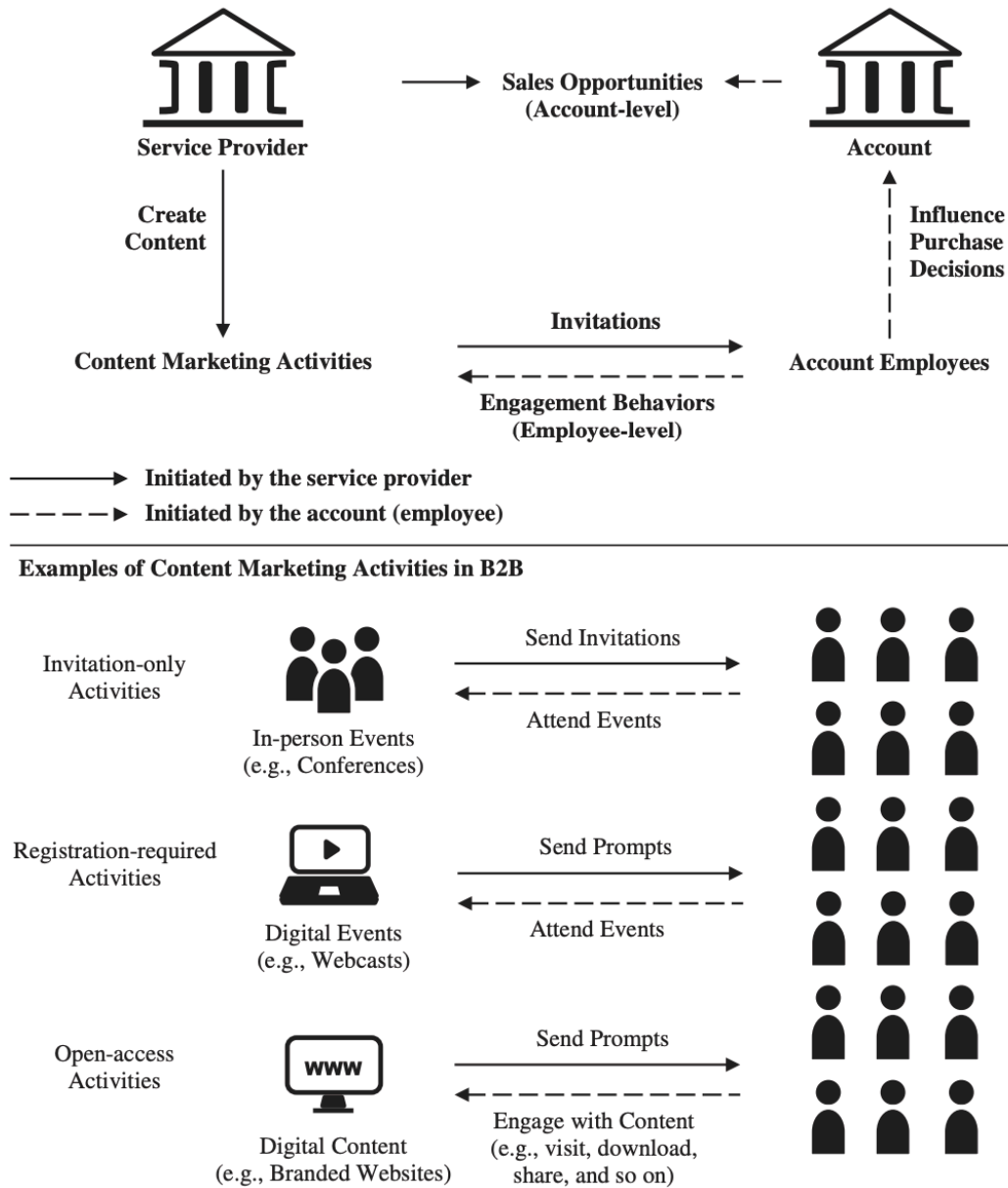
*Figure 3 - Engagement with content marketing activities in the B2B context (Wang et al., 2017)*

## 2.4. Tech Startups Digital Communication Strategy

The purpose of this thesis is to develop a content plan for a cleantech startup. Therefore, it is crucial to find out and understand the features of tech startups digital communications.

Nowadays, all successful companies invest more and more into flexible IT landscapes, which allow them to maximize the benefits coming from digital technologies (Wiesböck, 2020). Startups play an important role in digitalization processes. They not only contribute to a technological progress, but also increase the quality of products and services, production efficiency, open new markets and create new workplaces (Corl, 2019).

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A profound study of how to develop a marketing strategy for tech startups was conducted in Israel, where the quantity of high-tech startups is vast and all the conditions for innovation development are created. One of the key findings claims that the relationship between marketing and R&D are perceived as extremely important because often R&D does not meet the marketing team goals and expectations (Chorev S., 2006).

**2.5. LinkedIn as a Marketing Platform**

LinkedIn enables international networking and marketing and promotes a company in a business environment (Wagner, 2014). It gives access to millions of professionals all over the world and allows startups to engage in conversations with them. Therefore, startups have the opportunity to share content about their products and services and raise brand awareness (Basri, 2017).

LinkedIn plays an important role in inbound marketing strategy. Firstly, LinkedIn is an essential tool for a company to be found by potential clients who are searching online for information about products and services that are similar to their own. Secondly, it is relevant as a form of contact with potential clients and partners and of developing a long-term business relationship with them. However, LinkedIn can be also used as a channel for outbound marketing strategies, once a company starts growing internationally.

A series of competing hypothesis were formulated in Gruner (2017) in order to investigate a potential correlation between different social media platforms and their influence on business. LinkedIn corporate followers have significant negative interaction with Facebook likes. The research results reveal that once a company has social media presence on multiple platforms at the same time, it provides a negative moderating effect on the activity level on a specific platform (Gruner, 2017). Therefore, choosing the "right" social media platform might be a crucial point of a digital marketing strategy. This is one of the subjects of this Master's thesis.

LinkedIn has in total around 766 million users, and 310 million monthly active users. Six out of ten users actively look for industrial insights on LinkedIn, which makes it highly successful for content sharing purposes. Moreover, LinkedIn generates more than 50% of the traffic to B2B tech blogs and websites. In addition, most importantly, 92% of B2B marketers actively use LinkedIn in their digital marketing mix and 97% use it for content marketing (Omnicore Agency, 2021). According to the LinkedIn research on B2B marketers' attitude to this social network, it was found that 79% of them recognize LinkedIn as an "effective marketing channel" (Figure 4). Moreover, it was identified that 80% of B2B leads are coming from this social network.

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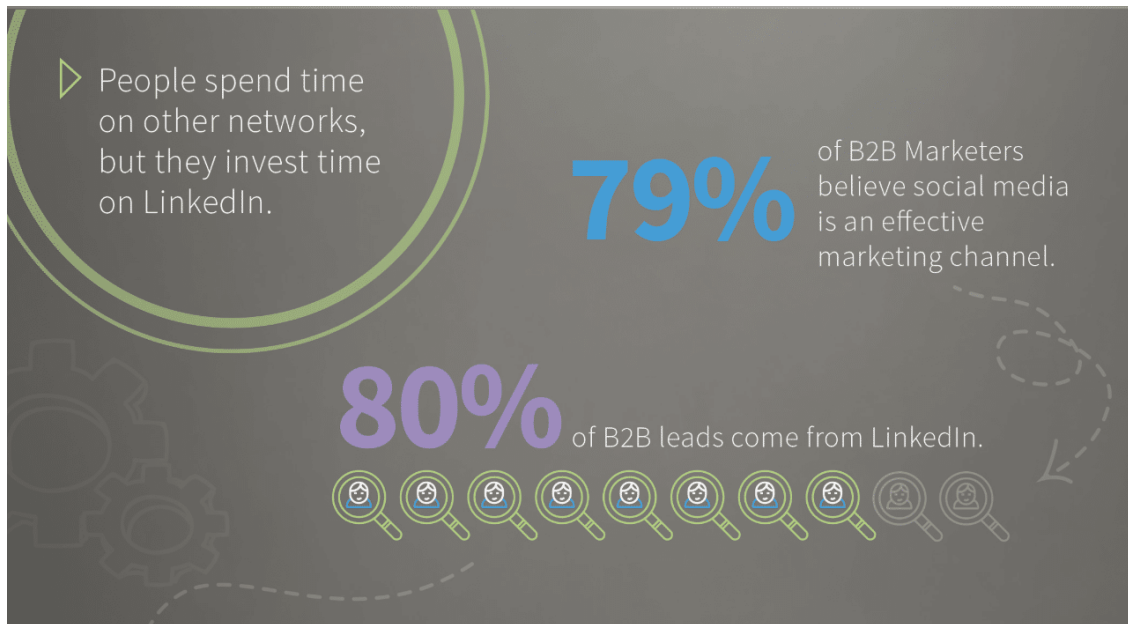
*Figure 4 - B2B LinkedIn Leads (LinkedIn Corporation, 2021)*

One of the reasons why people register on LinkedIn is their network expansion. Usually, people send connection requests to their colleagues, classmates or users who have the same professional interests. Therefore, LinkedIn is the #1 platform for social listening and social selling (Marin et al., 2021).

LinkedIn provides general recommendations for a content marketing tactical plan, based on its expertise and numerous corporate studies (Figure 5).  As the main goal of the ANNEA educational marketing strategy is to establish thought leadership on the market, "Groups" and "Publishing on LinkedIn" are considered to be the opportunities for the scope of this project. "Pages" and "SlideShare" are not taking into account in this project in order to keep the research focus on the content plan creation.

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| | OPPORTUNITIES | WHAT TO SHARE | OBJECTIVES | KEY METRICS | ACTION ITEMS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 HR. DAILY | Pages | • Company news<br>• Blog content<br>• Industry news and research<br>• Case studies | • Brand awareness<br>• Lead generation<br>• Thought leadership<br>• Event registration | • Page followers<br>• Post clicks<br>• Engagement<br>• Inquiries and leads<br>• Event registrants | • Post 3-4X a day<br>• Engage with followers via post comments<br>• Change header image every 6 mos |
| 30 MIN. DAILY | SlideShare | • Company videos and presentations<br>• Infographics<br>• Webinar decks | • Lead generation<br>• Brand awareness<br>• Thought leadership<br>• SEO | • Views<br>• Leads and inquiries<br>• Linkbacks and embeds | • Upload new content weekly<br>• Highlight decks on profile page<br>• Group content into playlists<br>• Add lead forms |
| 20 MIN. DAILY | Groups | • Avoid self-promotion<br>• Use as a catalyst for thought leadership and community<br>• Spark conversations about industry trends and challenges<br>• Ask questions to crowdsource sentiment | • Thought leadership | • Number of new contributors<br>• Number of discussions<br>• Quality of conversions<br>• Number of profile views<br>• Number of new connections | • Create a group for your company<br>• Ask for opinions and provide insights<br>• Monitor submissions daily<br>• Thank other contributors with a like or a comment<br>• Promote group on social media |
| 1 HR. WEEKLY | Publishing on LinkedIn | • Professional expertise and experiences<br>• Industry trends<br>• Lessons learned | • Thought leadership | • Post views (and demographics of your readers)<br>• Post likes, comments, and shares<br>• Profile views | • Publish whenever you feel passionate<br>• Recommended: bi-weekly or once a month |
| 30 MIN. DAILY | Sponsored Content | • eBooks<br>• Case studies<br>• Industry articles<br>• Helpful how-to content | • Lead generation<br>• Brand awareness<br>• Thought leadership | • Engagement rate<br>• Impressions<br>• Inquiries or leads<br>• LinkedIn Page followers | • Run for 3 weeks<br>• Share links to lead forms, and add URL tracking code |
| 1 HR. WEEKLY | Sponsored InMail | • Webinar and event invitations<br>• eBook launches<br>• Program demos<br>• Blog subscription campaigns | • Brand awareness<br>• Lead generation<br>• Event registration<br>• Program enrollments | • Open rate/click-through rate<br>• Inquiries, leads, and conversions<br>• Event registrants<br>• Program applications | • Keep copy <1,000 characters<br>• Use a clear call to action with a 300x250 pixel banner<br>• Use first name personalization<br>• Bid competitively, especially if your audience is narrow |
| 30 MIN. WEEKLY | Text Ads | • eBook launches<br>• Product one-sheeters<br>• Webinar and event invitations<br>• Program demos | • Brand awareness<br>• Lead generation | • Website traffic<br>• Inquiries, leads, and conversions | • Include an image: 50x50 pixels<br>• Use a strong call to action<br>• Use 2-3 active ad variations per campaign to compare success |

*Figure 5 - LinkedIn Content Marketing Tactical Plan (Rynne, 2019)*

Although, these recommendations can be considered as a core part for the ANNEA LinkedIn content marketing plan, it should be adjusted to the startup's positioning and the professional interests of its target group.

## 2.6. B2B Social Media Content Creation

Talking about LinkedIn as a marketing platform for a tech startup, it is crucial to find out what are the principles and possible strategies for content creation.

The main principle and goal of B2B content creation does not differ from a B2C approach: the content should be adapted to the clients and enable further trust and confidence about the brand's expertise (Cawsey et al., 2016). However, in B2B, relationship building is much more important and complicated rather than in B2C. This is why social media content plays a huge role and it is often called "the technological component of [...] relationship building" with clients (Andzulis et al., 2012). To become an efficient marketing tool, B2B social media content should be interactive and responsive (Karampela et al., 2019). In Karampela et al. (2019), it was proven that this type of content influences the following brand indicators in a positive way: satisfaction, intimacy, partner quality, and commitment. Besides, in Lehnert et al. (2021) content marketing is stated as a "precise focus of inbound marketing". A few recommendations for content creation based on inbound marketing are given and HubSpot is outlined as an "inbound powerhouse". Moreover, in Lehnert et al. (2021) it is mentioned that it is crucial to define the metrics that could measure the success of the content.

In Cartwright et al. (2021) there are three elements of a successful social media strategy: 1) contact establishment with the direct clients and other stakeholders; 2) clients' database creation; 3) client-oriented service system. These principles are also to be applied to the LinkedIn content creation strategy.

However, the biggest challenge that B2B companies have regarding content creation for social media is a lack of knowledge about effective use of the social media platforms as a strategic tool, and their implementation to the company's marketing mix (Liu, 2019). Profound research of the existing scientific articles on this topic was done in Cartwright et al. (2021). This research was integrated into a holistic framework that showcases how social media is being used in a B2B market (Figure 6). This figure shows that knowledge sharing comes from the focal firm to its audiences (customers and other stakeholders), and then returns as feedback and questions. Social media (SM) can be used in this process as a sales facilitation tool, as an integrated communication tool, or as an employee engagement tool. However, knowledge sharing content should be tuned to the tone of the company's brand voice and delivered to the audiences.
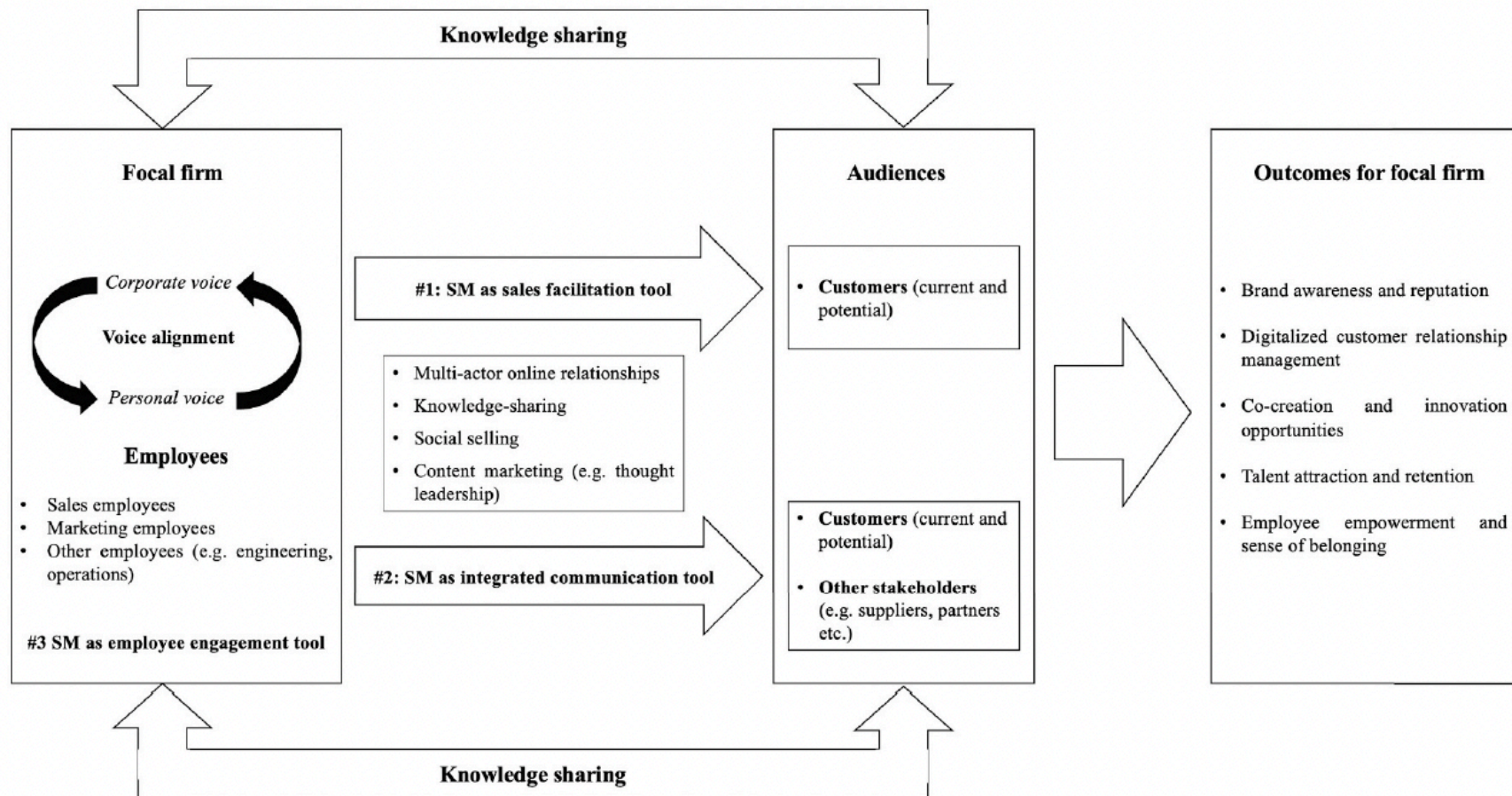
*Figure 6 - Social Media in a B2B Market (Cartwright et al., 2021)*

**2.7. Inbound Marketing Methodology**

As previously mentioned in the literature review, inbound marketing stays as an underpin for a social media strategy in a B2B market.

According to Hubspot (which is a recognized full platform of marketing), the inbound methodology, "is the method of growing your organization by building meaningful, lasting relationships with consumers, prospects, and customers" (HubSpot, Inc., 2021). The aim of an inbound marketer is to attract new prospects and make them engaged at an individual level with the content that the company creates. Normally an inbound marketer works very closely with the sales team and in some cases with a product team. Hubspot offers a "Flywheel" approach to the company's inbound marketing shown in Figure 7 (HubSpot, Inc., 2021).
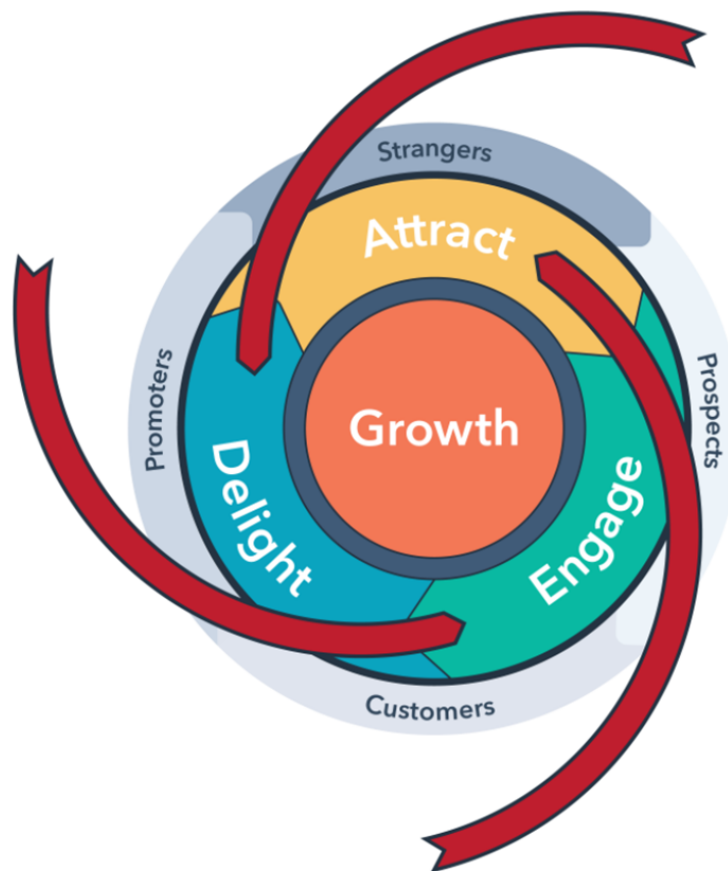


*Figure 7 - Inbound Marketing Flywheel (HubSpot, Inc., 2021)*

In the middle of the flywheel there are three spots that underpin the inbound methodology: attract, engage and delight. Attraction means reaching out to the targeted personas with a valuable content that showcases the company as an expert and an opinion leader. Engagement stands for providing information and insights that help to solve their pain points and to reach their goals. Delight stands for supporting and helping the customers after they made a purchase.

Bringing this approach to the marketing strategy allows creating successful experience for customers. Then they share their experience with others and therefore bring more prospects. This way, the process goes as a "self-sustaining loop".

The wheel starts to spin once a marketer implements content strategies that acquire and retain customers. These strategies are the forces for the flywheel (HubSpot, Inc., 2021). On the other hand, there is also flywheel's friction – everything that slows down its spinning. It can be caused by the lack of communication and collaboration between teams inside the company. If the inbound methodology is integrated to the company, it eliminates the friction, because marketing, sales and product departments add force to the flywheel. At the same time, the organizational department is also extremely important as it facilitates the handovers between the teams and therefore reduces the friction too.

The long-term goal of the flywheel is to attract, engage and delight as many customers as it is enough to keep it spinning. Therefore, with the time the flywheel enables company's growth without continuous investment in customer acquisition.

Customer acquisition in the B2B market is a very complex process. The companies' buying decisions are taken by a group of people, called the decision makers or sometimes a decision making unit (Meire et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to define them and adjust the LinkedIn content to their interests and needs.

According to Cambridge Dictionary, a decision maker is "a person who decides things, especially at a high level in an organization" (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Referring to the B2B sector there is another definition introduced by Frost A. on the HubSpot website: "During the sales process, the decision maker is the individual who can make the authoritative decision to make a purchase without having to confer to anyone else. In B2B sales, they are typically in the C-suite and sign the check when the sale is made" (HubSpot, Inc., 2021).

## 2.8. Inbound Marketing Strategies

Social listening is the core inbound marketing strategy that underpins all other content creation strategies (HubSpot, Inc., 2021). Social listening implies monitoring any (potential) customer feedback on the company's posts and articles, their discussions regarding specific keywords, topics, competitors, or industries, their professional interests and activities (Amaresan, 2020). Performing social listening enables a company to create attractive and involving content for its followers, follow the industry trends, and to interact with the followers. This approach helps to avoid mistakes, which the content creation based on a marketer's assumptions has. Using social listening, a marketer can hear exactly what the followers are saying and discussing. Knowing this, a marketer can create a content that "talks" with the followers. Sprout Social research shows that "83% of respondents like when brands respond

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to questions, and 68% like when brands join conversations" (Sprout Social, Inc., 2021). Moreover, social listening helps to increase customer acquisition. It broadens the prospects' outreach and helps to convert the followers and content viewers to the leads.

Meanwhile, social listening underpins the content creation process there are three content creation strategies that represent three types of the inbound content. They are as follows: attracting strategy, engaging strategy and delighting strategy. These strategies correspond with the three areas of the flywheel (HubSpot, Inc., 2021):

1. Attracting strategy implies creating content that brings value to the followers. This includes guidance on how to use the company's products and services, description of the benefits that they bring, customer testimonials and information about special offers and discounts. In the tech B2B sector, attracting strategy can also include articles that explain industrial issues, terminology and technical trends.

2. Engaging strategy is oriented on building a long-term relationship with clients. This type of content should explain the benefits and the value that the company and its business bring to the clients. The most important thing is to make sure that the created content sells the solution, not the product or service. The followers have to be sure that the company closes all the deals in mutually beneficial agreements for its clients and its business.

3. Delighting strategy has the goal to make clients satisfied, happy and make them feel always supported, even after they made the purchase. This type of content can involve contacts of the team members, who can answer the specific product's questions. The followers have to feel that the company has experts who will always give a professional advice and assist at any time. Requesting clients' feedback is also an important part of this strategy.

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## 3. Methodology

The objective of this chapter is to describe a step-by-step development of a LinkedIn content plan for ANNEA. It describes how the Inbound Marketing concept was implemented. Besides, it shows which tool was used on LinkedIn and how. The result, a LinkedIn content plan, is presented in the next chapter.

The theoretical underpins for this plan were taken from the literature review of this thesis. Inbound marketing approach was emphasized as the most efficient in the B2B market in many discovered sources.

Social listening is recognized as an effective approach in B2B marketing as well as the force for further sales in a few articles from the literature review. According to this approach, the content creator has to check social media activities of the target group and adjust the content to their interests, as well as to their tone of voice and communication style (Amaresan, 2020). Therefore, as the Step 1, it is crucial to define the target group. In the case of B2B content creation the decision makers of the potential clients' companies are the target group (HubSpot, Inc., 2021). To accomplish this task, a decision maker's persona should be described. Then the LinkedIn users with the defined characteristics should be found (using the LinkedIn Sales Navigator as a tool) – Step 2.

Step 3 – is to connect with the prospects found by using LinkedIn Sales Navigator. The content creator has to establish LinkedIn connections with the decision makers to be able to learn about their LinkedIn activity. Besides, it is important to encourage them to follow the ANNEA company page to make sure that they will see the company's posts (Step 4). For this purpose, a personal invitation should be sent (LinkedIn Corporation, 2021). This activity is considered to be a part of an outbound marketing strategy and is not in the scope of the current inbound marketing strategy. However, this action should be done to ensure that the targeted prospects will become ANNEA followers and will be able to see the ANNEA posts. Therefore, they will have a possibility to engage with them.

As the next step (Step 5) it is important to figure out the interests of the target group, their professional values and motivation to work. The elements of extended self (objects that people have relation with and regard possessions as part of themselves) together with communication of the shared values should be used in the B2B content to trigger the followers' engagement (Sundström et al., 2020). Based on this observation and social listening, the topics of the future posts should be defined.

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Once there is a list of topics that are interesting to the decision makers, a LinkedIn content plan should be developed (Step 6). There are three inbound marketing strategies (described in the literature review) that underpin the LinkedIn postings: (A) attracting, (B) engaging and (C) delighting (HubSpot, Inc., 2021). Category (A) contains the posts that educate the followers. According to the ANNEA marketing strategy, it is crucial to educate clients on predictive maintenance and AI applied to the renewable energy sector. Therefore, the posts of category (A) should dominate in the LinkedIn content plan.

Category B (engaging strategy) includes the posts that show the results and the created value of the ANNEA implementation. They should explain the benefits that the ANNEA clients get.

The category C (delighting strategy) consists of the posts that emphasise the market expertise that the team has. These messages have to assure the decision makers that the ANNEA team can deliver the results that are promised, showcasing the skills and knowledge of the team members.

Once the LinkedIn content plan is done and used for the ANNEA postings, the metrics should be gathered and analysed (Step 7). The analysis will show if the implemented approach was efficient or not and will also help to derive recommendations for the further ANNEA LinkedIn content creation.

To explore the efficiency of the implemented approach the last step (Step 8) is needed. The comparison of the LinkedIn metrics before and after Inbound Marketing approach implementation should be done.

Summarizing all the defined steps, the following plan can be introduced.

### 3.1. Applying an Inbound Marketing Approach to the ANNEA LinkedIn Content Plan

The in-company project's steps of creating a LinkedIn content plan are as follows:

1. Define decision makers' personas.

2. Search for the decision makers' profiles on LinkedIn using LinkedIn Sales Navigator.

3. Connect with the defined prospects.

4. Send invitations to follow the ANNEA profile to the connected prospects.

5. Check and track LinkedIn activity and interests of the connected prospects who also have become ANNEA Followers.

6. Create a LinkedIn content inbound marketing plan according to the defined prospects' interests.

7. Track and gather ANNEA LinkedIn page's analytics.

8. Compare the ANNEA profile's metrics before and after the implemented approach.

### 3.2. Defining the metrics to measure the success of the content

A purpose of LinkedIn marketing activities for a B2B startup differs significantly from B2C companies. The objectives of a B2B tech startup can vary depending on its development phase and be as follows: gain attention of decision makers and industry opinion leaders, gain their trust, make them support

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and promote the business on LinkedIn. Most importantly, it is not about the quantity of leads, but about their quality and the level of engagement of each of them.

One of the challenges mentioned in the literature review (Kuckertz et al., 2020) is a lack of physical interaction with the stakeholders. In order to substitute it, a digital communication channel (LinkedIn) is being used. It can help develop and strengthen the feelings between the clients and the startup and maintain the long-term relationship. This can be measured by the engagement rate (Sundström et al., 2020). Therefore, the main metric to measure the content success, that is available for monitoring on LinkedIn, suggested to be engagement rate. LinkedIn calculates it by using a formula shown below in this thesis.

### 3.3. Defining Decision Makers' Personas

HubSpot introduces four key qualities that help to create a decision maker persona: job title, budget management, strategy overview and tenure (HubSpot, Inc., 2021). Prior to identifying the decision makers in the industry, the personas of ANNEA end-users were identified and analysed (Annex 1. ANNEA End-Users' Personas).

The decision makers' persona were created based on interviews with the ANNEA founders (3 interviews), internal ANNEA workshops and brainstorming to analyse the client (2 workshops), meetings with external market experts through accelerator programs that ANNEA participated in (8 meetings), and meeting with the ANNEA clients (36 meetings). An example of a meeting protocol is shown in the Annex 2. Example of a potential client's meeting protocol (the names are hidden due to the NDA). After analysis of the notes and protocols from all the meetings, the decision makers' persona was identified as follows:

Job title: chief technology officer, senior operation and maintenance manager, chief operating officer, predictive maintenance executive, asset management director. The person should hold a senior level position.

Manages budget: has the authority to propose purchases within his department and influences the purchasing decisions.

Aware of the strategy: is involved in the strategy implementation, knows the current operation and maintenance problems, knows the lost profit caused by wind turbines' downtime, and is looking for the tech innovative solutions. The person might be operating in a business development, innovation, IT or operations and maintenance department.

Tenure: the person should have a large experience in the industry, not less than ten years. However, the person might be new to this role (less than one year), because usually people are very enthusiastic once they come to a new place and try to innovate.

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These characteristics will be applied in LinkedIn Sales Navigator when searching for decision makers.

**3.4. Searching for the Decision Makers' Profiles on LinkedIn using LinkedIn Sales Navigator**

LinkedIn Sales Navigator (LSN) is a tool provided by LinkedIn that helps to find the prospects and to reach out and engage with them. It is the most used tool for Social Listening by B2B marketers all over the world (LinkedIn Corporation, 2021).

This tool has filters that help to find the target personas (decision makers). The characteristics of the decision makers' personas from the previous step were applied. "Predictive Maintenance" was used as the keyword as this is the area that ANNEA works in. According to the founders' experience, this keyword is being used by the majority of the decision makers in their job description. The search was limited geographically to Europe. The industry was Renewables & Environment as this is the industry that ANNEA currently is focused on according to its marketing strategy. Figures 8 to 11 show the filters that LinkedIn Sales Navigator has.
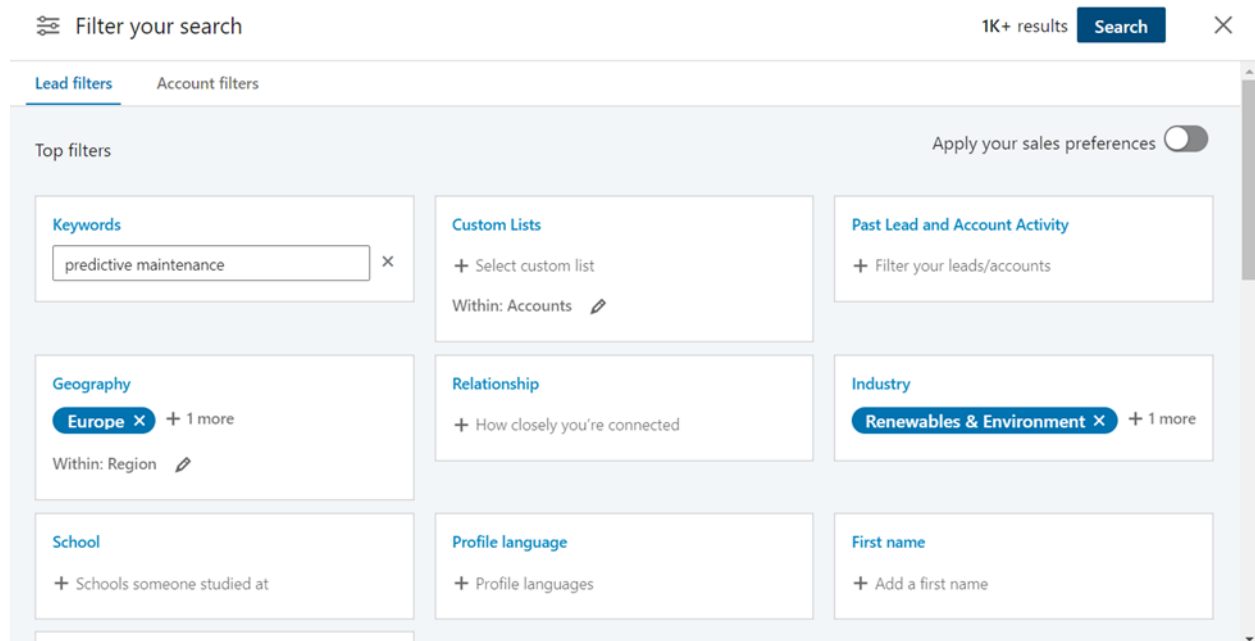


*Figure 8 -LinkedIn Sales Navigator Screenshot: Lead Top Filters*

The seniority levels were chosen as Manager, Senior and C-level, as at the meetings with clients and potential clients, the representatives were at the senior level of their companies. Besides, the ANNEA mentors recommended to address heads of departments at the companies. The years in current position was chosen as "less than 1 year", because managers tend to bring innovative solutions once they start a new position (LinkedIn Corporation, 2021). The functions were chosen as follows: Business Development, Operations, Innovations, IT (according to the decision makers' persona: aware of the strategy).

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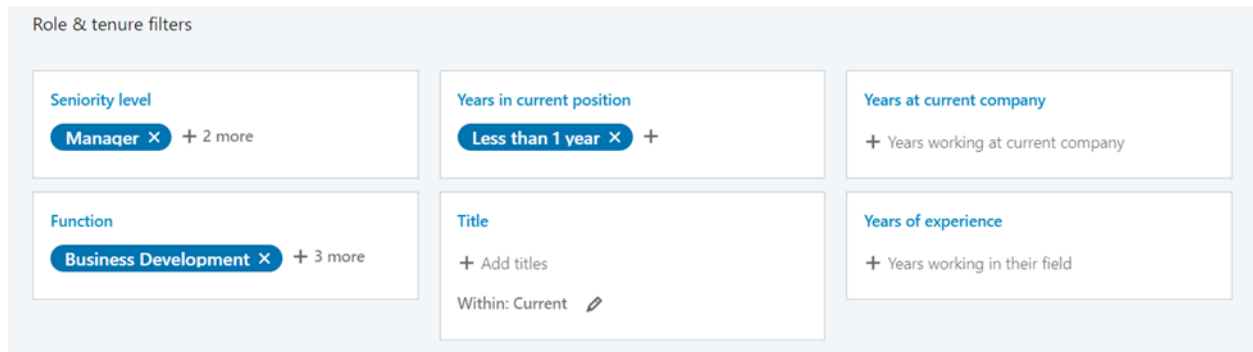
*Figure 9 -LinkedIn Sales Navigator Screenshot: Role & Tenure Filters*

None of the company's filters were used for the purpose of this search.
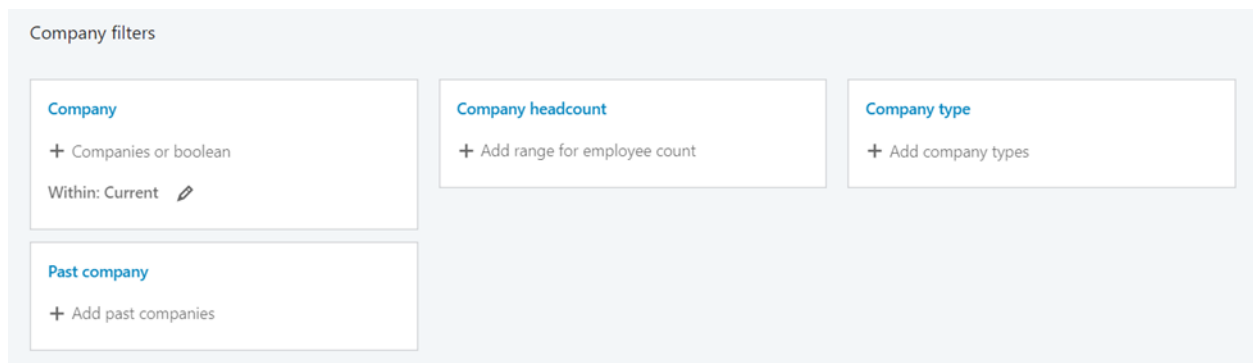


*Figure 10 -LinkedIn Sales Navigator Screenshot: Company Filters*

Among other filters, one group filter was used: "Renewable energy world". According to the Social Selling principles, there are higher chances to connect with LinkedIn users who are "active" on LinkedIn and who are the members of the same groups.
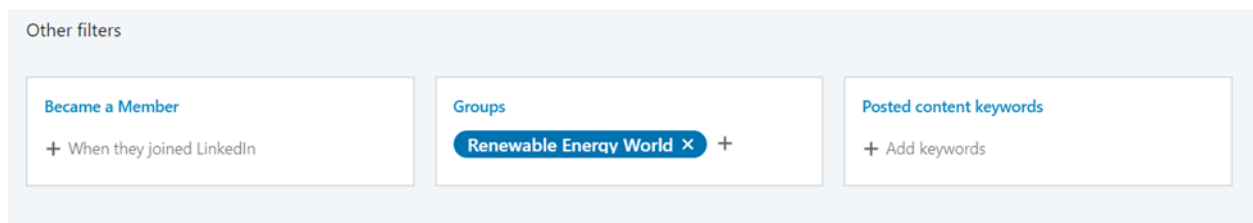


*Figure 11 -LinkedIn Sales Navigator Screenshot: Other Filters*

**3.5. Connecting with the Defined Prospects**

With the applied filters, LinkedIn Sales Navigator showed 48 prospects. After the manual review of the profiles of each prospect, 23 profiles were defined as the most relevant. Some of other profiles appeared to be potential competitors or they did not fully match the decision makers' profiles. The connection requests were sent out. 14 (61%) prospects accepted the connection request, meanwhile 9 (39%) did not respond.

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The people who accepted the request were mostly from large energy companies, that are actively looking for innovations and open to international businesses. Geographically speaking, almost one third of the connected prospects is coming from Spain. The rest is spread mostly through Germany, Portugal, Italy and some other European countries. The roles and responsibilities of the connected prospects are focused on operations and maintenance of wind turbines. Around 20% are involved in R&D. More than 80% of the sample have managerial positions.

**3.6. Sending Invitations to follow the ANNEA Profile to the Connected Prospects**

There is a "Super admin view" for the administrators of the company's profile on LinkedIn which is shown in Figure 12. It gives an opportunity to invite personal connections to follow the company's profile page.
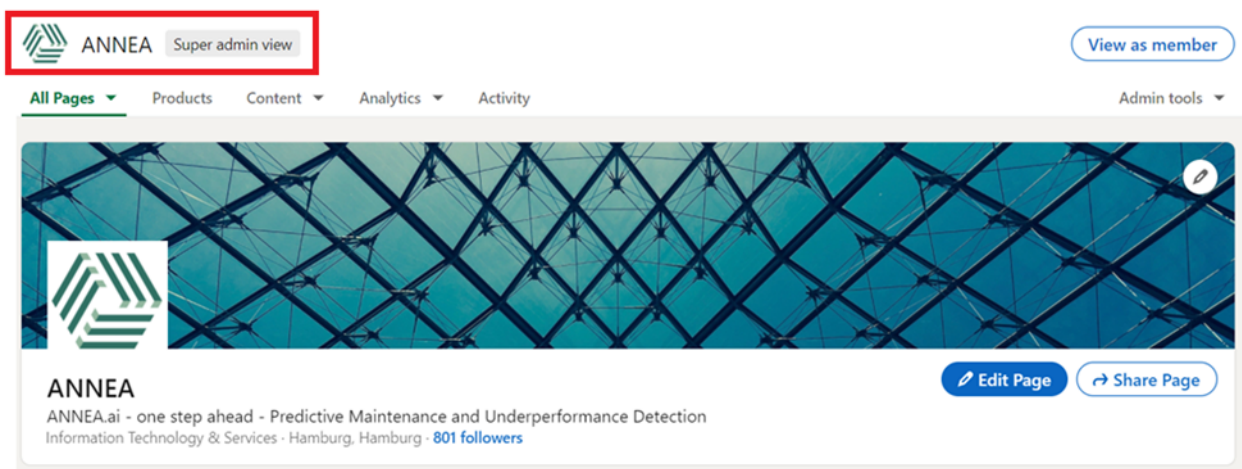


*Figure 12 - LinkedIn Screenshot: ANNEA Page Super Admin View*

Therefore, it is possible to invite only the prospects who accepted the connection request at the Step 3. Figure 13 shows the LinkedIn interface that allows inviting connections to follow the company's page.



*Figure 13 - LinkedIn Screenshot: Invite Connections*

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There were three weeks of waiting time after sending out the invitations and checking the accepting results. It is supposed to be sufficient time for LinkedIn users to respond to requests and invitations (Osman, 2021). As a result, three users (13%) accepted the invitation to follow the ANNEA LinkedIn profile.

**3.7. Checking and tracking LinkedIn Activity and Interests of the Connected Prospects who also have become ANNEA Followers**

The main objective of this step is to define the professional interests of the users who have already engaged with the ANNEA page or stayed connected with the ANNEA employees.

In order to check user's interests, one should scroll down his/her LinkedIn profile page until the "Interests" section. There are three categories of interests: Companies, Groups, Schools. Figure 14 displays the interests of one of the prospects, that are divided in three groups: Companies, Groups, Schools.
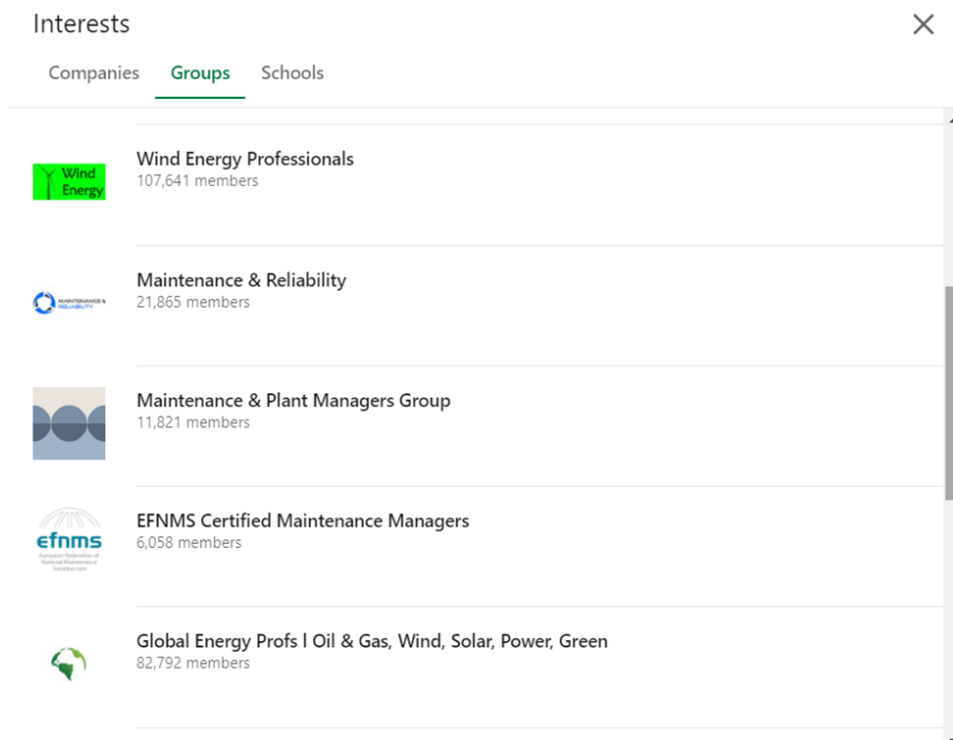


*Figure 14 - LinkedIn Screenshot: Prospect's Interests*

For the further content creation purposes, "Groups" is the most efficient to track. The ANNEA LinkedIn posts will be published in these groups to increase the number of posts impressions in the relevant audience. Besides, the "Activity" section of the prospects' profiles should be explored and be monitored (the name of the prospect is hidden to keep the confidentiality). Figure 15 shows an example of one of the prospect's activity.

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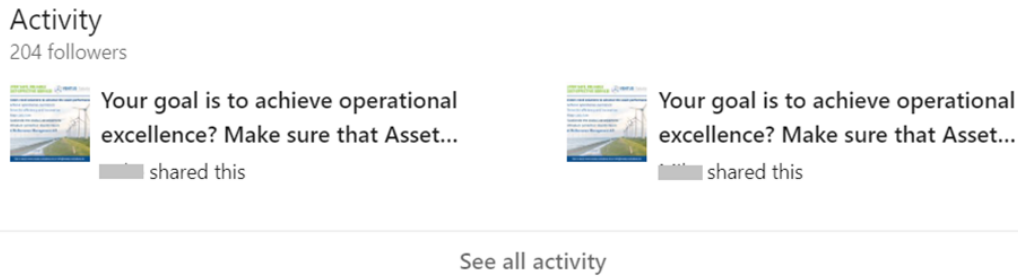
*Figure 15 - LinkedIn Screenshot: Prospect's Activity*

This approach was used to monitor all prospects' profiles. As a result, the following topics of interests were defined:

- Asset management in the renewable energy industry;
- Digital twins in the energy sector;
- Green energy and sustainability;
- Industrial IoT;
- Offshore wind energy development;
- Predictive maintenance;
- Solar farm's underperformance and its reasons.

Moreover, the tone of voice should be also checked. According to the inbound marketing concept, the content should be adjusted in terms of its style and special terminology to the target group. The connected prospects tend to use formal and semi-formal English language. They use specific industrial terminology but avoid using too technical words and expressions (some examples of the posts are in the Annex 3. Examples of the ANNEA Prospects' posts). The relevant keywords and hashtags that they use:

- Offshore wind;
- Green energy;
- Renewables;
- Sustainability;
- Wind farm;
- Wind energy;
- Cleantech;
- Decarbonisation.

The content should not have commercial statements, otherwise it will not be engaging for the followers (McShane et al., 2019).

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## 4. Implementation

### 4.1. ANNEA LinkedIn Content Plan

For the scope of this research work, two opportunities out of the list in Figure 5 (Rynne, 2019) were taken: Groups and Publishing on LinkedIn. Publishing was narrowed down to the posts on the ANNEA corporate profile page due to the workforce limitations in a startup.

The actual posts publishing dates should have been adjusted according to ANNEA's other necessary updates like recruiting posts and partners' posts sharing (where ANNEA was tagged).

The ANNEA content marketing plan for LinkedIn profile page is shown in the Table 1 following.

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| # | Topic | Inbound Marketing Strategy | Text | Publishing Date | Post Link |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Offshore wind energy development | Attracting | #Offshorewind energy sector is developing extremely fast! 2021 has started with ambitious #news: the first artificial energy island is planned to be built in #Denmark, the largest offshore wind farm will be completed in #SouthKorea by 2030, meanwhile, Amazon is going to buy offshore wind energy to enable its operations in Europe. At ANNEA we are excited to watch the industry's growth and to be a part of it! | 11.02.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67655554684942925825 |
| 2 | Green energy and sustainability | Attracting | We are glad to be included in the Sustainability Landscape 2021! Thank you HV Capital, Center for Digital Technology and Management (CDTM), Ananda Impact Ventures, Acton Capital, and Plug and Play. Let's keep on contributing to a sustainable future together! | 03.03.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6772878213333966848 |
| 3 | Industrial IoT | Engaging | Breaking down #IoT: What is the connection between IoT and Industry 4.0? What are edge computing and data streaming? How do we use IoT at ANNEA to enable failures' predictions up to one year in advance? We answered all these questions (and more) in our new article! Follow the link below to read it: | 11.03.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6775785985679609856 |

| 4 | Asset management in the renewable energy industry | Engaging | With ANNEA Dashboard you can easily identify the asset that has a problem and drill down to the actual faulty component. Here you can also see the root-causes of the future problems on your wind or solar farm. This information, as well as underperformance issues and operational malfunctions, is displayed in real-time.<br>If you would like to check our Dashboard demo, feel free to drop us a message or send an email to info@annea.ai | 24.03.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6780400854693380096 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 5 | Predictive maintenance | Attracting | We are pleased to appear in Top-5 predictive maintenance startups! | 05.04.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6784847211638353920 |
| 6 | Digital twins in the energy sector | Delightning | The term "digital twin" is not new anymore and it can be used in many different fields. However, the full concept itself might still not be very clear to everyone.<br>At ANNEA we create digital twins for the #renewableenergy sector, but we believe that it is important to clarify the general concept behind #digitaltwins. Click on the link below to read our new blog post! | 20.04.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6790234929327308800 |
| 7 | Offshore wind energy development | Attracting | The number of #offshorewind turbines is growing worldwide. The operating conditions are usually harsh and it is getting even more complicated once wind turbines are floating. At ANNEA we implement the inflow and wave conditions in our predictive models and we know precisely when the components will need #maintenance. | 26.04.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6792421843459424257 |

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| 8 | Solar farm's underperformance and its reasons | Engaging | 62% of overall failures on a solar farm are related to the PV Inverter. The ANNEA Solar Dashboard is already commercially available! Interested? Schedule a Demo session with us: info@annea.ai. | 06.05.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67960086730819817472 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Green energy and sustainability | Delightning | This Thursday our CEO, Dr. Maik D. Reder, will present ANNEA in South Korea. The event is dedicated to Smart City, Sustainability and Social Impact Ecosystem. Many thanks to German Accelerator for this opportunity! Follow the link to register! | 18.05.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:68003359362138251264 |
| 10 | Industrial IoT | Delightning | We are continuing a cycle of articles that sheds some light on the technical side of the ANNEA solution. This time we explained edge computing and its role in the #bigdata world. Follow the link below to learn more about it! | 24.05.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:68002614342232748032 |
| 11 | Green energy and sustainability | Attracting | Have you ever thought of what you can do with 1 MW of #windenergy? And with 37,5 MW? This is the amount of green energy that can be additionally produced by 100 wind turbines with ANNEA. Check what you can use it for! | 08.06.2021 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:68079973402859597824 |

*Table 1 - ANNEA LinkedIn Content Marketing Plan*

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In order to reach out to a larger audience and to establish a thought leadership the posts were also shared in the relevant groups. Table 2 below shows the posts' distribution across different LinkedIn groups that are followed by the defined decision makers:

| Post # | Topic | Post Link | Groups' Names |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Offshore wind energy development | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67655554684942925825 | Offshore Wind Farms; Floating Offshore Wind Turbines; Offshore Wind Energy & Support Vessels; Offshore Wind Energy; Offshore Wind Professionals. |
| 2 | Green energy and sustainability | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67728782133339668848 | Renewable Energy World; Digital Strategy & Transformation; Entrepreneurs and Start-up Connections. |
| 3 | Industrial IoT | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67755785985679609856 | Data Mining, Statistics, Big Data, Data Visualization, AI, Machine Learning, and Data Science; Digital Strategy & Transformation; Future Technology: Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, IoT, Blockchain, Bitcoin \| Startups (BIG). |
| 4 | Asset management in the renewable energy industry | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67780400854693380096 | Renewable Energy World; Wind Energy; Energy People; Wind Energy Professionals. |
| 5 | Predictive maintenance | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67784847211638353920 | Digital Strategy & Transformation; Future Technology: Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, IoT, Blockchain, Bitcoin \| Startups (BIG); Entrepreneurs and Start-up Connections. |

| Post # | Topic | Post Link | Groups' Names |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | Digital twins in the energy sector | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67900234929327308800 | Energy Professionals; Solar Energy Network; Renewable Energy World; Wind Energy; Digital Strategy & Transformation. |
| 7 | Offshore wind energy development | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67922421843459424257 | Offshore Wind Farms; Floating Offshore Wind Turbines; Offshore Wind Energy & Support Vessels; Offshore Wind Energy; Offshore Wind Professionals. |
| 8 | Solar farm's underperformance and its reasons | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67960086730819817472 | Solar Energy Network; Solar Energy Professionals - PV & Thermal; Solar Energy (PV) Network. |
| 9 | Green energy and sustainability | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:68000359362138251264 | Renewable Energy World; Digital Strategy & Transformation; Future Technology: Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, IoT, Blockchain, Bitcoin \| Startups (BIG); Entrepreneurs and Start-up Connections. |
| 10 | Industrial IoT | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:68002614342232748032 | Data Mining, Statistics, Big Data, Data Visualization, AI, Machine Learning, and Data Science; Digital Strategy & Transformation; Future Technology: Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, IoT, Blockchain, Bitcoin \| Startups (BIG). |
| 11 | Green energy and sustainability | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:68079973402859597824 | Renewable Energy World; Energy Professionals; Wind Energy; Energy People. |

*Table 2 - ANNEA Content Distribution across LinkedIn Groups*

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## 4.2. ANNEA LinkedIn Page Metrics Analysis

This chapter analyses in detail the metrics from ANNEA social media account on LinkedIn. Based on this analysis, the recommendations for further LinkedIn content creation will be provided to ANNEA. These statistics shows how well the company's profile posts are performing on LinkedIn.

The key metrics and their definitions are as follows:

1) Number of (organic) impressions – the number of views when the post is not less than 50% on the screen or whenever a user clicks on it.

2) Number of reactions – when a user reacts on the post. There are six possible reactions on LinkedIn: Like, Celebrate, Support, Love, Insightful, Curious.

3) Click-through rate – shows percentage of (organic) impressions resulted into clicks. CTR = Clicks / Impressions.

4) Shares – shows the total amount of when users shared the post.

5) Engagement rate – shows the level of interaction of users with the company's profile page. Engagement rate = (Likes + Comments + Shares + Clicks + Follows) / Impressions.

6) Clicks – the number of user-clicks on the post.

The metrics of each post are shown in Table 3 below.

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| Post # | Post Link | # of Impressions | # of Reactions | CTR, % | Shares | Engagement rate, % | Clicks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6765554684942925825 | 408 | 10 | 2.45 | 2 | 5.39 | 10 |
| 2 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6772878213333966848 | 320 | 5 | 24.06 | 0 | 25.62 | 77 |
| 3 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6775785985679609856 | 376 | 9 | 1.86 | 8 | 6.38 | 7 |
| 4 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6780400854693380096 | 413 | 14 | 4.84 | 8 | 10.17 | 20 |
| 5 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6784847211638353920 | 184 | 4 | 2.72 | 0 | 4.89 | 5 |
| 6 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6790234929327308800 | 219 | 7 | 3.65 | 1 | 7.31 | 8 |

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| Post # | Post Link | # of Impressions | # of Reactions | CTR, % | Shares | Engagement rate, % | Clicks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:67924218434594242457 | 243 | 7 | 1.65 | 12 | 9.47 | 4 |
| 8 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6796086730819817472 | 220 | 9 | 4.55 | 10 | 13.18 | 10 |
| 9 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6800359362138251264 | 439 | 16 | 1.59 | 0 | 5.24 | 7 |
| 10 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6802614342232748032 | 300 | 10 | 3.67 | 3 | 8 | 11 |
| 11 | https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6807973402859597824 | 351 | 10 | 4.56 | 25 | 14.53 | 16 |

*Table 3 - ANNEA LinkedIn Page Metrics*

Regarding the number of Impressions, posts #1 (408 impressions), #4 (413 impressions) and #9 (439 impressions) were the most successful. They are related to the following topics (respectively): "Offshore wind energy development", "Asset management in the renewable energy industry" and "Green energy and sustainability". In terms of the number of reactions, posts #4 (14 reactions) and #9 (16 reactions) were also the most successful ones.

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In terms of CTR, the most successful post was the post #2, which CTR is significantly higher than the others (24,06%). However, its topic was also "Green energy and sustainability". A high CTR might be explained by the fact, that this post contains slides that are appealing for LinkedIn users to click and observe. This fact can be noted and taken into consideration for the further ANNEA LinkedIn content creation.

However, it is interesting to mention that both of these posts (#2 and #9) gained 0 shares. Meanwhile, the most successful post in terms of sharing was post #11, which number of shares was significantly higher than the others (25 shares). Its topic was also "Green energy and sustainability". A high number of shares might be explained by the fact that this post explains the benefits of ANNEA for the end users (electricity consumers). This segment is much larger, than direct clients in B2B sector. Therefore, a high number of shares might be caused by the relevance of the published content to a larger audience than the targeted ANNEA prospects. The influence of this audience sharing on the ANNEA brand has to be analysed separately, as it is out of a scope of this thesis.

In terms of the engagement rate, which was assumed the most important metric for the scope of this thesis, post #2 was the most successful. Its engagement rate is significantly higher than the others (25,62%). It means that this post had the highest level of LinkedIn users' interaction with it. The topic of the post #2 was "Green energy and sustainability".

Finally, the highest number of clicks was received by the post #2 as well. The number is significantly higher than the others (77 clicks). This metric has a high influence on CTR and engagement rate. Therefore, the post #2 has these three metrics at the highest level.

The further analysis of the ANNEA LinkedIn page focuses on the graphs showing the dynamics of the metrics described above. The following graphs were automatically generated by LinkedIn. They are available for the page administrators in the Analytics section under the Updates sub-section. The analysis focuses on Impressions, Reactions, Shares, Engagement rate, and clicks. These graphs show the period from October 2020 to June 2021. The goal of this chapter is to present the performance of the developed ANNEA's LinkedIn content plan without any bias, by explaining each metric and by comparing them.

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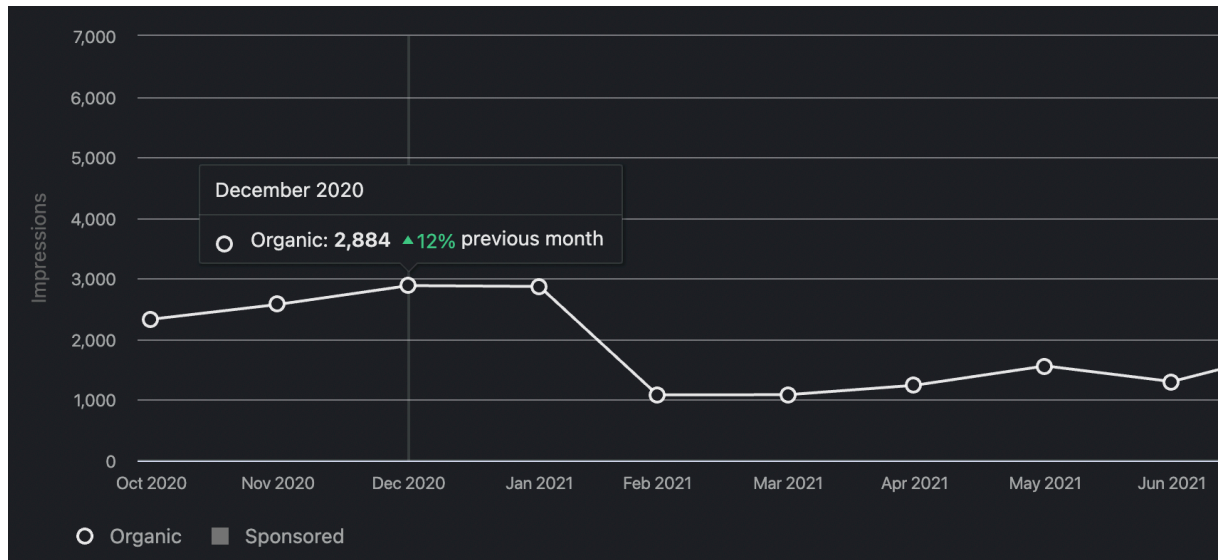
*Figure 16 - LinkedIn Screenshot: Impressions*

Figure 16 analyses the number of impressions in which the number of times the content was displayed no matter if the piece of content was clicked on or not. The first spike was the number of impressions reaching over 2,000 from October towards the end of November 2020. Later, towards December there was a steady rise towards almost 3,000, where the organic reach of impressions in terms of how many times the content was shown on the LinkedIn newsfeed to the number of unique people who saw the content was more than 2,800 on December 2020 providing a 12% increase comparing to the previous month.

However, starting from January 2021 to June 2021, there is a large dip after January 2021. This might be explained by the beginning of the year, which is usually an extremely busy time for the decision makers (according to the meeting conducted). Then throughout March and April 2021, there is no high rise in the metrics, only until May 2021 where the organic reach went up by 26% compared to the previous month at 1,560 impressions. However, by June 10 it comes a heavy plunge in the number of impressions to 500 compared to the starting value at 2,500 from last November. To conclude, the number of times in which the content was displayed saw a decrease between October 2020, to June 2021 by 20%.

Figure 17 shows the number of Reactions, in which the set of expressions offered to the ANNEA followers to easily demonstrate their attitude to the posts.

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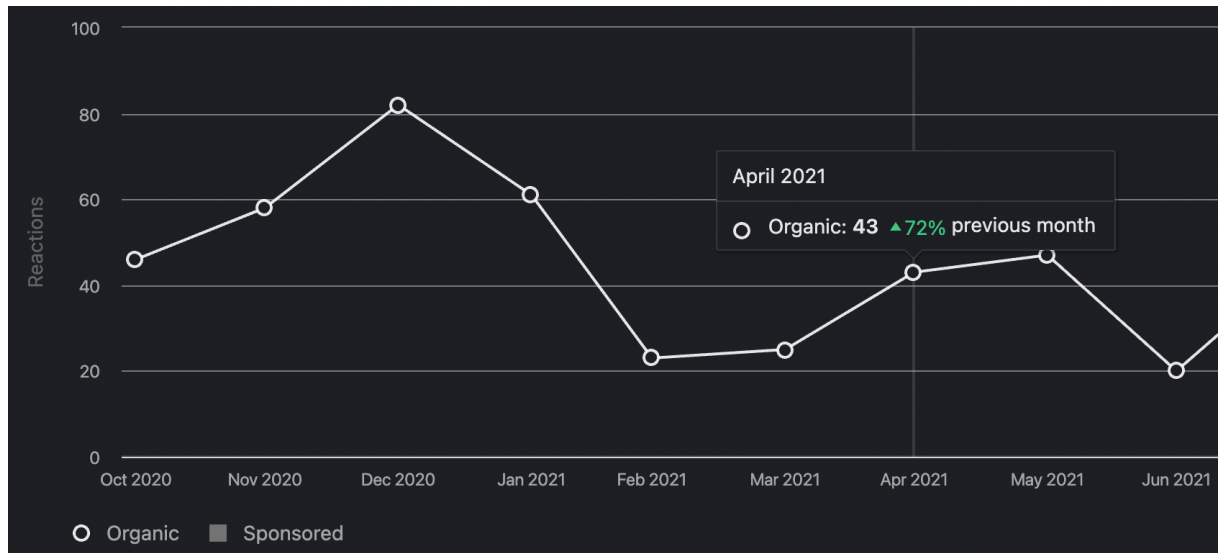
*Figure 17 -LinkedIn Screenshot: Reactions*

From October to the end of November 2020, there is a rise in reactions to 60, then by the end of December the organic reach went up slightly by 41% to 82 compared to the previous month. However, by January 31, 2021, a decline back to 60 reactions takes place. Afterwards, an even larger fall by the end of February 2021 to way below 30, but slightly reaching up again by the end of April to just above 40. Nevertheless, by the end of May 2021, the organic reach was at 47 giving a 9% increase compared to the previous month. Although by June 2021, a heavy reduction is seen to just below 20 compared to the starting value from October 2020 to the end of November 2020, which started at 60. Overall, there was a dramatic decrease of this metrics from October 2020 to June 2021. The followers were not encouraged to put the reactions on the ANNEA posts.

The Shares graph (Figure 18) visualises the dynamics regarding the ANNEA followers who shared the posts.
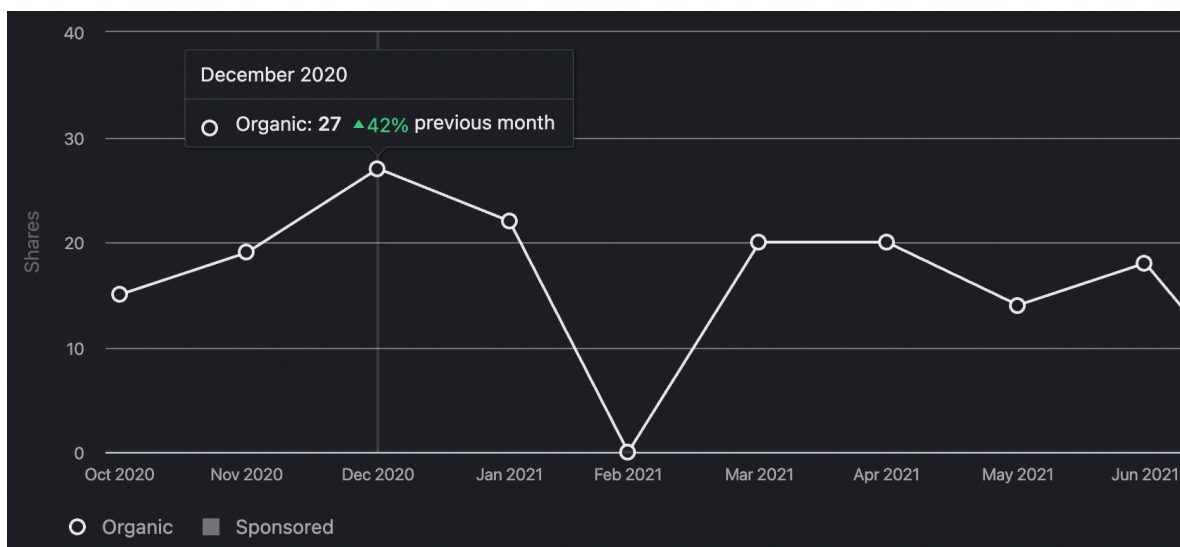


*Figure 18 -LinkedIn Screenshot: Shares*

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From the end of October 2020 to the end of November 2020, the number of shares reached slightly above 20. Then by the end of December 2020, the amount of sharing totalled to 27 providing a 42% increase compared to the previous month. However, by the end of January 2021, a slight fall is seen to about 23. From the end of January to the end of February 2021, there were zero shares. Even so, by the end of March and April 2021 the shares peaked back up to 20 and then slightly decreased below 15 by May. However, peeking up again by June 2021, to 23 organic shares providing a 64% increase compared to the previous month. In total from the end of October 2020 to June 2021 there were not any significant changes in the metrics.

Figure 19, showing the engagement rate from October 2020 to June 2021, represents the number of times followers clicked, liked, commented on, and shared ANNEAS content. Engagement rate is the most important metric when it comes to the analysis of inbound marketing strategy's efficiency, because it shows how well the followers were engaged with the published content (which is the goal of inbound strategy). "Engagement" on social media generally refers to actions that are more active than passive (such as views or impressions). The average engagement rate per post on LinkedIn in 2021 is 0.35% (Omnicore Agency, 2021). LinkedIn calculates engagement rates in many forms. One way the engagement rate can be calculated is by dividing post interactions by the total number of followers. Currently, (October 2021) ANNEA has 1057 followers on LinkedIn. A good LinkedIn engagement rate is around 2%. However, this can climb all the way up to 5 or 6%, depending on the type of content % (Omnicore Agency, 2021).
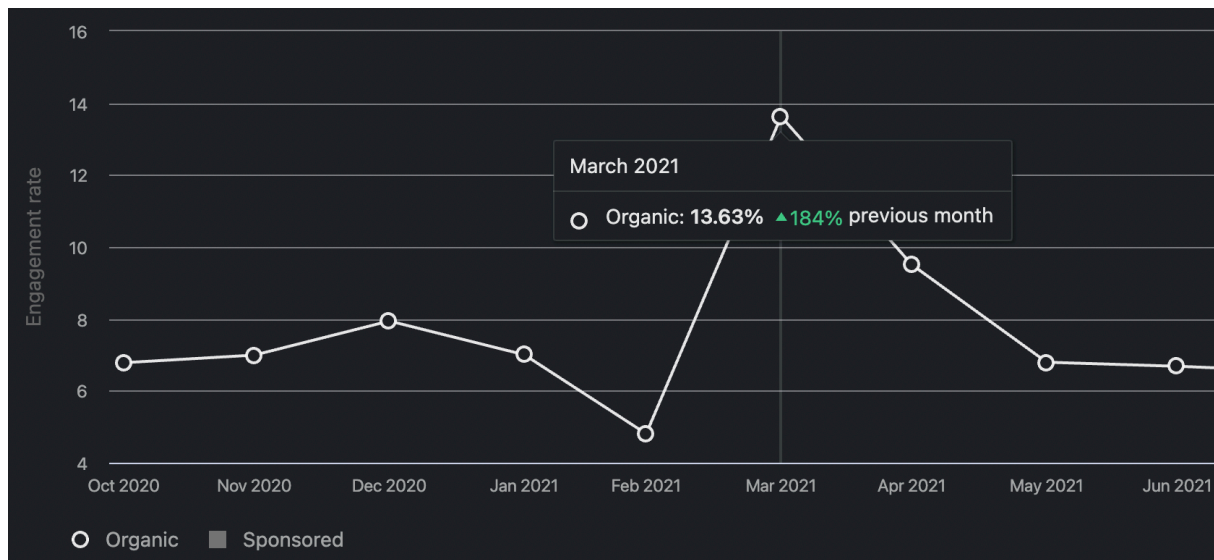


*Figure 19 -LinkedIn Screenshot: Engagement Rate*

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From the end of October 2020 to the end of November 2020 the engagement rate stood at 7%; then by the end of December the organic engagements reached a peak at 8% providing a 7.94% increase in the engagement compared to the previous month. However, it dropped back down to 7% by the end of January 2021. Then from the end of January 2021 to the end of February there was a further decrease to 5%, still by the end of March a spike took place, of around 13.63% providing an 184% increase compared to the previous month. However, by June 2021, there was a 72% decrease compared to March. Although, compared to the end of October 2020 to June 2021 we saw a 60% increase in the overall engagement with a total of 11 interactions.

The final graph, Figure 20, shows the number of Clicks in terms of the number of times ANNEA's name, content or logo has been clicked during the period from October 2020 to June 2021.
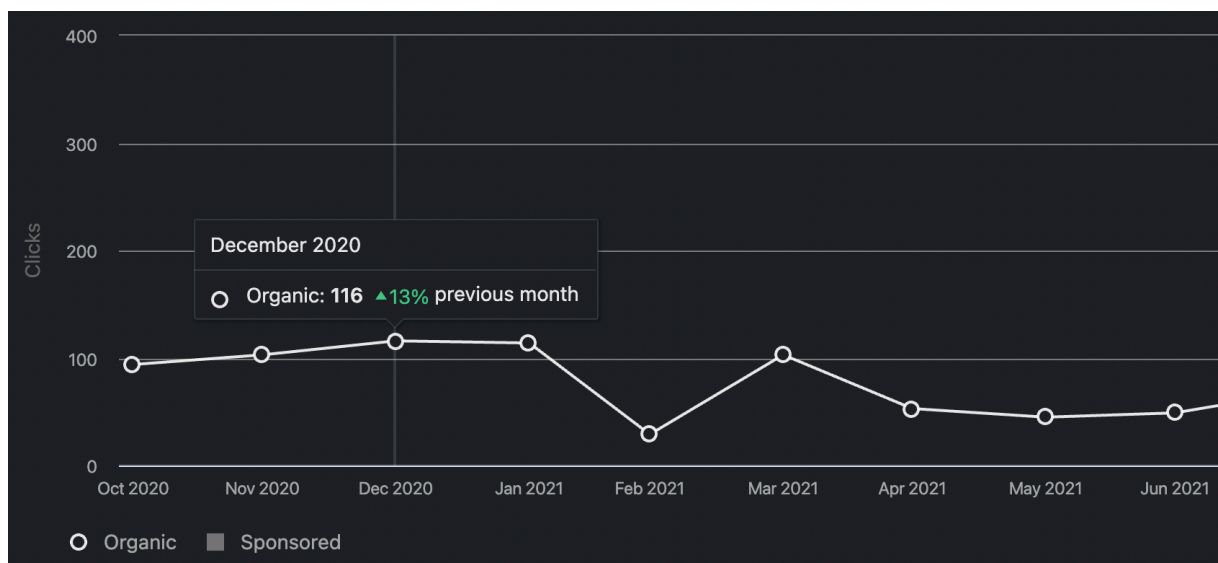


*Figure 20 - LinkedIn Screenshot: Clicks*

From October 2020 to the end of November the number of clicks stood at 100 then by the end of December the organic number of clicks peaked at 116 showing a 13% increase compared to the previous month and then stayed the same throughout January 2021 and towards the end. However, by the end of February there was a large dip to 25 with the number of clicks but then spiked up dramatically by the end of March to 103 organic clicks by 255% compared to the previous month. Although by the end of April, the number dropped again by over half to 50 clicks and then slightly again in May just below 50. Later it dramatically dropped lower by June 2021, compared to the previous month at just below 25 clicks. Therefore, compared to the end of October 2020 to June 2021 there was a large decrease of clicks of 75%.

**4.3. Recommendations for ANNEA for the further content creation**

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Based on the literature review and the analysis of the LinkedIn posts performance, the following recommendations for the further LinkedIn content creation are provided to ANNEA.

Overall, the social listening approach and content creation based on the professional interests of the defined prospects showed its efficiency. Therefore, it is suggested to keep on tracking their LinkedIn activities and adjust the content to their interests and needs. Besides, the chosen tone of voice should be kept as semi-formal.

In terms of the topics of the posts, it is suggested to publish more information related to sustainability and environment. This type of posts gets the most attention and the highest engagement rate.

Another recommendation would be to add more visual content. The posts with clear infographics performed as highly engaging. Besides, it is recommended to provide sometimes not only B2B information, but also B2C. For example, the post #11 that explains how the amount of green energy produced with ANNEA can be used, performed successfully. It would be good to demonstrate the value of ANNEA to the end-users (energy consumers) from time to time (the best periodicity should be explored).

It is also suggested to increase the frequency of the posts and provide at least two posts per week. At the times when ANNEA did not post anything for more than a week, the metrics were becoming worse.

To increase the engagement rate metric, the following metrics should be increased: Reactions, Shares, Clicks, Comments, Follows. As the metrics analysis shows, ANNEA should use more visual content and more explanatory materials. For instance, post #2 with the slides visualisation has the highest engagement rate (25,6%) and the highest number of clicks (77). Besides, tagging people who work at ANNEA also influences positively. The post #9 with the highest number of Reactions (16) has a tag – Dr. Maik Reder.

To increase the number of impressions, ANNEA can try different collaborations with other companies or agencies in the green energy sector.

Once ANNEA has more marketing budget, LinkedIn paid ads should be implemented to the LinkedIn marketing strategy. Their performance and efficiency have to be analysed.

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# 5. Conclusion

The aim of this master's thesis is to develop a LinkedIn content plan for a German cleantech startup ANNEA using inbound marketing as a strategy, then analyse its efficiency and provide the recommendations for the further content creation. To complete this objective the following steps were made.

This topic was chosen due to the lack of sources and knowledge for B2B social media content strategy (Sundström et al., 2020). Besides, LinkedIn has become the #1 opportunity for industrial networking since the Covid-19 pandemic started and it should be used in the marketing mix (Kuckertz et al., 2020). LinkedIn appeared to be recognized by the majority of B2B marketers all over the world (Omnicore Agency, 2021).

According to the ANNEA positioning and marketing channels, LinkedIn was justified to be the most appropriate and efficient social media platform, with implementation in 2020 – 2021 (Kuckertz et al., 2020). Taking into account that ANNEA is a startup, it did not have previous LinkedIn posting and content planning experience. Therefore, it was crucial to develop a clear content plan for this social network.

To meet the thesis's objectives, a literature review was conducted. It was crucial to find theoretical underpins for digital content creation. The research was done starting from a Digital Marketing topic, narrowing down to Social Media Marketing with a focus on the B2B sector. Then a literature review on tech startups, their marketing mix and strategy was done to define and understand the features of startup's marketing processes and positioning. Besides there was an attempt to find scientific articles about LinkedIn as a B2B marketing tool. However, the materials on this topic are more action-oriented and practical, rather than theoretical. "There is a lack of knowledge on how to act and how to plan media content when the company is small or medium-sized" (Sundström et al., 2020, p.2). Nevertheless, a few scientific sources were found which mentioned LinkedIn as an effective tool for inbound marketing. Besides, a literature review included Content Creation as a separate topic, which also outlined inbound marketing concept and HubSpot as the most powerful practical implication source. Therefore, research was done for the inbound marketing. However, any scientific articles that describe this approach in detail applied to the B2B content creation were not found. However, the source that appeared to be very helpful, both from the theoretical and practical perspectives, was HubSpot. It was recognised in some sources as an expert in practical implementation of inbound marketing strategies. Therefore, the flywheel approach from HubSpot was taken as a conceptual framework for the content creation.

Following the literature review, the methodology was introduced. The in-company project steps were defined. The methodology was based on HubSpot materials, and the articles discovered during

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the literature review phase. The methodological part of this thesis describes a step-by-step plan for ANNEA LinkedIn content creation. Firstly, a persona of decision maker was introduced and described, which is crucial for the further steps. Secondly, LinkedIn Sales Navigator was used to find LinkedIn profiles matching the defined persona (prospects). After that, personal connections with the prospects were established, using this thesis author's LinkedIn profile. Then the author of this thesis, being an administrator of the ANNEA LinkedIn profile page, sent invitations to the connected prospects to follow ANNEA. A few weeks were taken as a pause to wait the prospects to connect and start following the ANNEA page. Later, the prospects who followed ANNEA were defined, and their LinkedIn activities and interests had been tracked. Based on that, a list of the topics for content creation was developed.

The final part describes ANNEA LinkedIn page metrics and provides a detailed analysis on them. It gives a definition of all metrics that LinkedIn provides and describes the way in which they are calculated. The analysis shows that the most engaging topic for ANNEA LinkedIn followers is "Green energy and sustainability". The LinkedIn posts devoted to this topic gained the highest number of Impressions, Reactions, Clicks and Shares, as well as the highest CTR and Engagement rate.

The analysis of the LinkedIn metrics graphs showed that the engagement rate increased by almost 60% since the Inbound marketing approach has been implemented to ANNEA LinkedIn content creation. Therefore, Inbound marketing concept may be considered effective for ANNEA LinkedIn content planning.

One of the main recommendations, based on the metrics analysis, is to use "Green energy and sustainability" topic for the further ANNEA LinkedIn content creation. Besides, other recommendations for ANNEA further LinkedIn posts were provided. It was suggested to follow the social listening approach, as well keeping the chosen tone of the brand voice. Another recommendation was to use more visuals and "easy-to-consume" content, that would be interesting not only to the large industrial companies' employees with a technical background, but also to the end users (energy consumers). Lastly, it was recommended to publish the posts more frequently as it improves the engagement rate, as well as the other metrics.

With further LinkedIn content creation ANNEA has to focus on increasing the following LinkedIn metrics: Reactions, Clicks, Shares and Follows.

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# 6. Limitations

A few limitations were defined for this project during its development. It is important to mention them to provide a full understanding of the thesis.

Firstly, the usage of LinkedIn by the defined ANNEA prospects was not explored. It could be possible that some of them do not use LinkedIn on a frequent basis. This could have affected the ANNEA LinkedIn metrics. Besides, the second half of December and the first half of January could not provide an adequate picture because most of the people have vacations and do not use LinkedIn. The beginning of summer is also considered to be a vacation period, and it could be one of the reasons of the metrics decrease. Therefore, the overall seasonality of LinkedIn usage has to be explored.

Secondly, Inbound marketing strategies (Attracting, Engaging and Delighting) have subjective definitions. Therefore, their implementation to content creation was subjective from the author's perspective, as there are no clear and defined parameters for each.

Lastly, some aspects were not taken into account in the scope of this thesis. They are recommended for the future research developments:

⟹ What is the most efficient day (and probably time) of the week to publish LinkedIn posts?

⟹ What would be the effect in case of publishing posts in different languages?

⟹ Which LinkedIn groups are the most efficient?

⟹ Explore the paid LinkedIn ads.

⟹ Explore LinkedIn Pulse as a publishing platform for articles.

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# 8. Annexes

**Annex 1. ANNEA End-Users' Personas**

1) General Manager:
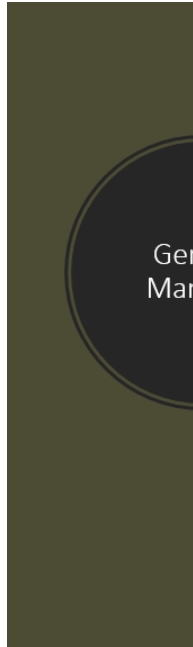


2) Operations and Maintenance Team Lead:



3) Wind Turbine's Technician:

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## Technician

- Works in the field
- Climbs on top of the turbines
- Understands the technical details of the machines
- Reports to the O&M Manager
- Is responsible to repair the machines in the shortest amount of time
- Decides how to repair the machines

## Annex 2. Example of a potential client's meeting protocol

### ANNEA - XX Introduction Meeting Notes

**Date**
23.01.2021

**Participants:**
@Maik Reder
@Dana Sultanova
@XX

**Goals:**
Identify the potential client's profile: background, position in the company, responsibilities and challenges.
Understand the company's strategy considering operations and maintenance of their wind turbines' fleet.

**Discussion topics:**
1. A round of personal introductions. The company's representative has an engineering degree from a technical European university. He worked in this energy utility company for 12 years, started as an engineer. Last year he was transferred to the HQ and became the Head of the Asset Management Department for the wind fleets in Southern Europe.
2. ANNEA presentation.
3. Q&A. The Company's representative asked how long it will take to implement ANNEA. What is the minimum required data? Can we work without historical data? He mentioned that the long-term plan is to integrate predictive maintenance to all wind farms that the company has. For now they would like to start with a pilot in Spain (22 wind turbines). He shared the information that there is a budget for the pilot, but didn't specify the amount.

**Decisions:**
1. Sign a mutual NDA;
2. Have a follow-up meeting with ANNEA dashboard demo.

**Action items:**
1. Send the ANNEA technical white paper;
2. Send the NDA template;
3. Organise a follow up meeting with more participants from their side.

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**Annex 3. Examples of the ANNEA Prospects' posts**



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**#offshorewind #industry** # **#infrastructure #investment #project #electricity #renewables #turbines**



Vestas is committed to taking a leading role in the transition to a world powered by sustainable energy. With an installed capacity of 129 GW by the end of 2020, our fleet of wind turbines spares the planet 186 million tonnes of carbon emissions annually. Since 1981 Vestas' deployed capacity has helped to avoid around 1,492 million tonnes of carbon emissions in total 🌍 💚

Translating the amount of carbon emissions avoided over the past 20 years into everyday activities, it looks something like this 👇

Read more here: **https://fcld.ly/i0aayuj**

**#sustainablefuture #cleantech #Vestas #windturbine**



CO₂e avoided

| | 2020 | | 1981-2020 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **186** million tonnes CO₂e avoided | | **1,492** million tonnes CO₂e avoided |
| Equivalent to greenhouse gas emissions avoided by | **125** million Passenger vehicles driven for one year | | **1,007** million Passenger vehicles driven for one year |
| Equivalent to CO₂e emissions from | **31** million homes' electricity use for one year | | **252** million homes' electricity use for one year |
| Equivalent to CO₂e emissions from | **23** trillion smartphones charged | | **190** trillion smartphones charged |
| Equivalent to greenhouse gas emissions avoided by | **63** million tonnes of waste recycled | | **507** million tonnes of waste recycled |

Dana Sultanova

Every year, 15 June is Global Wind Day, a worldwide event organized by **WindEurope**, **Global Wind Energy Council (GWEC)**) and national associations. The purpose: discovering wind, its power and its possibilities. Wind energy is now one of the most competitive energy sources in markets across the world and is one of the key technologies we need in order to establish the clean energy system required to limit global warming to 1.5°C. Learn more about onshore wind in general and about **Nordex Group**'s turbines in particular in our video – and find further information on why **Ben Backwell**, CEO GWEC, states, that "the question now is not 'why wind energy' but rather 'why not'". **https://globalwindday.org**/

**#globalwindday #greenenergy #sustainability**

We're kicking off! 🎉
Today, we can proudly announce that our first onshore wind farm in France is going into operation. In the Centre-Val de Loire region, 250 km south of Paris, our onshore wind farm "Les Pierrots", with a capacity of 26.4 MW, supplies more than 15,000 households per year with green electricity. We are pleased to celebrate the commissioning of this 11-turbine site, which was developed in consultation with the citizens and elected representatives of the municipalities of Saint-Georges-sur-Arnon and Migny. For a sustainable future, we will continue to invest in renewable energies in order to achieve climate neutrality by 2040. 🌿

Click here for more information: **https://lnkd.in/d4Ty9CUN**?
**#onshore #france #renewables**

Dana Sultanova

The Global Wind Energy Manifesto for **COP26 - UN Climate Change Conference** sets out 8 actions needed to scale up wind to meet **#netzero**:

👉 Increase **#windpower** ambition and reflect this in updated **#NDCs**, comprehensive national climate strategies and long-term energy plans.

👉 Commit to rapid phase out of coal-based generation now.

👉 Design & implement energy markets for the future.

👉 Implement streamlined, sensible permitting schemes for **#renewableenergy** projects to accelerate deployment and minimise project attrition.

👉 Initiate plans to rapidly build out clean energy grids and charging stations for electric vehicles.

👉 Develop cohesive and inclusive policies which dedicate public resource to the people-centred shift to a **#netzero** economy.

👉 Align national and regional finance flows with benchmarks for a **#netzero**, 1.5°C-compliant pathway.

👉 Advance voluntary cooperation on carbon pricing under Articles 6.2 and 6.4 of the **#ParisAgreement**.

Dana Sultanova