

The Role of on-line Marketing Research for competitive ability of Macedonian Companies

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Abstract

Today, at beginning of the 21st century, starts the era where the companies and other stakeholders on the market get a mediator in the information exchange fluctuating in the entire world. The Internet provides people and business entities with opportunities for overcoming of geographical and time barriers and realization of fast and cheap communication. The digital revolution opens the door for information as "a global product" necessary for definition of the company's market approach at different destinations in the world defined as targeted market. It gives company opportunities to become equal partners at the global world market. Started at equal position, they use the advantages of information revolution in all areas of business behavior, getting opportunity for fulfillment of their market needs on huge destinations with minimum costs and efforts. Marketing research as a problem oriented research activity, directed towards collection, procession and data analysis necessary for managers in decision making process, uses a scientific method in effectuation of research procedure. The procedure comprises logical order of activities using several methods for data collection from different sources. Having in mind the changes influenced by the digital revolution, the on-line marketing research as a part of a complex process of marketing communication gets a new, modern and active role in the contemporary terms of companies' working from all over the world. Macedonian companies have a partial approach to marketing-research issues which has to be a base for stabile marketing decision backed up by exact and prompt information on the market and the environment. Recently changed conditions in Macedonia's economy will urged the changes in the management process by use of marketing information's in all spheres of the management process. In that direction, the on- line marketing research could be an opportunity for Macedonian companies to become competitive on the world market.

Keywords: *marketing, Macedonia, communication, research, on-line.*

Introduction

The era of global competition unconditionally requires the successful involvement of companies in international trade, which on the other hand presupposes the fulfillment of important assumptions at the level of each national economy. The inclusion in global economist with ki flows, one of the primary strategic goals of the Republic of Macedonia is an EU integration which assumes achievement of the above significant economic benefits. Macedonia's equal membership in the EU in terms of participation of Macedonian companies in the European market means meeting the necessary conditions for free competition in the market and increasing the competitiveness of companies. The second condition is the current and permanent problem that usually analyze the macro level for the complete national economy and the micro level, in terms of the companies. No matter from which aspect the analysis is conducted, what is common in terms of competitiveness of companies is the need to use relevant and timely information on trends in foreign markets of all factors operating in that market .

In such global trends, the era of the information revolution is reflected at all levels of social life. Computer technology and the Internet are becoming an integral part of companies' business operations. This tendency is emphasized both in practice and in theory, especially when it comes to the importance of information for business decision-making for companies operating in the global market. Internet technology allows companies a simple and relatively cheaper way to access databases organized on a global level in terms of governance and development functions should be an important strategic premise of increasing competition t slope capability of Macedonian companies.

Starting from the previous one, this paper addresses the application of the Internet in the business operations of companies and the use of information technology for online marketing research (which is a segment of electronic business activities) as a condition for greater competitiveness of Macedonian companies in the global market.

1. Companies in cyber space

The Internet is a new medium especially interesting for market analysts as well as for modern management structures. He creates the global information network needed for the day-to-day operations of every successfully marketed company. As a world-wide information network, the Internet offers a mix of diverse opportunities that globalize opportunities and their practical application from a marketing perspective.

By using the *Internet* , companies receive a certain amount of information that is larger and more extensive than what companies have received in the past. The development of information and the information revolution in general and the cybe r - space in which companies are located in a certain way

modify the marketing research and increase the possibility of obtaining certain information. The Internet provides many answers and provides information and data needed by companies in the process of positioning themselves in the market.

The competition in cyber - space in which there is a network of multiple intertwined information is particularly fierce. In such a space where online information is particularly important as a way of reflecting the overall environment, several basic possibilities of their application can be defined. These are the following:[\[1\]](#)

- *Creating an information database for consumers* . The reduced number of consumers inevitably conditions the need to obtain as much data as possible from existing and potential customers.
- *Develop a precise idea of how to use Internet information* . Internet information can be used in different ways and according to different needs.
- *Using all of you in a mutual relationship*. A company should examine which WEB site - you should visit as the most objective. [\[2\]](#)
- *Conduct effective feedback from consumers* . It is very common for everyone at a particular company to have the option to respond using email.

2. Benefits of Internet Marketing Research

If we treat the problem from its most global aspect, it can be said that the most significant advantages of the Internet for marketing research come from the fact that it;

- enables interactive communication and global connectivity, and
- offers the opportunity to quickly transfer information in various forms (text, image, animation) which together with the previous one is the basis for research.

The Internet can be a powerful resource in achieving marketing research goals. The following can be achieved through it[\[3\]](#):

- to discover the wishes of consumers;
- to monitor the activities of the competition;
- to analyze new opportunities in business;
- to find a strategic partner in another country;
- to obtain feedback on the product (service) through consumer research or testing;
- to test a concept or product;
- to obtain a consumer feud in connection with a certain product modification;
- to determine the success of the propaganda activity; and

- to determine the intentions to buy or the attitudes of consumers about products, prices, etc.

So, the Internet offers many different opportunities in business. As an open medium, it enables the external communication of the company with the market through the activities of communication, research, propaganda, trading in a new way because of its interactivity. He excels in the possibility of direct contact with information providers. Namely, according to a group of authors^[4], the Internet finds application in needs assessment in the following areas:

1. Communication, Internal - networking, External - buyers, consumers, suppliers
2. Data transfer - between locations to / from other companies
3. Obtaining information / request / use-marketing research, new materials, training, professional development
4. Logistics - making schedules, planning, calendars, stocks
5. Cost content - alternative communications (telephone, mail, staff - efficiency of customer support, telecommunications, reduced need for meetings, announcements, newspapers, etc.).
6. Collaboration / product development - working groups
7. Marketing research - primary and secondary, surveys
8. Direct marketing / propaganda
9. Sales - product support, distribution channels, customer / consumer information, on - line sales .

Internet users have the opportunity to:

- search, collect and read millions of files - stored on various computers around the world;
- exchanged e-mail (e-mail);
- approach narrowly oriented discussion groups;
- form temporary and permanent discussion groups;
- browse catalogs of public, university and publishing libraries;
- browse manufacturers' catalogs;
- set up their own presentation and promotion;
- conduct marketing research.

Adequate image of these and many other opportunities allows you to expand your existing Internet business, which primarily relates to marketing, sales, research and customer support.^[5]

There are many reasons why companies today inevitably use the Internet as a new way of communicating with people and a new way of entering the market. According to Be On The Net Inc. (WWW. Be On The Net .com) The most important of these are the following:

- the size of the Internet market (the number of consumers through the Internet is growing every day) does not allow ignoring this Market regardless of the type of business;
- 24 hour presentation of the company;
- informing potential consumers around the world about the nature of the business, the range of products for much less money. Namely, the WWW replaces an employee newsletter for 24 hours;
- customer service by providing business information;
- increasing public knowledge of products. The WWW provides access to information for anyone, anywhere, anytime. On the other hand, every company has the same chances to be noticed, which gives small companies the opportunity to participate in a "competitive competition" with market leaders, which is unthinkable for the field of classical marketing;
- the way of presentation enables increased sales of the products. The website must be incorporated into the overall marketing effort. It is a tool that enables communication with consumers and sales. Making a purchase decision is preceded by a good knowledge of the seller which increases his credibility;
- achieving the desired market demographics. It is a large group of users who are at the same time consumers with high incomes and a high level of education and professionalism;
- any change in information comes immediately to consumers;
- opportunity to answer the questions constantly;
- opportunity to reach places with a small number of inhabitants where not all products can be found;
- possibility to create a 24 hour service;
- ability to interact with consumers for the same costs;
- opening to the international market
- able animation, images, sounds a Web page.

The listed advantages of using the Internet for marketing research are increasing daily, but in this context it should be pointed out certain shortcomings or weaknesses of the network that negatively affect the implementation of the necessary research-related activities. Namely, as weaknesses on the Internet are emphasized: [\[6\]](#)

- poor infrastructure, ie poor network bandwidth;
- the problem with the security and privacy of individuals and their data as well
- the retrieval and quality of content.

3. Strategies of on - line marketing research

The increasing need to conduct marketing research represents the transition from an intuitive to a scientific approach to solving the problems that companies face and are related to their market performance. Decisions based on managerial intuition are basically the personal experiences and knowledge of managers, while the scientifically determined methodological approach is the result of a well-established, logical and systematic approach in the decision-making process based on information obtained from marketing research. Although intuition can in some cases be used to solve everyday insignificant problems, as the risk of alternative solutions increases, so does the importance of marketing research.

The main goal of the research is to provide with information that will facilitate the identification of the market situation, which will help managers in considering all alternatives to market performance that are available to them in a certain period of time. In this sense, quantitative research allows to obtain quantified and statistically substantiated results, while qualitative research summarizes the subjective opinions of respondents or experts.

Marketing research is an important input in marketing and strategic decision making. Key questions when searching for sources of information online are:[\[7\]](#)

-are they relevant,

-are they correct (what is the impact)

-are they updated (up to date)

When you are conducting online marketing research, research strategy will vary depending on what type of information is required AT .

In recent marketing theory, from the aspect of the increasing application of the Internet in marketing research, different approaches to the process of marketing research process are distinguished.

Generally, the marketing research process takes place in the following stages:[\[8\]](#)

1. *Defining and localizing the researched problem,*
2. *Development of hypotheses*
3. *Determination of the sample*
4. *Gathering information to test hypotheses*
5. *Analysis and interpretation of research results and compilation of a report.*

Defining and localizing the researched problem

is the first phase in the research in which the researched problem is isolated and the basic parameters for its practical research are set. The Delphi method, which is conducted through expert interviews, is often used to define a market problem. The problem must be accurately identified in order to develop a hypothesis as an informative assumption for a specific problem or set of problems, which is the second stage of the procedure.

The development of hypotheses is the second stage in the research process. A hypothesis is a choice of assumptions based on certain information or assumptions about a certain problem. In this phase, secondary information is collected from the internal sources of the company or from some published publications, periodical reports, Internet, etc.

In the third phase - *Gathering information for testing hypotheses*, the necessary primary information is collected. Methods and techniques such as experiment, interview, survey or observation are used. Recently, the method of *online* experiment is especially relevant as a set of rules and procedures related to the further analysis and interpretation of the obtained results. In developed market economies, researchers use this method to learn about the "real, real world".[\[9\]](#) reflecting the macro environment in which the company is located. Then, using techniques such as anketatata by mail, email or Internet telephone interview using computer technology, on-all k ompjuter interview, in - home interview, interview focus groups and others. Observation is one of the methods that allows to record the reactions of respondents and their behavior by analyzing their psychological state and ability to make decisions in the buying process.

Due to the speed and efficiency of the implementation of the entire marketing research process, the following two methods of interviewing are used in the world at the height of the cyber era:

1. *Computer-assisted telephone interview and*
2. *On-site interview.*[\[10\]](#)

Computer-assisted telephone interview presupposes examination

by applying an integrated questionnaire, data collection and tabulation and provides information to managers in the marketing decision-making process in the shortest possible time. With this method, the questionnaire written on paper is replaced by a computer monitor or video screen. Answers are entered in the terminal or special convenience is used for answering by positioning the answer by touching the touch screen. The computer program decides which question to position on the screen, thus bypassing the less important questions. Apart from the efficiency in terms of data collection, it is considered that the application of this method is efficient in terms of the cost of its application in relation to other classical ways of conducting an interview.

On - site interview is a way of providing answers to a specific sample of respondents in which respondents complete the questionnaire directly on a computer monitor. For example, MAX (Machine Answered Examination) is one such software package developed by POPULUS [11]. In this way, consistent and timely information is provided. With the help of this questionnaire, each respondent gets the same questions in the same way. There are programs with which each subsequent question is developed and designed according to what has been previously answered. Respondents answer directly using a computer.

Finally, in the *analysis and interpretation* phase of *the research*

results are the data analyzed, on the basis of which researchers should compile a *Report* on the results of the research with an interpretation that managers should understand and apply in practice. It is well known that in this time of intense information revolution, companies and researchers are using computers to prepare reports of all kinds, including marketing research reports. There is almost no other more modern and practical way to elaborate research results, both narratively and using spreadsheets, graphs and the like. For that purpose, in practice programs such as WORD , EXCEL and others are used.

4. Application of on - line marketing research to the Republic of Macedonia

Business decisions for entering foreign markets are particularly complex and significant in terms of positioning and development of the company and increase its competitiveness t ska ability. They are also decisions that, unlike others, are characterized by a higher degree of risk. This is indicated by the considerations according to which " ... the success of the foreign market without the necessary research will increasingly be an exception and a successful performance based on research is increasingly the rule " [12]

Aware of the importance of information for successful performance in foreign markets, EU countries in 1992 organized a single information infrastructure in response to the need for equal involvement in the international exchange of information and access to databases. From the point of view of Macedonian companies, although the needs for using information in strategic and business decision-making are perceived, there is still insufficient and inconsistent professional readiness and ability to connect and engage in modern information flows.[13] In this regard, although there is a tendency of spreading information technology and its application in various spheres of social l contingent and economic life, there are analyzes that directly or indirectly indicate inadequate and marginal application of these technologies in marketing research activities.

From the data that can be found on the website of Unet, which is actually the first Macedonian provider, it can be concluded that April 20, 1995 is considered the birthday of the Macedonian Internet access. Internet in Macedonia shows a tendency of progress and development, especially in the last 5-6

years. There is an expansion of providers, as well as the number of Web presentations with useful information (often updated) and opportunities for selective search.

According to a 2006 survey by the State Statistical Office, 92% of companies with more than 10 employees use a computer, and 72.3% have Internet access. [14]. This means that they have equipment, but the question is to what extent it is used. One reason is the reluctance of sectors for marketing professionals who know the problems of research and little is performing traditional off line research.

According to one analysis, [15] The poor use of the Internet in business and marketing communication is confirmed by the fact that most companies in the Republic of Macedonia do not have their own WEB page which today is considered a necessity for market positioning of companies around the world. [16].

This attitude of most Macedonian companies to some extent slows down the process of marketing research, which unequivocally confirms the general conclusion about the still low level of marketing and business orientation. This is a short-term strategy, insufficiently applicable in modern conditions of market operation of companies in the market. The same study confirms that most companies do not implement investigate and pendent market and marketing as off - line so and on - line , and as a common cause stating that they work with well-known partners, therefore , know the market and does not need any research primarily due to the means and activities that need to be engaged for this purpose.

Another analysis [17] indicates that the use of e-commerce as part of the e-business to which it belongs and , online marketing research is proportional to the size of the enterprise . [18] The obstacles to using e- business and thus and on-line marketing research are numerous, but the interesting fact is that to change this situation, companies rely on others h sets out the basic mainte y ka, embodied through the creation of centers training in the e-business and ICT. These centers would assist in the development of company individual strategies, such as training and coaching on technological and business procedures for running an e-business .

Conclusion

Successful involvement in the global economy prefers respect for market logic, which puts companies' competitive capabilities first. Competitiveness largely replaces the focused variables of comparative advantage with the dynamic and changing variables of competitiveness that companies need to permanently create and increase in order to survive in the global marketplace. In order to achieve this strategic goal, it is necessary to constantly and anticipatory implementation of market research and marketing activities that are significantly changing in conditions of information revolution.

The Internet as a direct consequence of the information revolution provides almost unlimited possibilities for its wider application in all stages of the marketing research process. In any case should not have used the opportunities that he has offers to

the local and especially the global level . This especially if the company has the intention to have appeared with their products or services and the international market .

The problems that appear in the field of application and implementation of marketing research using the Internet are part of the overall problems that indicate the partial application of e-business in the country in which a significant part is market and marketing research. Although the process of informatization as a long-term development needs requires appropriate effort for its more organized targeting primarily from institutional nature from micro aspect, iPod enterprises despite the lack of financial resources strongly is expressed and the lack of information , skills and knowledge of the benefits of research through internet.

One of the possible ways out of this situation is to conduct continuous training of management and employees for the opportunities that have provided the Internet , constantly monitoring the experiences and trends in the field and continuous professional and professional approach in the introduction of methods of on-line marketing research for needs the enterprise in order to get out of the competitive market on an equal basis with other market entities . No need to have forgotten that previously need to be implemented knowledge of traditional methods of marketing research that will be the basis for research through the Internet.

Efforts to create competitive advantages for Macedonian companies in foreign markets are imperative for the company's market position. In this regard, the main driving force and input for successful strategic performance of companies in foreign markets are information that provides greater flexibility and adaptability to environmental factors and as such enable success in creating, maintaining and developing ownership competitiveness of the complex global market.

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