

**An investigation of the marketing communications tools
employed by small businesses in Sligo and Mayo with
particular emphasis on the Internet marketing tools utilized**

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Plagiarism Declaration

I hereby certify this material, which I submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the Masters of Science in Marketing, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, except to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Student ID No: _____

Name of Student: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Chapter One

Introduction and Methodology

Introduction

“No man is an Island” is an expression meaning variously “Human being depend on one another” or “You can’t manage this all by yourself”. This same thinking can be applied to small businesses.

No man is an island therefore no business should operate as an island; it must co-exist with other businesses, its communities, and the business world at large. Communicating your business message and your presence in the marketplace is vital. Creating awareness of your product and or service is critical in order to ensure the survival of your business. This can be done through using marketing communication techniques and tools.

Marketing and the marketing communication mix are constantly subject to change. New insights, new tools, new opportunities and new challenges are emerging as we step into the 21st century. At a basic level, marketing communications – or “promotion” as it was originally known - is used to communicate certain elements of an organisation to a target audience. Key elements of this communication are to inform the customer and raise awareness of what an organisation is offering. Marketing communication attempts to persuade current and potential customers of the desirability of the company product/service. Communication can also help to reinforce the customer experience and it can act as a differentiator, particularly in markets where there is little to separate competing products and brands (Smith et al, 2002 and Fill, 2009).

Significance of this study

This dissertation sets out to investigate the methods of marketing communications that small businesses in the West of Ireland engage in. There are various communication techniques available to small business which they can employ to promote their product or service. For small businesses, deciding among the numerous methods of promotion can be the difference between sales increase and sales decline. Also, small business owners need to be comfortable with the promotion method they choose to use regarding their personal knowledge basis, the industry norms and their spending budget. With the increase of new digital media techniques like social networks, businesses have a lot more options they can employ.

From the research examined, there is a very limited amount of research currently carried out in this subject area. This type of information can be found mostly in commercial research and governmental research but unfortunately, there is not any academic research done with particular focus on either Ireland in general or the West of Ireland in particular. Therefore the

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researcher has decided to examine the communication techniques employed by small business in two West of Ireland counties with the particular emphasis on internet marketing tools.

Chapter Two

Research Methodology

Research Methodology

Research design is the blueprint for conducting the study that maximises control over the factors which may interfere with the validity of the findings (Hart, 2006). This chapter will discuss the chosen research perspective and methodology. Discussion relates to population sampling and access to the participants as well as the chosen method of data collection. In addition, the implication of reliability and validity are discussed in relation to the data collection tool and ethical issues.

Definition

Small Business –is defined as an enterprise which employs less than 50 people usually refers to SME in industry research and academic research.

Internet Marketing –the application of the internet and related technologies in conjunction with traditional communication to achieve marketing objectives.

Marketing Communication - are messages and related media used to communicate with a market. Marketing communications is the "promotion" part of the "Marketing Mix" or the "four Ps": price, place, promotion, and product. Those who practice advertising, branding, direct marketing, graphic design, marketing, packaging, promotion, publicity, sponsorship, public relations, sales, sales promotion and online marketing are termed marketing communicators or marketing communication managers.

Attitudes is a somewhat complex phenomenon involving factors such as beliefs, where we accept something is true, for example statements about relationship and values which are special types of beliefs, often expressed as an abstract ideal, an ideal mode of conduct and ideal goals.

Characteristic of an attitude:

1. They are learned –we are not born with attitudes; we learn them primarily from the family and from society at large.
2. They are persistent –unlike a mood, attitudes will persist over time.
3. They are predictive of behaviour –because an attitude expresses how someone feels, we can use this as a measure of behavioural predictability.

4. They can exist at a low level of consciousness –frequently, an individual may be unaware of how strongly they feel towards a situation until a discussion is entered into, or they are required to vote or make an input into a topic.
5. They retain the uniqueness of human experience –the individuality of the person plays a big part in expression of attitudes. Many people may share similar attitudes, but expression and/or behaviour related to an attitude may differ simply because of the uniqueness of their experience.

Clearly, attitudes are not innate; we learn or acquire them in many ways from many sources including:

1. Family – this is a major influence in an individual’s life. Here attitudes are absorbed, almost unconsciously and are rarely questioned. This is our first experience of interaction with other people.
2. Influential others – these include reference groups, peers, friends whose opinions we tend to seek out and which are important to us. Their influence on us is quite profound because we look up to or respect their judgements and we tend to adopt similar views though a need to identify with them.
3. Interaction and direct experience –we come into contact with situations constantly causing us at time to re-evaluate our thought or views.
4. Mass Media – in today’s world the media has a profound influence on society. We are directed, cajoled and intimidated into forming attitudes

(Mac Donagh et al, 2002)

Attitudes are assumed to be an important predictor of behaviour, i.e. having a positive attitude towards a product, service or retail outlet means we are more likely to purchase or use it.

Behaviour refers to the actions or reactions of an object, usually in relation to the environment. Behavior can be conscious or unconscious, overt or covert, and voluntary or involuntary.

Attitude and behaviour are considered to be linked together with a number of variables influencing this relationship:

1. Intensity – the stronger and more intense the attitude held, the less it will be compromised, and the more likely it is predictive of behaviour.
2. Existence of other attitudes –the existence of a strong attitude may frequently inhibit the behavioural expression of a weaker attitude.
3. Ability to respond –learning to respond to a particular attitude is often through conditioning. Family, peers and life experience tend to reinforce our long held attitudes.
4. Situational factor –physical environment can sometimes inhibit behavioural expression of an attitude. Social environment –the sensibilities of others often prevent individuals from expressing their true feelings.

(Morely et al, 2004)

Rationale

Small businesses throughout Ireland are looking for a competitive advantage over their competitors in the current tough financial climate both in Ireland and overseas. While small business owners think the first thing to cut is their marketing /sales budget, this line of thinking will cause a number of issues for the other stakeholders because it will lessen the business awareness.

Importantly, in today's business world, digital media techniques such as social network websites are becoming useful tools helping businesses keep in touch with one another. Three areas of business where social network websites are being widely used are in recruiting new employees, in customer relationship management and in advertising to this target market. Advertising in the area via social networks has become very popular because of the amount of traffic social networks attract. Businesses can advertise in the form of banners and text ads, viewable to millions of web users and this in turn helps to create brand loyalty among its key target market.

Research question

To investigate the marketing communications tools employed by small business in Sligo and Mayo with particular emphasis on the Internet marketing tools utilized.

Research Objectives

- To discuss the various methods of marketing communication techniques.

- To examine the role of traditional marketing communication techniques versus internet marketing techniques.
- To investigate the use and adoption of internet marketing tools by small business enterprises.
- To investigate the measurement of internet marketing effectiveness.

Research perspective and approach

Research perspective is the blueprint for conducting the study that maximises control over the factors which may interfere with the validity of the findings (Collis and Hussey, 2003). This section will discuss the chosen research perspective and methodology.

Quantitative research is numerically oriented, requires significant attention to the measurement of market phenomena, and often involves statistical analysis. In quantitative research your aim is to determine the relationship between one thing (an independent variable) and another (a dependent or outcome variable) in a population. Quantitative research designs are either descriptive (subjects usually measured once) or experimental (subjects measured before and after a treatment). Populations are large and diverse therefore allowing for generalisability of finding.

The qualitative paradigm concentrates on investigating subjective data, in particular, the perceptions of the people involved. The intention is to illuminate these perceptions and, thus, gain greater insight and knowledge. Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. The discipline investigates the *why* and *how* of decision making, not just *what*, *where*, *when*. Hence, smaller but focused samples are more often needed rather than large random samples (Collis and Hussey, 2003).

The mixing of methods within research occurs in the data collection phase, the data analysis and data interpretation phase of the study. A simplified summary might include two main options; one is whether the quantitative and qualitative elements of the study are sequential or concurrent and the other is whether one method is nested within the other or used to confirm the finding obtained. One variation is to add a qualitative component to a fundamentally quantitative study to help explain or extend the findings. For example, a questionnaire survey providing quantitative data could be accompanied by a few in-depth interviews to provide qualitative insights and illuminations (Collis et al, 2003 and Rudestam et al, 2007). In a

nested study, there is one predominant method, and the other method is embedded within it to enable the researcher to obtain a richer perspective on the phenomenon being studied.

The nested method may be looking at a different question from the dominant method. A common application is when a subsample of a larger group that has been assessed quantitatively is interviewed qualitatively for further information or when quantitative data are also collected in a predominantly qualitative study to learn more about the participants. Perhaps the most common application of mixed methodology is to assess a large number of participants using standardized scales and measure in a field study or an experimental study and then conduct open ended interviews with a subset of the original sample to derive a richer understanding of the phenomenon in question. In the purest sense, statistics is merely shorthand for communicating information about complex phenomena elegantly and precisely (Rudestam et al, 2007).

If we are classifying research according to its purpose, we can describe as being exploratory, descriptive, analytical or predictive.

Descriptive studies are concerned with description and classification; rather, therefore relationships between variables are identified in order to get an overall picture of the phenomena. Its aim is to discover new facts about people, situations, activities or events and how frequently they occur in order to access or justify current situations or to make recommendation for improvement in marketing of the product. The data collected is often quantitative and statistical techniques are usually used to summaries the information.

Exploratory research is conducted into a research problem or issue when there are very few or no earlier studies to which we can refer for information about the issue or problem. The aim of this type of study is to look for patterns, ideas or hypothesis, rather than testing or confirming a hypothesis. In exploratory research the focus is on gaining insights and familiarity with the subject area. Typical techniques used in exploratory research include case studies, observation and historical analysis which can provide both quantitative and qualitative data. Such techniques are very flexible since there are a few constraints on the nature of activities employed or on the type of data collected. The approach to the research is usually very open and concentrates on gathering it wide range of data and impressions (Collis and Hussey, 2003).

Analytical Research is a continuation of descriptive research. The researcher goes beyond merely describing the characteristics, to analysing and explaining why or how it is happening. Thus, analytical research aims to understand phenomena by discovering and measuring casual relations between them. An important element of analytical research is identifying, and possibly controlling, the variables in the research activities, since this permits the critical variable or the casual links between the characteristics to be better explained.

Predictive Research goes even further than analytical research. Predictive research aims to generalise from the analysis by predicting certain phenomena on the basis of hypothesised, general relationships. Predictive research provides 'how', 'why', and 'where' answers to current events and also to similar events in the future. It is also helpful in situations where 'what if' questions are being asked.

Primary Research:

Primary research involves the collection of data that does not already exist. This can be done through numerous forms, including questionnaire and telephone interviews amongst others. In this research, I will be using the research techniques; Questionnaire and In-depth interviews.

Research tool: Questionnaire:

A questionnaire is effective tool to get opinions, attitudes and descriptions as well as for assessing cause and effect relationship. Surveys and questionnaires are among the most popular data collection methods in business studies and the major types of questionnaires are descriptive and/or analytical. Questionnaire can be used to measure customer's behaviour, their attitudes, standardisation and uniformity in the data gathering process. If a researcher asks different people a somewhat different question, they will get answers that are not directly comparable. A questionnaire standardises the wording and sequencing of the questions and allow the field workers to achieve speed and accuracy in recording the data. A questionnaire has three objectives. Firstly, it must translate the information needed into questions that the respondent can and will answer. Secondly, a questionnaire must uplift, motivate and encourage the respondent to co-operate and complete the interview. Thirdly, a questionnaire should minimise response error (Domegan et al, 2007).

Questionnaires are associated with both positivistic and phenomenological methodologies. A questionnaire is a listed of carefully structured questions, chosen after considerable testing,

with a view to eliciting reliable response from a chosen sample. The aim is to find out what a selected group of participants do, think or feel (Collis et al, 2003).

Closed-ended are typically used in quantitative studies. The assumption is that detailed knowledge is available on the attributes of interest and therefore it is possible to pre-specify the categories of response. Background questions provide demographic and socio-economic information on the individual or firm. Attitudinal questions provide information on the strength of feeling or opinion about objects, issues, activities and interests. Attitudes can be measured through the use of single item rating scales and multiple items rating scales. Activity and usage question provide information on the extent of involvement in activities such as text messaging, surfing the internet on their mobile phones and so on.

Questionnaires are a quick and economical method of collecting a large quantity of information from a geographically diverse population (Remenyi et al 2005). Remenyi et al (2005) maintain that a questionnaire in a descriptive study provides data to facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. It also contributes to the production of inductive knowledge. Self-administration of questionnaires allows study subjects to answer freely without cognisance of any of the researcher's biases and allows for anonymity of participation. A major limitation of self-reporting questionnaire is that it relies on participants to accurately describe the phenomenon. Some individuals may give a socially desirable response instead of describing the phenomenon as it occurs..

Online survey/questionnaires are increasing in popularity. The online questionnaire can be completed in one's own time and place. Quick response time and ability to target specific population are also advantages worth noting. As internet usage become more widespread, the disadvantage of this method in terms of sampling limitations and representativeness is substantially reduced. An online questionnaire has fewer missing response and they can be coded/presented in a more flexible manner. The questionnaire response time can be shorter relative to a paper survey and the time required for data entry and cleansing can also be greatly reduced as the data is collected at source in an electronic format. Tools such as survey monkey allow researchers to create their own survey using an online survey editor, selecting from over a dozen types of questions and using options such as custom skip logic and question randomization to help bias. Results can be viewed as they are collected in real-time and the application allows ease of production for graphs and charts as well as downloading the raw data into Excel or SPSS (Domegan et al 2007).

Research action

For this study, forty small businesses throughout counties Mayo and Sligo will be circulated with this questionnaire through an online questionnaire survey website. The small businesses will be sent a link via e-mail explaining the purpose of this research

In-depth interviews

The technique uses extensive probing in the context of a personal interview to get a single respondent to reveal motivation, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic. The purpose of the technique is to descend beneath the superficial answers that are often provided by the respondent and to disclose the more fundamental reasons underlying the respondent attitudes and behaviour. Interviews make it easy to compare answers from a number of people.

Interviews are associated with both positivist and phenomenological methodologies. They are a method of collecting data in which selected participants are asked questions in order to find out what they do, think or feel. Interviews make it easy to compare answer from different participants, it helps to generate a full picture of the subject area (Collis et al, 2003).

In-depth interviews are another method of obtaining qualitative data. The technique uses extensive probing in the context of a personal interview to get a single respondent to reveal motivation, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic. The purpose of the techniques is to descend beneath the superficial answers that are often provided by respondents and to disclose the more fundamental reason underlying the respondent's attitudes and behaviour.

In-depth interviews are versatile, but they require careful planning, training and preparation (Domegan et al, 2007). The main strength of the in-depth interview is in its ability to uncover more complete answers to questions than might be answered at more superficial level during a questionnaire research. Interviews make it easier to compare answers from each other. Questions are likely to be open ended and probes may be used to explore answers in more depth (Collis et al, 2003). The one to one in-depth interview also has the advantage of respondents revealing attitudes or motives that they may be reluctant to discuss in a group setting.

The researcher must use a guide or list of questions to provide some structure to the interview. Where research is being conducted across sites it is particularly important that such an instrument be used to systematise the collection of evidence and to enable comparison to be made during the analysis phase.

In-depth interview are versatile, but they require careful planning, training and preparation. The main strength of the in-depth interview is in its ability to uncover more complete answers to uncover more complete answers to questions than might be answered at a more superficial level during survey research. In-depth interview has the advantage of respondents revealing attitudes or motives that they may be reluctant to discuss in a group setting. With in-depth interview the one to one nature of the method, sample sizes are small and can't be extrapolated into statistical material.

Research Action

For this study, ten interviews will be conducted with small businesses throughout counties Mayo and Sligo.

Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which the instrument is effective in measuring the phenomena to be examined, while reliability refers to the accuracy and consistency with which the instrument measures the characteristics under investigation (Hart, 2006 and Collis and Hussey, 2003). Validity can be assessed in a number of different ways, sensitivity and specificity which is commonly used in diagnostic tests in which cause and effect need to be determined. Criterion-related validity is concerned with the comparison of present data with other methods of data collection methods while predictive validity is concerned with whether or not future data will confirm present data. Face validity involves giving the questionnaires to others not necessarily experts in the field to investigate whether the questions reflects the phenomenon. Construct validity refers to the ability of the collection tool or scales to measure a particular construct. Content validity refers to the degree to which the questionnaire adequately represents the phenomenon being studied. It involves an organised review of the data collection tool, ensuring that it measures what it is supposed to and removing un-necessary questions. There is no statistical test to test this concept but the degree of panel agreement can be used to calculate an index of content validity. This questionnaire will be given to five individuals to investigate the content of the questions ability to answer the phenomenon and to allow for changes in wording to occur to allow for clarity for all in answering of the questions.

Reliability refers to the consistency with which a data collection tool collects data. In quantitative research three aspects of reliability are of interest; stability which refers to the extent to which the same scores are obtained when the instrument is used with the same people on separate occasions. Internal consistency of a test is the extent to which the result

on different items correlate with one another. I will perform a test-retest trial of this questionnaire to test its stability by giving this questionnaire to a group of ten young adults who will not be included in the study and administering the same questionnaire to the same group of people five days later. Analysis of both sets of results will be done to investigate for clarity in relation to the ability to respond to the question and to allow for any changes necessary to the questionnaire.

Secondary Research

Secondary research also known as desk research involves the summary, collation and/or synthesis of existing research rather than primary research, where data is collected from, for example, research subjects or experiments. Secondary research can come from either internal or external sources.

Population, Sample and Sampling:

Population is defined as the total population from which data could potentially be collected from. Remenyi et al (2005) believes that it is useful to distinguish between target population and accessible population. A target population is defined as the total number of individuals from which data can potentially collected from, while accessible population are the pool of subjects accessible to the researcher for this study.

Sample Selection

The aim of sampling strategies is to ensure that the chosen sample is representative of the population which the researcher aims to study and the ability to generalise their research findings to the population in general (Collis and Hussey 2003). The two main types of sampling are probability and non-probability.

Probability is a type of sampling where each unit has a known chance of being selected. Inclusion and exclusion in the sample is determined by pure chance and the likelihood of this is known. Probability sampling was developed to ensure some degree of precision in estimating the population thus reducing sampling error. The researcher must know every element of the population to obtain a probability sample, then using this information develop a sample frame, and choose the appropriate design from any of the five random sampling designs to obtain the population representative (Collis and Hussey 2003). Probability sampling excludes the researcher, from choosing the sample members and so eliminates selection bias on behalf of the interviewer as well as subjective selection.

- Simple Random Sampling –in simple random sampling each member of the population should have an equal chance of being selected. This can be achieved by numbering the individuals in the sampling frame, and then selecting from these using some random procedure produced manually or on a computer.
- Systematic sampling – a systematic sample, the population is divided by the required sample size.
- Stratified sampling –in stratified sampling the population is subdivided into homogeneous groups, called strata, prior to sampling. Random samples are then drawn from each of the strata and the aggregate forms the stratified sample.
- Cluster sampling –involves making a random selection from a sampling frame listing groups of units rather than individual belonging to the selected groups is then interviewed or examined.
- Multistage sampling –is used where the groups selected in a cluster sample are so large that a sub-sample must be selected from each group. (Collis et al, 2003 and Remenyi et al, 2005).

Non-probability sampling every element of the population is not known. No sampling frame is used and the researcher must choose from the four non-probability designs which one is appropriate to their study (Collis and Hussey 2003). It is inherently subjective and not objective as the sample members are chosen consciously by the researcher.

- Convenience samples comprise those individuals or organisations that are most readily available to participate in the study.
- Judgement samples are samples where individuals are selected with a specific purpose in mind, such as their likelihood of representing best practice in particular issue (Remenyi et al, 2005).

Descriptive studies provides detailed information on the variables under study therefore generalisable to that sample population, thus the major interest of this type of study is to represent the population under study to the best of the investigator's ability (Collis and Hussey 2003). The population for this study will be randomly selected by their presence at one of the events and their willingness to participate in the survey.

The aim of sampling strategies is to ensure that the chosen sample is representative of the population which the researcher aims to study and the ability to generalise their research findings to the population in general (Collis and Hussey 2003). The two main types of sampling are probability and non-probability. Probability sampling was developed to ensure some degree of precision in estimating the population thus reducing sampling error. The researcher must know every element of the population to obtain a probability sample, then using as a developed sampling frame, choose the appropriate design from any of the five random sampling designs to obtain the population representative sample name the samples (Collis and Hussey 2003). In non-probability sampling every element of the population is not known. No sampling frame is used and the researcher must choose from the four non-probability designs which one is appropriate to their study (Collis and Hussey 2003).

Descriptive studies provides detailed information on the variables under study therefore generalisable to that sample population, thus the major interest of this type of study is to represent the population under study to the best of the investigators ability(Collis and Hussey 2003). The population for this study will be randomly selected by their presence at one of the events and their willingness to participate in the survey. The online questionnaire allows for freedom to participate and for the collection of diverse data from individuals who may not have attended event which I have attended to collect data.

Research action

For this study, cluster sampling has been chosen because it involves making a random selection from an email lists obtained from Mayo and Sligo County Enterprise boards and a group will be selection for interviewed and the rest of the list will be sent an email containing the online survey.

Ethical Considerations:

Anonymity is guaranteed for participants as the researcher only contact with them will be in a public arena and the questionnaire does not require signatures or names from participants. The electronic data was secured by a password and only accessible to the researcher and her academic supervisor, will be erased on completion of the study. The paper documentation will be destroyed by incineration on completion of the study and only accessible to the researcher and their academic supervisor. They will be held securely in a locked cupboard.

Limitations

Time constraints are a major limitation of this study because it has to be completed by the end of the academic year in September. If this were not the case a larger country wide population could be accessed giving a large amount of data which would give greater generalisability of the findings.

The fact that some of the question may not be answered by the small business owners because of sensitivity issues may limit my understanding of their perceptions of this cohort of individuals in relation to small businesses use of internet marketing. This may limit my recommendations for future marketing strategies.

Conclusion

For this study, it is important that the researcher investigate both the primary and secondary sources of data in relation to marketing communications, internet marketing and small business owner attitudes to marketing communications and internet marketing and the future of online marketing as a valuable marketing tool.

The next chapter will look at these topics in relation to secondary sources of research in the literature review.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

Introduction

Marketing communication is a management process through which an organisation engages with its various audiences. Through an understanding of an audience's preferred communication environments, marketing organisations seek to develop and present messages for its identified stakeholder groups, before evaluating and acting appropriately upon any responses. By conveying messages that are perceived to be of significant value, audiences are encouraged to offer attitudinal, emotional and behavioural responses. Marketing communication involves a mix of three elements: tools, media and message. The primary element of the mix has customarily been the mix of tools that can be used in various combinations and different degrees of intensity in order to communicate with a target audience. Promotion is a vital part of business and is an integral ingredient of the total marketing process. It helps to make choices available regarding products and services (Shyan Fam et al, 1998).

There are five principal marketing communication tools: advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling. Although each tool has its own unique communication capability in promoting the firms, their products and the services they offer, not all of them would be perceived as equally important. The growing expense involved in promotion plus their relatively limited financial resources and managerial expertise prohibits many business especially the small businesses, from utilising some of the promotion tools (Shyan Fam et al, 1998).

Small business often use marketing communication differently to large enterprises e.g. because many SMEs fail for cash flow problems they often use sale promotion to incentivize payment speed from larger companies (Spickett Jones et al, 2006). Marketing in small firms is different to marketing in the larger organisation. It is considered to be more intuitive, competency based, revolving around networking and operating under financial and human resource/time constraints. Whilst the traditional strengths of SMEs are their ability to serve niche market and develop strong relationship with customers, these are diluted by internet enabled businesses of any size. The threat of entry from larger regional, national and international firms is greater because of the lower transaction costs involved in entering markets dominated by SMEs. There is little doubt that the internet is changing marketing practices, from the detection of what consumers need to manage their relationships with companies. With the internet, people can interact with content provided by companies, expressing their opinions, suggestions, and comments. As the internet has penetrated people

lives and companies' business practices, providing interactivity and commercial support, it has had a great impact on marketing practices (Schimdt et al, 2008).

The internet has been a key driver of marketing during the past ten years. Uptake of the internet has been rapid compared with other communication technologies such as radio and television and now is accepted as being an essential business tool. With its combination of the written and audiovisual material, the internet contains more information than other media and is characterised by a high level of user involvement. The internet offers speed, reach and multimedia advantages and has altered the way businesses interact with their customers, competitors and employees. Businesses are increasingly investing substantial resources in online marketing and consumer use of the internet is increasing correspondingly. As more consumers use online technology they have higher expectations of the nature and availability of the services provided. Nearly all businesses, regardless of size, now have a web site. A business website enhances the image of a business and provides direct benefits in terms of e-commerce sales and indirect benefits in terms of informal retrieval, branding and service. The internet was most frequently used by consumers as a primary source of information (Welling et al, 2006).

This poses the dilemma of either jumping the bandwagon of internet marketing adoption and perhaps not fully understanding all the implications or waiting and being left behind by competing businesses that are already using the internet and e-marketing. SMEs can benefit from implementing the internet into their marketing mix, for example, marketing products and services by providing online quotes, advertising in more markets with less expense, using e-mail as a marketing tool and decreasing the cost of printing materials such as catalogues and glossy brochures. They could also enhance their credibility by creating a professional image through the presence of an efficient web site, answer questions about products and services in several languages and conduct research in foreign markets (Gilmore et al, 2007 and Simmons et al, 2007).

Tools of Marketing Communication

The tools employed by marketing communications include the following: advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, personal selling, public relations, corporate identity and internet marketing. For small businesses, choosing the right elements of the marketing communication mix which best complements their business product or service can be a

critical decision, especially taking into consideration constraints on budget, time and expertise.

Advertising

The role of advertising in most marketing communications campaigns is vitally important. Advertising, whether it is on an international, national, local or direct basis, has the potential to engage audiences in the short term. It either changes perception or builds brand value by encouraging the relevant change in behaviour; this is often delivered through a call to action. Advertising can reach a huge audience by means of simple messages enabling receivers to understand what a product is, what its primary functions are and how it relates to all the other similar products available. The main roles of advertising are to build awareness, induce engagement and to position brands, by changing either perception or attitudes towards them.

Advertising has traditionally been used to develop brand identities by stimulating awareness and perception. Marketing communication has now evolved to such a degree that purely focusing on product identity and brand values are no longer sufficient. The growth of direct marketing and one to one, preferably interactive communications have become paramount, and marketing budgets have swung more towards establishing a call to action, a behavioural rather than attitudinal change response (Fill, 2009).

Sales Promotion

Typically a majority of small businesses now employ techniques of sales promotion whereby they offer the customer a direct inducement or an incentive to encourage the receivers of these promotional messages to buy the product or service. With inducement it helps to add value to the basic product and encourage buyers to act 'now' rather than later. Sale promotion is used as a means to accelerate sales or bring forward future sales; the implication is that a behavioural change is required by the receiver for the sales promotion to be effective. The establishment of new behavioural patterns is now the preferred outcome for the business. If sales promotions are to work over the longer term, that is, to bring about repeat purchase behaviour, then the new behaviour patterns need to be learned and adopted on a permanent basis (Fill, 2009).

Sponsorship

Sponsorship can be defined as a commercial activity, whereby one party permits another the opportunity to exploit its association with a target audience in return for funds, services or resources. The main aim of sponsorship is to build awareness, develop customer loyalty and

improve the perception of the brand or organisation. A secondary aim of sponsorship is to attract new users, to support dealers and other intermediaries and to act as a form of staff motivation and to enhance morale. Sponsorship is normally regarded as a communication tool used to reach external stakeholders. For small businesses, sponsorship can be expensive especially if the business has a limited marketing/promotion budget. From the point of view of small business, sponsorship in its local area can bring goodwill towards the business from both current customers and potential new customers. Sponsorship has therefore become an important part of the mix as it allows brands to be communicated without the clutter and noise associated with advertising. At the same time sponsorship enables associations and linkages to be made which add value for all the participants in the communications process.

Direct Marketing

Direct marketing is a term used to refer to all media activities that generate a series of communications and response with an existing or potential customer. Direct marketing is concerned with the management of customer behaviour and is used to complement the strengths and weaknesses of the other communication disciplines. To put this in a different way, advertising and public relations provide information and develop brand values; sales promotion and direct marketing, however, induce active responses i.e. sales. Typical direct marketing techniques are: direct mail, telemarketing, insert to magazines or newspapers, print, door to door, radio and television and internet and new media.

Internet Marketing

Like traditional marketing, the goal is still to facilitate exchange, build long term customer relationships and create utility, which the benefit or value received from marketing exchange. The focus is on the synergy created when traditional method can be performed in a electronic environments which it can reduce time and space constraint, facilitates personalization and customization and allow the interoperability of computers and other devices.

In the 1990's, a boom in conventional advertising occurred as new and existing organisations set about informing audiences of their arrival on the internet. Many of these advertisers were part of the dot.com vanguard and their demise coincided with a downturn in the global economy. This caused a downturn in the fortunes of the global advertising industry. Target audiences were made of various websites as a result of extensive broadcast and print advertising. Many organisations also used publicity to draw attention to their websites. These techniques are still used although internet based techniques are also used to attract visitor (Medcalf, 2004).

Internet marketing delivers time, place, possession and form utility. The potential for time utility is far greater online than off because web storefronts never close, information is available nonstop, and searches can be conducted anytime the visitor is connected. The internet is a twenty four hours, seven days a week and three hundred sixty five days a year. People with connectivity and the ability to search for the products or information they need or want online benefit from place utility. Online visitors have worldwide access to store and content. The internet facilities customization on a scale that cannot be approached offline (Siegel, 2004).

There are many benefit associated with marketing communication on the internet:

- Users determine usage patterns –that is when, where and how often they access the internet, since it allows users round the clock access throughout the year.
- It offers global reach, which is undifferentiated but, once someone has made contact over the internet, they can be individually targeted.
- It is a powerful tool for building long term customer relationship –once a person has visited a website and registered their details, an organisation can keep in regular contact via e-mail.
- It is interactive, unlike television, cinema, radio, press and outdoor media. Interactivity implies that all parties can influence and are involved in the communication process.
- It enables consumers to be proactive –the internet turns marketing communications on its head. Traditionally, the organisation initiated marketing communications activity. The internet enables the customer to be more proactive when searching for suppliers and in many cases it has shifted the initial emphasis from organisation to potential customer contact to potential customer to organisation contact.
- It support channel strategy by building customer goodwill and complementing the organisations other sale channels as opposed to selling its products directly (Mecalf, 2004).

Traditional Media versus Digital Media

Large firm have traditionally commanded a competitive advantage over small firms. One explanation is that large companies use substantial resources to conduct extensive market research, mount powerful advertising campaigns, place their products in readily accessible outlets and dominate selected markets with their products. Large firm enjoy advantage such

as economies of scale, experience, brand name recognition and market power that typically eludes the smaller organisation.

Interestingly, traditional advantages that once belonged exclusively to the large firms are now being eroded. The cost of technologies, especially technologies for use in communicating with customers, suppliers and internal personnel have decreased dramatically over the past decade. Small businesses are taking advantage of new media in marketing more and more as a means of levelling the playing field of their larger competitors. By using the internet for global advertising and marketing research, low cost e-mail to communicate with customers for order taking and field sales, small businesses have to been able to establish a local presence with a global reach on a shoestring budget (Lynn et al, 1999).

Traditional media is considered to be television, print i.e. magazines and newspapers, outdoor billboard, in-store exhibits or Guerrilla tactics. With these tried and tested marketing communication approaches, small business owners feel a certain assurance that these methods work and are successful. But small business owners forget that these methods can be both costly and time consuming, and could still be an inappropriate method to connect with their target market. By contrast digital media can be cost effective and have a fast turnaround with regard to getting ones's message across immediately, for example using social networks like Facebook and Twitter. Digitisation has provided marketers with the opportunity to develop new ways of communicating with a wide variety of potential customers. Digital media enables users to have interactivity between the customer and the business, helping to create a personalised product tailored to what the customer wants and needs. In this manner, there is increased mobility throughout the market place. Digital media will also increase the speed and efficiency of the way business is conducted in the future. This will also help to enhance the customer's relationship with the relevant business (Fill, 2009 and De Pelsmacker et al, 2004).

Small Medium Enterprises

Although SMEs dominate international and European industry in terms of volume, their size militates against their potential influence in their markets, however, it is their size that affords them competitive advantage. This competitive advantage is derived from their distinctive marketing style which has little or no adherence to formal structures and models. The marketing activity of small firms is inevitably restricted in its scope and activity because of their limited resources. This result in marketing that is simplistic, haphazard, often

responsive and reactive to competitor activity. Coupled with a dynamic environment, these limitations challenge SMEs, driving their need for efficient and effective innovation to capitalise on marketplace opportunities; innovative marketing provides a significant mechanism in this process (O' Dwyer et al, 2009).

Within the complex reality of a SMEs environment, marketing is influenced by a number of critical factors such as customers, markets, trends and competitors, markets, trends and competitors whose interaction helps SMEs develop a distinctive marketing style. SME marketing is restricted by resource limitations, including finance, personnel, perception of function, skills and attitudes. However, these limitations serve to stimulate innovation to overcome the associated obstacle, thus resulting in some kind of innovative marketing. Innovative marketing in SMEs has been variously defined focusing on terms such as newness and opportunity, "creative, novel or unusual solution to problems and needs" including the "development of new products and services and new processes for performing organisational functions" (O' Dwyer et al, 2009).

To attract customers, these small business need to spend a great deal of money both online and offline. Online promotional campaign management continues to gather importance and to evolve rapidly. A shift is underway that will recognize that integrated marketing communications elements (trade shows, personal selling, advertising, sale promotion and publicity) and integrated direct marketing elements (face to face, personal selling, telemarketing, catalogues, direct mail and online marketing) must be merged into one summative unit for assessing the impact of corporate communications for enhanced buying and selling as well as sustaining contacts with publics relevant to the firm. Online in many ways has the best of all worlds. It likely costs the least per thousand and is available 24/7. However, it is almost entirely buyer initiated. There are no reasonable limits on variety and quantity of information as long as the website is easy to navigate for all steps of the buying process. As well, it is perhaps the lowest cost tool that can bring a buyer through all stages (Lichtenthal et al, 2002).

Online Marketing

E-business refers to the use of digital interactive technologies and information technology in order to conduct a firm's business. It is a term that is often used synonymously with e-commerce and e-marketing, however, these latter terms are merely parts of those e-business activities. E-marketing makes use of these same technologies specifically as a logical

extension to fulfil the traditional market practices of creating, communicating and delivering value to customers. Closely aligned with this, e-commerce refers specifically to the facilitation of the transactions created by the businesses marketing activities. The internet is the venue where e-commerce takes place; it provides information via the World Wide Web, e-mail, allows for real time communications and enables the sharing of databases. However, e-marketing is about much more than just the internet. It involves other technologies that enable customer relationship management, enterprise resource planning, supply chain management, text messaging, bar code scanners and digital television. The technologies that have created the internet have improved efficiency in the development and richness of the content of marketing activities; providing all companies, including SMEs, with opportunities that otherwise would perhaps not be available to them (Gilmore et al, 2007).

The use of the internet for e-commerce (technologically mediated exchanges) has grown rapidly in relation to the increase in commercial websites. Information can be requested and provided, orders placed and filled, products delivered and services performed. It has also impacted upon the barriers to export entry and has provided hope to millions of small and medium sized enterprises attempting to enter foreign market by allowing them to communicate globally as efficiently as any large business (Gilmore et al, 2007).

SMEs perceived value of e-marketing is to enrich company promotion by advertising in more market with less expense, using e-mail as a marketing tool and decreasing the cost of printing materials such as catalogues and glossy brochures. The use of the internet by SMEs may only offer benefits in the form of improved promotions and communications with customers and that its role in generating revenue still remains to be seen with only one company believing that e-marketing would ever replace traditional method. However, the SMEs still retain a collective belief that the internet and e-marketing is essential in today's business environment and that it will be important in the future (Gilmore et al, 2007).

The 5S's of Internet Marketing

- *Sales* –grow sales –achieved through wider distribution to customers you can't readily service offline or perhaps through a wider product range than in store or lower prices compared to other channels.
- *Serve* –add value –achieved through giving customers extra benefits online or inform product development through online dialogue and feedback.

- *Speak* –get closer to customers –this is creating a two way dialogue through web and e-mail forms and polls and conducting online market research through formal surveys and informally monitoring chat rooms to learn about them.
- *Save* –save costs –achieved through online e-mail communication, sales and service transactions to reduce staff, print and postage costs.
- *Sizzle* –extend the brand online –achieved through providing a new proposition and new experience online while at the same time appearing familiar (Smith and Chaffey, 2005).

Chaffey (2006) identifies four main type of online presence which each have different objectives and are appropriate for different markets. The four main types of site are:

1. *Transactional e-commerce site* –these enable purchase of products online. The main business contribution of the site is through sale of these products. The sites also support the business by providing information for consumer that prefer to purchase product offline.
2. *Service oriented relationship building web site* –provides information to stimulate purchase and build relationships. Products are not typically available for purchase online. Information is provided through the web site and e-newsletters to inform purchase decisions. The main business contribution is through encouraging offline sales and generating enquires or leads from potential customers. Such sites add value to existing customers by providing them with detailed information to help them support them in their lives at work or at home.
3. *Brand building site* –provide an experience to support the brand. Products are not typically available for online purchase. Their main focus is to support the brand by developing an online experience of the brand. They are typical for low value, high volume fast moving consumer goods brands for customers.
4. *Portal or media site* –provide information or news about a range of topics. Portal refers to a gateway of information. This is information both on the site and through links to other sites. Portals have a diversity of options for gathering revenue including advertising, commission based sales, sales of customer data.

Each of these different types of sites tend to increase in sophistication as organisations develop their internet marketing. Many organisations began the process of internet marketing with the development of web sites in the form of brochure sites or electronic brochures

introducing their products and services, but are now enhancing them to add value to the full range of marketing function (Chaffey, 2006).

Measurement of internet marketing effectiveness

Although the internet enable companies to collect large amount of data, the intangible nature of some aspect of e-business make it difficult to measure the contribution of specific e-business initiatives to overall business performance. Measuring the success of a web site is not easy, because the purposes for which web site exist vary considerably (Welling et al, 2006).

Chaffey (2000) suggests that businesses can define a measurement framework which can be divided into specific metrics grouping to assess internet marketing performance:

- (a) Include macro level effectiveness metrics which assess whether strategic goals are achieved and indicate to what extent e-marketing contributes to the business
- (b) Micro level metrics which assess the efficiency of e-marketing tactics and implementation.
- (c) Assess the impact of the e-marketing on the satisfaction, loyalty and contribution of key stakeholders i.e. customers, investors, and employees.
- (d) The framework must be flexible enough to be applied to different forms of online presence, whether business to consumer, business to business, not for profit, or CRM orientated or even brand building.
- (e) Enable comparison of performance of different e-channels with other channels.
- (f) The framework can be used to assess e-marketing performance against competitors' or out of sector best practices. (Chaffey, 2000)

The internet is frequently called “the most measurable of business media” because of the wealth of data that internet applications can capture on the activities and interests of customers or other users. Although return on investment is not widely measured in online marketing, many other things are and some of these metrics play an important role in return investment calculations. The most common measurement techniques used to analyzed marketing tools employed by business that are online are:

- Unique visitors
- Page views
- Session time

- Click through –what percentage of visitors to the home page click through to another website
- Registered members to information emails about new products and offers
- Posting per day/week/month
- Read to post ratio
- Repeat visitors

Most of these measures describe what is happening online, but they do not tell much about what it means to the business (Cothrel, J.P., 2000). Many companies have difficulty in predicting the likely effect of the internet on their marketing and in deciding what they should do about establishing a presence on the internet, those who do so have met with mixed success. Because the costs associated with developing, implementing and maintaining a website can be high, e-business projects need to be evaluated and monitored carefully to determine whether they are delivering what they are supposed to deliver. This means that performance measurement is one of the most important aspects of undertaking a website project (Welling et al, 2006).

Measuring advertising effectiveness online should be relatively easy because almost all of it is direct advertising where the audience sees or hears ad and immediately can click through to make a purchase. The problem involves developing accepted standardized measures so as to determine what is really happening. Thus far, advertising measures/metrics have been an area of intense debate complicated by the difficulty in monitoring when and where ads appear online. Web advertising metrics are measurement used in determining what is happening when ads are used on the web. Web metric measure audience size and reach, brand building, audience contact with ads and recall and effectiveness in leading to a behaviour, stimulating recall or raising awareness. Site owners, advertisers, agencies, media and other want widely accepted standardized measurements because they lend credibility to reports of audience size and characteristics, contacts and ad effectiveness which are all important in setting rates. Standardized measurement allows meaningful comparisons between web advertising form, media and offline advertising. The internet and the web are unique in their capacity to allow marketers to gather more information than other channels and at a remarkable depth and specifically (Siegel et al, 2004).

Social Media

Social media encompasses a wide range of online information, word of mouth forums including blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer to consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites, forums and social networking websites to name a few. The 21st century is witnessing an explosion of internet based message transmitted through these media. They have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behaviour including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchasing behaviour, and post-purchase communication and evaluation. Companies can use social media to talk to their customer through such platforms as blogs, as well as Facebook and MySpace groups. The promotional role of social media is unique; customers can use it to communicate with one another.

Conventional marketing wisdom has long held that a dissatisfied customer tell ten people. In the new age of social media, he or she has the tools to tell 10 million consumers virtually overnight. In a sense, the role of social media enabling customers to talk to one another –is an extension of traditional word of mouth communication. Social media is a hybrid element of promotion mix because it combines characteristics of traditional IMC tools (companies talking to customers) with a highly magnified form of word of mouth (customer talking to one another) whereby marketing managers cannot control the content and frequency of such information. Social media is a hybrid in that it springs from mixed technology and media origins that enable instantaneous, real time communication and utilizes multi-media formats (audio and visual presentation) and numerous delivery platforms (Facebook, YouTube and blogs to name a few), with global reach capabilities.

Consumers like to network with people who have interests and desires that are similar to their own. Organisations can leverage this desire by creating communities of like minded individuals. People are more likely to communicate through both word of mouth and social media when they are engaged with the product, service or idea. This engagement may come naturally for supporters of the cause i.e. political campaign e.g. US Presidential Election or a trendy new technological product i.e. iPad (Glynn Mangold et al, 2009).

Conclusion

Marketing communications include the following: advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, personal selling and public relation. For small businesses choosing the right elements of the marketing communication mix which best complements their business product or service can be a critical decision, especially taking in to consideration limitations

of budget, time and expertise. For small businesses, deciding among the numerous methods of promotion can be the difference between sales increase or sales decline. Also, small business owners need to be comfortable with the promotion method they choose to use regarding to their personal knowledge basis, their industry norms and spending budget. With the increase of new digital media techniques i.e. social networks, e-commerce sites, etc., a business can employ especially business to business.

From the literature discussed in this chapter, marketing communication is where messages and related media are used to communicate with a market. Marketing communications is the "promotion" part of the "Marketing Mix" or the "four Ps": price, place, promotion, and product. The Internet has brought media to a global audience. The interactive nature of Internet marketing in terms of providing instant responses and eliciting responses are the unique qualities of the medium. Internet marketing is sometimes considered to be broad in scope because it not only refers to marketing on the Internet, but also includes marketing done via e-mail and wireless media. With the fast pace of the technological advancement in today's society, marketing online has now become more important and essential to help further a small business target market therefore, it is making internet marketing a viable option. Internet marketing is relatively inexpensive when compared to the ratio of cost against the reach of the target audience. Companies can reach a wide audience for a small fraction of traditional advertising budgets. The nature of the medium allows consumers to research and purchase products and services at their own convenience. Therefore, businesses have the advantage of appealing to consumers in a medium that can bring results quickly. The strategy and overall effectiveness of marketing campaigns depend on business goals.

Internet marketers also have the advantage of measuring statistics easily and inexpensively. Nearly all aspects of an Internet marketing campaign can be traced, measured, and tested. The advertisers can use a variety of methods: pay per impression, pay per click, pay per play, or pay per action. Therefore, marketers can determine which messages or offerings are more appealing to the audience. The results of campaigns can be measured and tracked immediately because online marketing initiatives usually require users to click on an advertisement, visit a website, and perform a targeted action. Such measurement cannot be achieved through billboard advertising, where an individual will at best be interested, then decide to obtain more information at a later time..

Because exposure, response, and overall efficiency of Internet media are easier to track than traditional off-line media—through the use of web analytics for instance—Internet marketing can offer a greater sense of accountability for advertisers. Marketers and their clients are becoming aware of the need to measure the collaborative effects of marketing (i.e., how the Internet affects in-store sales) rather than siloing each advertising medium. The effects of multichannel marketing can be difficult to determine, but are an important part of ascertaining the value of media campaigns.

Small business approach to internet marketing is different from larger organisations, as they don't have the money, time and expertise sometimes to engage with some of the internet marketing tools. Sometime being the small guys in the market place can work to small business advantage because it can change and move much more quickly than a larger business in order to gain market advantage over a layered large business where it can take up to six months or more to get to the marketplace, whereas a small business can get to the marketplace in less than 2 months if required.

In light of these development, small business now have a more level playing field in the marketplace with larger organisations especially with the advancement of the internet and various internet marketing tools available for very little financial outlay.

Internet marketing has been creating a new market potential for small businesses which didn't believe such potential even existed for their business i.e. exporting abilities. This area of small business and their use of internet marketing need to be investigated further with a particular focus on a target audience.

Chapter Four

Results from Online Questionnaire and In-depth Interviews

Data Collection:

Two methods of research were engaged in for this study; one questionnaire (see appendix 1) for the small business owners who were contacted through Mayo and Sligo County Enterprise Boards and one to one in-depth interviews with 10 small business owners' based in County Mayo and Sligo to discuss their point of view about internet marketing using semi-structured methodology (see appendix 2).

Initial contact was made with Mayo and Sligo County Enterprise Board in order to gain access to the emailing lists of the board's participants in various county enterprise programmes.

Prior to beginning in-depth research, five business owners were asked to fill out the initial questionnaire. They were then asked if they had encountered any question they didn't understand, or any question which in their opinion was asked incorrectly, or any questions which they thought were uncertain of how to answer. After the initial testing, changes were made to the questionnaire in relation to wording and grammar before it was administered to small business owners. To give reliability and validity in this research tool, a further five business owners were asked to fill out the questionnaire. As with the previous group, these note any additional misunderstanding in the questionnaire. Following these discussions it was established that the questionnaire was ready to be administered to the selected business owners. These two tests ascertain the reliability and content validity of the research tool. The ten business owners that were involved in the re-testing study were not asked to be included in the main study.

Before administrating the questionnaire, two contact persons from the County Enterprise Boards were contacted by the researcher in order to discuss with them the objective of this research, and to consider typical questions which could be asked by participants. Cluster sampling was used to find the study subjects with no sampling frame all subjects were obtained in a group setting through the various enterprise board programme groupings.

The questionnaire was administrated through using online questionnaire programme "Survey Monkey" and the link to the questionnaire was linked in the email sent out to the participants explaining the purpose of this research and the intended outcome.

After the administration period, the researcher collated results from the questionnaire using the analysis programme content in the "Survey Monkey" site. The results was checked

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three times, firstly, by the researcher one week after the initial results were collected was to make sure there wasn't any irregularities. Secondly an independent person was given a sample of 10 questionnaires to ensure there weren't any problems and finally, a third time, the results were looked at again before diagrams for study were constructed.

The results are broken down into questionnaire answers compared to in-depth interview/questionnaire answers and comments compared to questionnaire answers.

For the purpose of this research it was necessary to gain a more in-depth insight to how small business carry out internet marketing therefore 10 interviews with small business owners in various industries was set up by the researcher. The business owners involved in this study will only be identified by an assigned number as they feel information provide to the researcher is industry sensitive and due to the close vicinity of the small businesses involved, anonymity was guaranteed for the purpose of this research.

Results from the Questionnaire and In-depth comparison:

Firstly, it is required to establish the amount small business spend in its marketing budget. From the questionnaire the following diagram shows the breakdown small businesses spend in this regard.

How do you decide how much money does Company spend on Advertising and Marketing throughout the year?

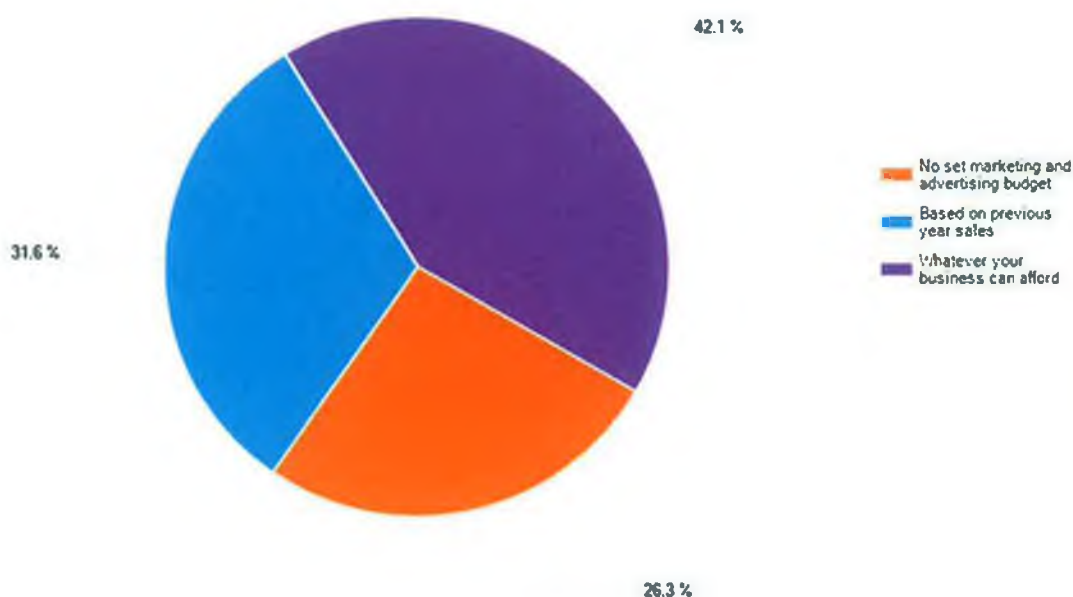


Figure 1 Question: How do you decide how much money your company spend on advertising and marketing throughout the year?

42.1% of small business owners state that “Whatever the business can afford” is an interesting comparison with 31.5% who use the previous year sales figure. 26.3% of respondents stated that they have no set marketing budget.

From the in-depth interviews company 1 and 5 stated they set their yearly marketing budget based on their current work load. Whereas companies 2, 3 and 6 stated that their yearly marketing budget is based on a mixture whatever they can afford and previous year sales. And company 4 stated there is only has a small marketing budget and uses it to its best

abilities. This is an example of where online marketing has become very affordable and effective because it reflects a cheaper option for example the use of social network sites.

Secondly, the small business owners were asked to give a rough percentage in their opinion of the amount of money spent on the following various marketing and advertising techniques; brochure, sales promotion, signage for the business, direct marketing, sponsorship, public relations, online presence, advertising and other various techniques for example billboards or print campaigns. The first table shows the level of spending of the small business surveyed, it demonstrate the amount of spending they assign to certain marketing techniques.

	0-5%	6-10%	11-15%	16-30%	31-50%	51-70%	71-90%	91-100%
Brochure	33.3%	16.7%	25%	0%	8.3%	16.7%	0%	0%
Sales Promotion	14.3%	42.9%	42.9%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Signage for the business	41.7%	33.3%	8.3%	16.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Direct Marketing	18.2%	27.3%	27.3%	18.2%	9.1%	0%	0%	0%
Sponsorship	30%	40%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Public Relation	12.5%	37.5%	25%	12.5%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%
Online Presence	17.6%	11.8%	11.8%	35.3%	5.9%	11.8%	5.9%	0%
Advertising	0%	18.5%	25%	43.8%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%
Other	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 1. Question: *In your opinion, what percentage of your budget do you spend on the following areas of marketing –Small business owners questionnaire results*

From the table, you can see that small business owners spend a small amount of their marketing on several of the recognised marketing techniques as opposed to focusing on two or three techniques only. For the purpose of this study it is interesting to see that 35.3% of small business owners spend between 16% to 30% on developing their online presences in comparisons to 43.5% of small business owners who spend between 16% to 30% on their advertising budget alone.

Second table shows the level of spending small business owners interviewed felt to be a breakdown of total spending

	0-5%	6-10%	11-15%	16-30%	31-50%	51-70%	71-90%	91-100%
Brochure	66.7%	16.7%	0%	16.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sales Promotion	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Signage for the business	20%	20%	60%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Direct Marketing	50%	25%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sponsorship	40%	60%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Public Relation	0%	40%	20%	20%	20%	0%	0%	0%
Online Presence	20%	0%	40%	20%	0%	0%	20%	0%
Advertising	0%	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%	33.3%	0%	0%	0%
Other	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 2. Question: *In your opinion, what percentage of your budget do you spend on the following areas of marketing –Small business owner interviewed result*

The table indicates how, small business owners interviewed split their marketing and advertising budget into various areas so as to gain the most exposure for their limited budgets. Of the small business owners interviewed for this study, 40% spent between 11% to 15% on their online presence and interestingly 20% interviewed actually spend between 71% to 90% of their marketing and advertising budget. 66.7% of small business owners interviewed spent 0.5% on print brochures for their business. While 33.3% of the small business owner spend between 11% to 15% and 31% to 50% on advertising their businesses through a series of marketing tools for example signage for business, direct marketing, sales promotion etc.

The next question was to establish the type of online presence the small business has.

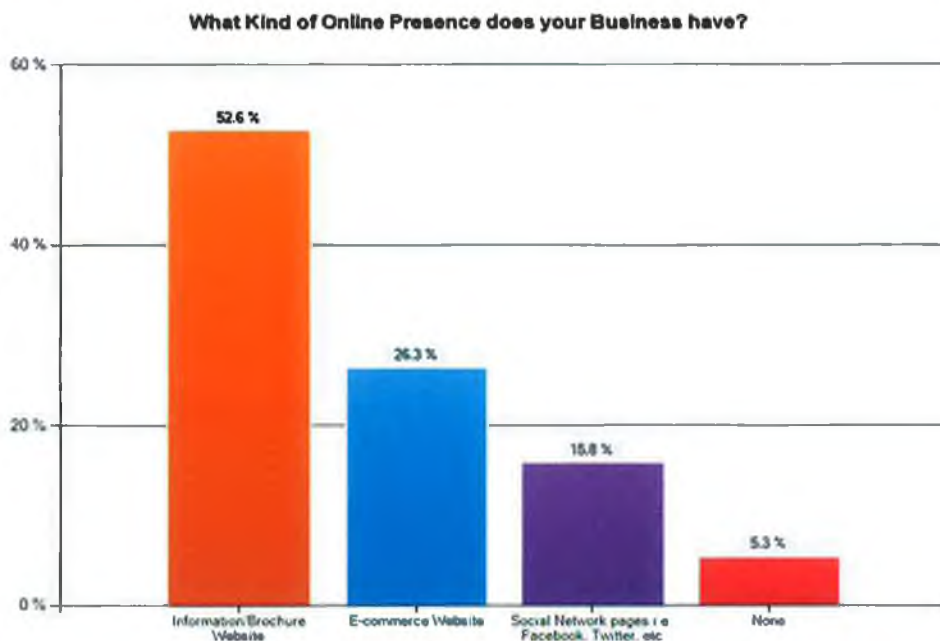


Figure 2. Question: What kind of Online presence does your business have? Small business owners questionnaire response

The above diagram shows that 52.6% of small business owners surveyed have a information/brochure website, 26.3% of small businesses' online presence is through e-commerce websites and 15.8% of small business surveyed had only a Facebook or Twitter account.

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From the following diagram you can see from those interviewed that the only types of online presence they currently have is: have an e-commerce website (83.3%) or 16.7% an information only website.

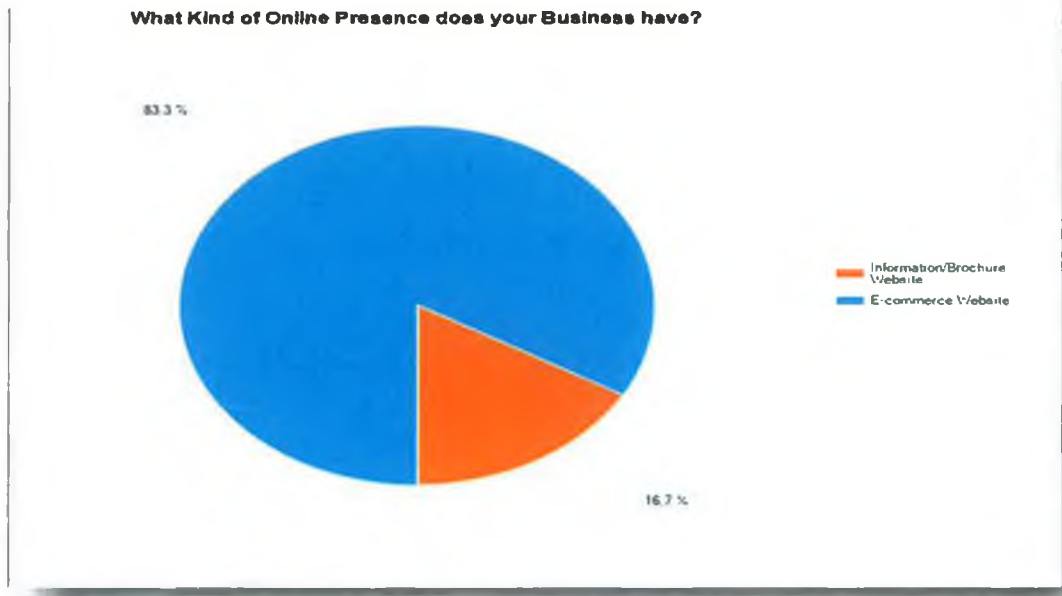


Figure 3. Question: What kind of online presence does your business have? –Small business owner interviewed response

The following diagram demonstrates, small business owners opinion as to what percentage of their overall sales has been helped by their business online presences

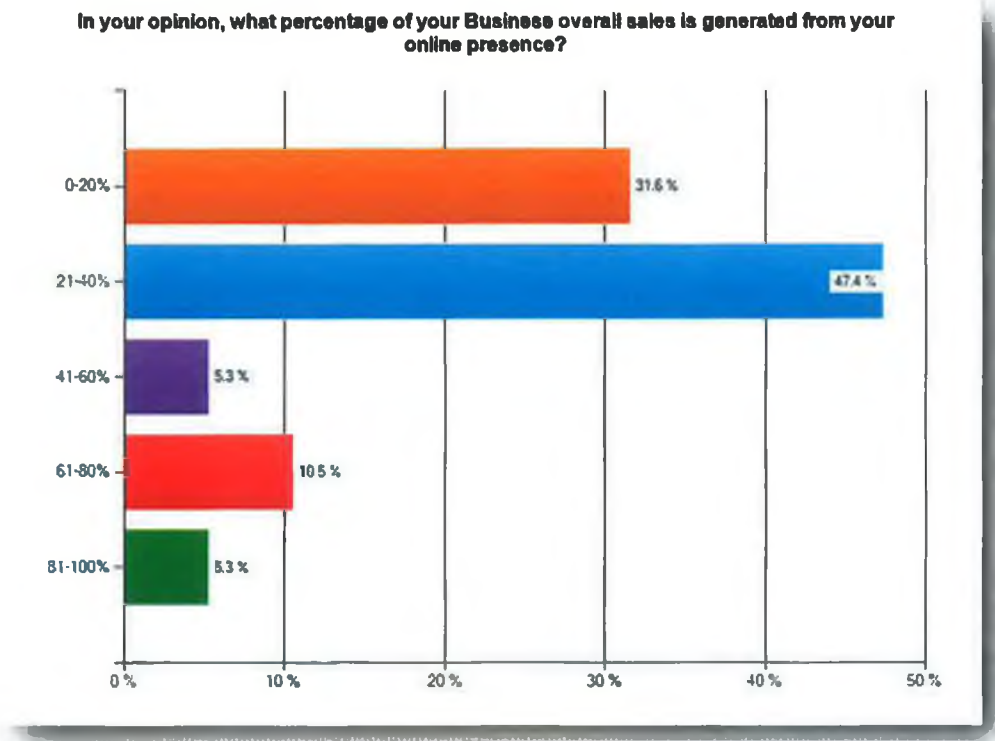


Figure 4 Question: *In your opinion, what percentage of your business overall sales is generated from your online presence? Questionnaire response*

47.7% of the business owners surveyed believe that their online presence brought in 21 - 40% of their overall sales generated through their website. Where those who answered the questionnaire believed that 31.6% their online presence brought in 0.20% of the company overall sales. And 5.3% believe that their online presence brings in 41-60% of sales and 81-100% of overall sales return. While 10.5% believes that 61to 80% of overall sales come from the business online presences.

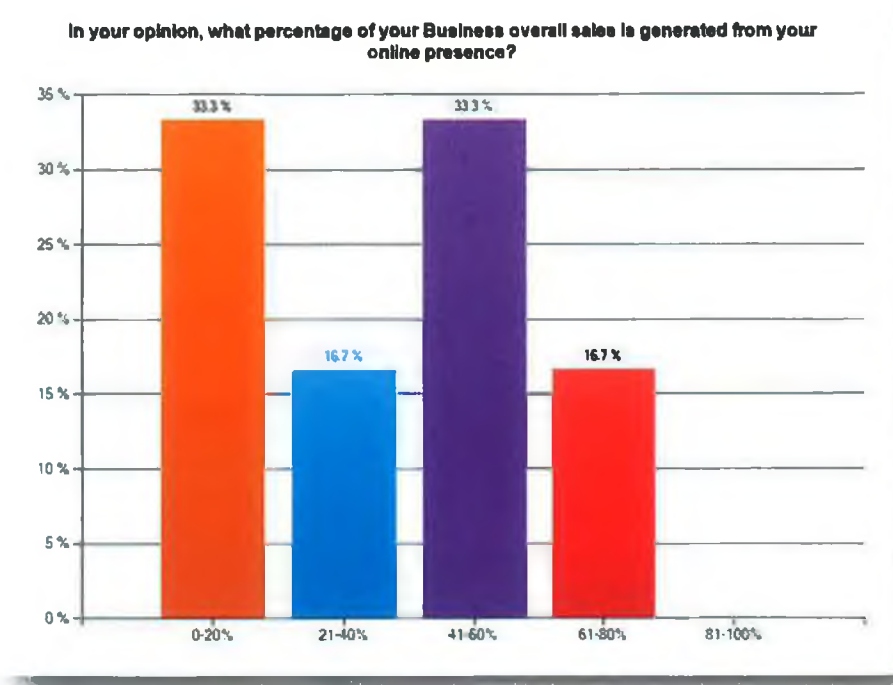


Figure 5. Question: In our opinion, what percentage of your business overall sales is generated from your online presence? Interview response

The interviewees stated, as shown in the above diagram the percentage of sales in their opinion their online presence brought to the business. 33.3% of the interviewees felt that their online presence brought in between 0-20% of the business overall sales but only had information style website. While those with e-commerce sites found that they achieve between 41-60% of their sales online. And 16.7% of interviewees who had new websites felt that 21-40% of their sales were generated online and those who relied on online sale only techniques felt that 61-80% of its overall sales are generated from its online presences.

With business striving to become more efficient and effective, technology will plays a huge part in furthering this aim into the future.

Clearly, where your business is based is not an issue anymore. Small business can now be run from the owner's own home. With that, access to the internet and its speeds has been an issue particular in Counties of Mayo and Sligo; this will be discussed further in the Discussion Chapter. With this in mind all the business owners were asked their opinion on the internet access and speed in their area.

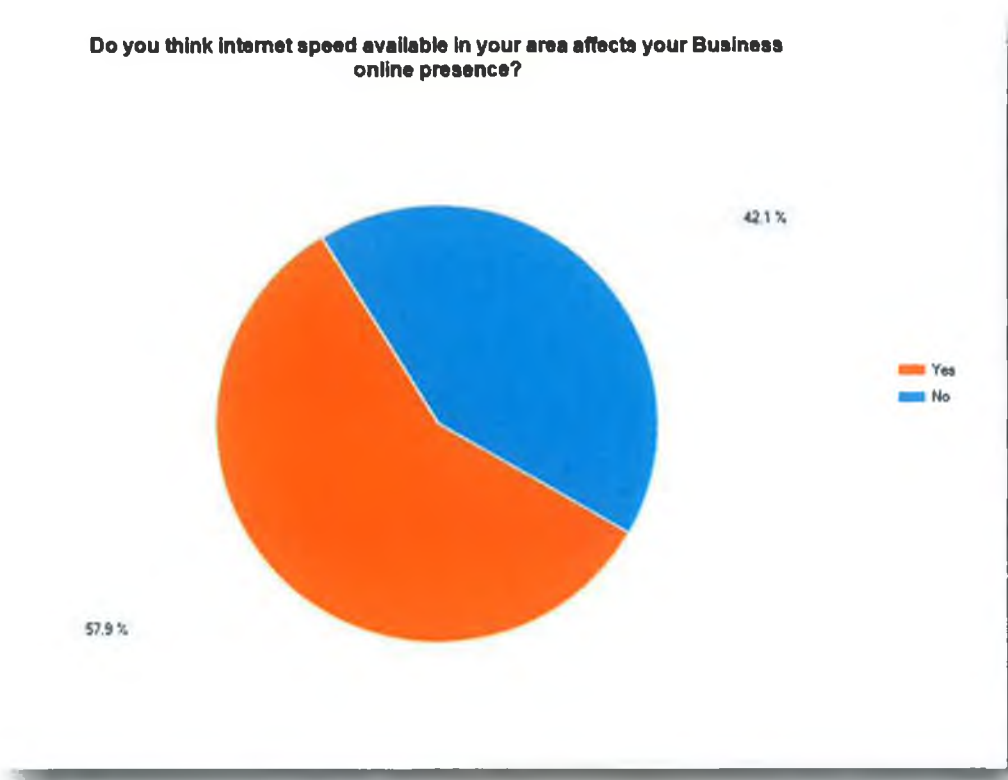


Figure 6. Question: Do you think Internet available in your area affects your business online presence?

From the pie chart you can see that 57.9% of business owner do feel that internet availability and speed affects their business online presence whereas 42.1% feel that internet availability and speed does not have a significant impact on their business.

This area will be discussed further in the next chapter. The following are direct quotes from some of the in-depth interviews about the subject area:

Company 2 stated the following: “Yes, it affects the way we conduct business because internet speed has caused trouble in getting in contact with suppliers and customers who prefer to conclude business online rather than on the telephone”

Company 3 stated the following: “Since the business is very new in the marketplace, getting to grips with what type of internet provider to use was an interesting process as providers offer different services that are more geared to larger businesses, not small business with only two employees”.

Company 5 stated the following: “In the beginning, it was a little troublesome to find an internet provider in our area, who understood the needs of this business as opposed to a larger business. It was a learning curve for us as a business to figure out internet access not only ourselves but also for our customer base”

When it comes to updating the website, small businesses have a limited amount of resources and time from the chart below you can see that 57.9% of business owners oversee all of their business websites updating and improvement themselves while 31.6% outsourced their website updating and developments..

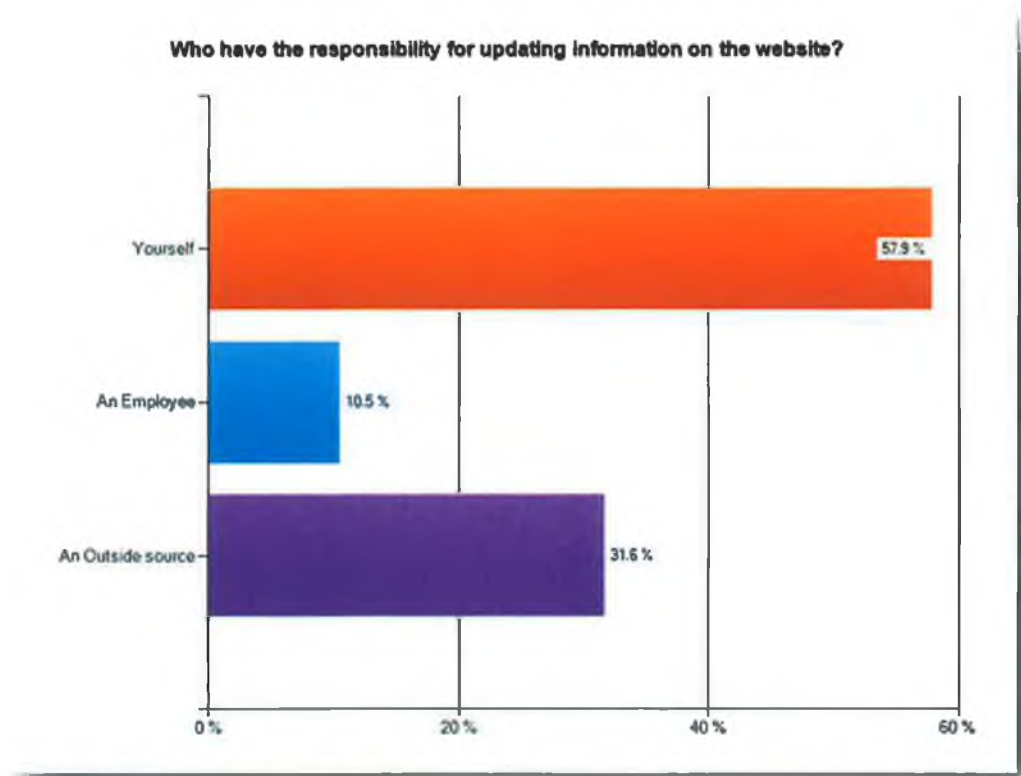


Figure 7. Question: Who have the responsibility for updating information on the website?

Also, in the interviews this question was also asked and from the following quotes it emerges that most of the updating responsibility falls to the small business owner him or herself.

Company 1 stated the following: “Since we are a small business with only 7 employees, everyone has access to the company website pages so they can update information on the websites whenever it’s necessary.”

Also Company 6 stated the following: “In this business, two people have the responsibility of updating the websites with both people they have more flexibility in updating the sites and can following through with sales promotion”.

In the in-depth interview, the small business owner was asked how often are their sites updated.

How often do the person who has responsibility for the online marketing tools update the business information online and offer sale promotions online.

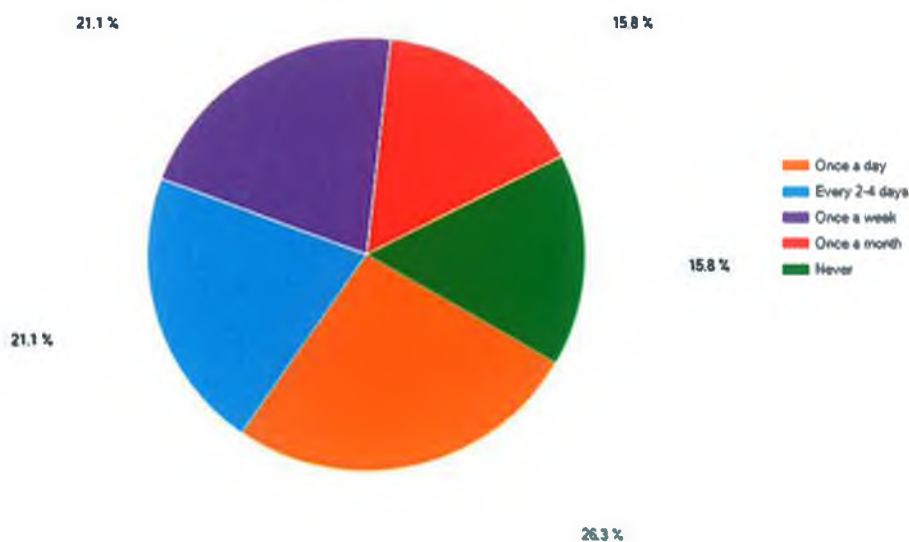


Figure 8. Question: How often does the person who has responsibility for the online marketing tools update the business information online and offer sale promotions online. -

Interview response

From the pie chart, it shows that 21.2% of business owners interviewed stated that they update their company website either once a week or every 2 to 4 days. Whereas 26.3% of businesses interviewed update their company website at least once a day. And 15.8% stated that they only update their website once a month. And also 15.8% stated that they haven't updated their websites since they launched it.

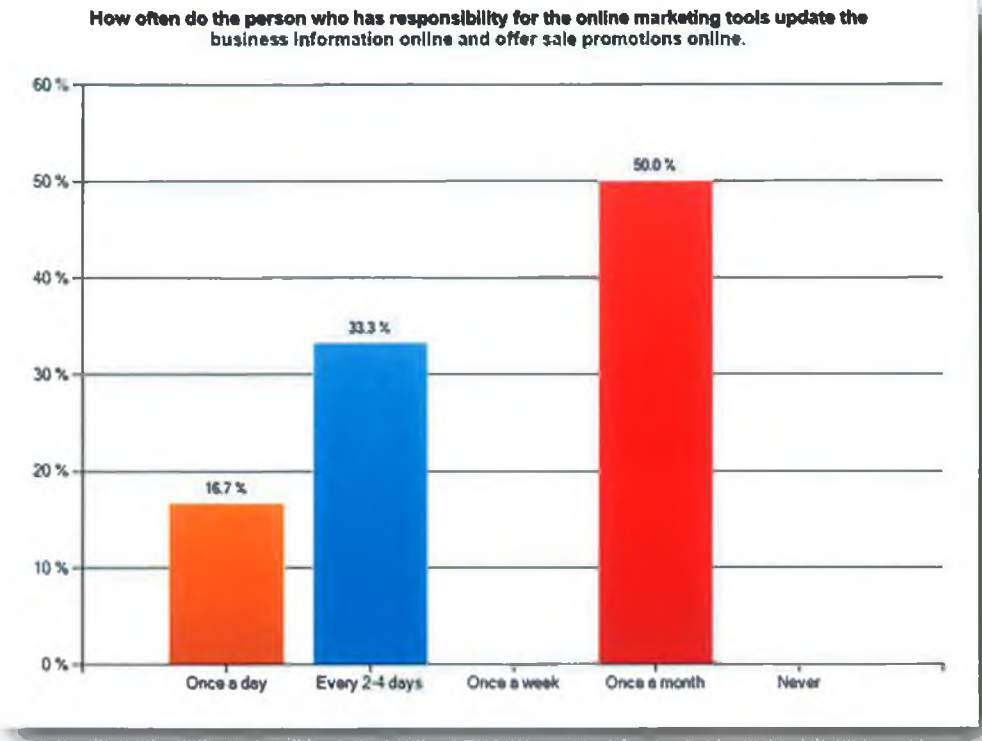


Figure 9. Question: How often does the person who has responsibility for the online marketing tools update the business information online and offer sale promotions online. -
Questionnaire response

From the online survey the following was discovered: 50% of small business owners stated that they update their websites at least once a month. 33.3% stated that they update their website every two to four days and 16.7% stated that they updated their website at least once a day.

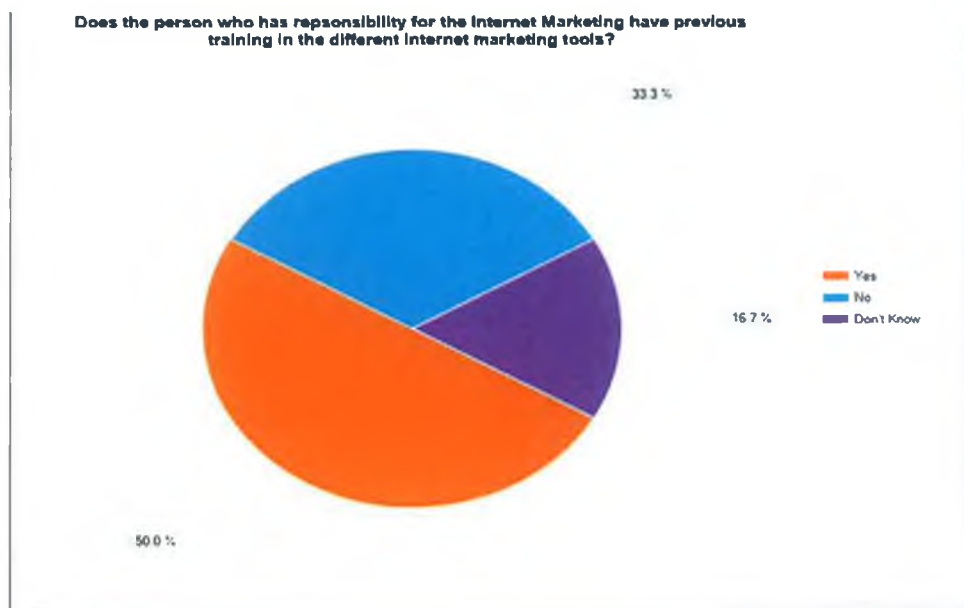


Figure 10. Question: Does the person who has responsibility for the internet marketing have previous training in the different internet marketing tools?

When questioned about the person who had responsibility for running of their internet marketing campaign, and if they have any previous training in this field, 50% of the business owners stated 'Yes' they did indeed have internet marketing training. Interestingly 33.3% of businesses stated that they have no previous training in internet marketing and 16.7% stated they didn't know if the person in charge of the online marketing campaign had previous training or not.

With various online tools that can be used to further a small business position in the market place the businesses surveyed were asked to rate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of certain online marketing tools:

	Very effective	Effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Ineffective	Very Ineffective	N/A
Website	61.5%	23.1%	7.7%	0	0	7.7%
Facebook	21.4%	35.7%	42.9%	0	0	0
Twitter	0	33.3%	66.7%	0	0	0
Online store	27.3%	18.2%	27.3%	9.1%	9.1%	9.1%
Advertising on other websites	0	0	0	30%	50%	20%
Online sales promotion	0	10%	30%	40%	0	20%
Internet Ads	0	14.3%	28.6%	14.3%	14.3%	28.6%
Blog	0	33.3%	0	33.3%	0	33.3%

Table 3. Question: How effective is the following online tools in your business? -
Questionnaire response

From the results in the table above, it shows that from the questionnaire 84.6% of the small businesses surveyed believe that their website is the most effective online marketing tool followed by online stores at 45.5% and thirdly, their business Facebook page comes in at 57.0%. 50% of the small business owners felt that advertising on other websites e.g. chamber of commerce websites was very ineffective for their business. Also split three ways is their

opinion on having a company blog where one third feel blogs are effective, another third feel blogs are ineffective for their business and the final group don't use blogs at all.

The table below demonstrates the level of effectiveness or ineffectiveness small business owners that were interviewed perceived the online marketing tools.

	Very effective	Effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Ineffective	Very ineffective	N/A
Website	66.7%	33.3%	0	0	0	0
Facebook	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%	0	16.7%	16.7%
Twitter	20%	0	20%	0	20%	40%
Online store	50%	16.7%	0	0	0	33.3%
Advertising on other website	16.7%	0	16.7%	0	33.3%	33.3%
Online sales promotion	16.7%	33.3%	0	16.7%	0	33.3%
Internet ads	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%
Blog	0	0	0	0	0	100%

Table 4. Question: How effective are the following online tools in your business? –Interview Response

In the table, the results show that 100% of the interviewees felt that their company website was the most effective online marketing tool. Interestingly again, the interviewees also felt advertising on other website was ineffective and 33.3% of the small business owners interviewed do not even advertise on other website as they feel it is was ineffective and a waste of time and money. 66.7% of the small business owners also felt that their online store was very effective of achieving sales and market share.

Nicola Flynn An investigation of marketing communication tools employed by small businesses in Sligo and Mayo with particular emphasis on Internet Marketing tools utilized

From the results discussed, small business owners have demonstrated their use of marketing communication techniques through using marketing tools for example sponsorship, advertising in local press and online marketing. The small business owners have demonstrated they do use various internet marketing techniques to market their business to a wider target market. They also saw internet marketing as an effective sales technique and method of making people aware of their business and products

In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the result of this research project further with reference to the secondary research and its implications for the market place.

Chapter Five

Discussion, Recommendations and Limitation occurring in this study

Marketing communications is essentially about how a business gets its message out to the market place and it helps to create an awareness of a product or service through; advertising, public relations, direct marketing, sales promotion, sponsorship traditional i.e. print campaign and in-store exhibits and new digital media. Small businesses throughout Ireland are looking for a competitive advantage over their competitors in this tough financial climate both in their home market and overseas. When looking for cost saving initiatives many small business owners think the first thing to cut is their marketing /sales budget, this line of thinking will cause a number of issues for the other stakeholders because it will lessen their business awareness and can affect the business competitiveness. It may even influence customer loyalty towards the business because customer may develop a negative image of it. This is because they may feel that a lack of communication between the business and themselves indicates signs of financial difficulties and may affect their loyalty towards these products.

Importantly, in today's business world, digital media techniques such as social network websites are becoming a useful tool helping businesses keep in touch with one another and their customer base. Three areas of business has been identify where social network websites are being used are:

1. In recruiting new employees,
2. In customer relationship management
3. In advertising to this target market.

Advertising in the area of social networks has become very popular because of the amount of web traffic social networks attracts. With social networks, recruiting new employees has become much more easier through social networks for example LinkedIn is where employees can network with each other employees in different businesses. Customer relationship management can be enhanced by social networks because the businesses can have special offers to their loyal customers through their various social network pages. Also advertising on social networks can target particular customer base i.e. 18-35 age group spends over 4 hours a day online. Businesses can advertise in the form of banners and text ads, viewable to millions of web users and this in turn helps to create brand loyalty among its key target market.

Ireland has a population of around four and a quarter million people; approximately two million are in employment and of these 350,000 people work for Government departments, state agencies or other public sector bodies (including health and education) and over 100,000

work in agriculture. The rest of the working population work is the enterprise sector i.e. manufacturing, services, construction, wholesale and retail, hotel and restaurants, transport, self employed professionals and these working in businesses a that employ fewer than 50 people. Given the size of the sector, it is clear that the success of the SME sector is a vital determinant of well-being of the whole economy. The Irish economy is in a period of transition, as domestic demand rather than the external side of the economy becomes the main source of economic growth. Given the current rate of growth, SME are becoming an increasing source of economic growth.

Response Rate for this study:

This research study chose to use an online questionnaire (see appendix 1), which was a tick box format, which in theory should have elicited a good response rate because online survey can be completed in one's own time and place. They also have a quick response time and an ability to target specific populations. This questionnaire sent to over 60 small businesses operating in Counties Mayo and Sligo through emails obtained from the county enterprise boards in Mayo and Sligo but as response rate of only 31.6% was achieved. This can be attributed to the time of year in which the research was carried out as it was during the summer holiday period. There appears to be a lack of knowledge of the importance of this form of research in relation to best practice in small business sector (Chamber Ireland 2008).

The second research tool was to conduct ten semi-structured interviews (see appendix 2) which were arranged to happen in the last week in June and first three weeks in July. Unfortunately, four people due to be interviewed pulled out of the interviews and replacements couldn't be found on such short notice. From phone conversation with the interviewees, a couple of reason was given for their unavailability and unwillingness to take part in the research. Reasons given were; lack of interest in the value of being involved in this research project, going on last minute holidays and being too busy to be interviewed. Only six companies were eventually interviewed. The interviews were of a high quality and informative despite their low number.

The importance of research in today's business market in order to develop best practice in marketing not just for larger organisations but for small organisations was lost on many of the business owners involved in this study (Chamber Ireland 2008). This led to a smaller sample than planned but the size of the sample is still viable considering the level of enterprise involved with both County Enterprise Boards based in Mayo and Sligo. A couple of the

small business owners did present with an “it’s only a small shop attitude” company 3 stated “they felt their business was only a small business and it couldn’t compete with the larger retail outlets” but in fact when questioned further was in fact the market leader in their particular area of expertise. This attitude needs to be addressed if Irish entrepreneurs want to continue to compete in today’s global economy. These businesses do in fact compete in global markets even if the small business owners even if feel their business isn’t the next Microsoft or Coca Cola through their various online marketing tools for example websites. This process may need further encouragement and education to improve the small business owner’s attitude towards their business market presence in the global economy. More businesses need to be encouraged to participate in enterprise boards education programmes. The Government needs to encourage these businesses into interacting with the international markets through tax break initiative and or improve broadband infrastructure nationally.

Small business owners have become so focused on the recession and survival of the business that they have become fixated on the negative side of the recession rather than working on creating a positive outcome for their business. When small business owners were asked their opinions on the possible future for their business, 70% of the owners interviewed felt their business would be lucky to be around in the next two years. This negative attitude towards the business environment in Ireland isn’t helping to create more sustainable employment. A lot of small business owners when contacted for this research both in the online questionnaire and for the in-depth interview found it hard to understand why research was important to their business sector possibly because these were entrepreneurs who had no formal third level business education or were business owners that inherited small family businesses.

Internet in Ireland

Ireland has one of the largest internet communication technology (ICT) and related services economies in Europe relative to the size of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The country’s Internet and mobile communications usage is broadly on a par with the rest of the European Union (EU), yet it has an under-developed residential and business broadband market, with poor levels of Digital Subscriber Lines (DSL) and cable modem adoption compared with other European countries. Low penetration is due to high wholesale costs, lack of competition, high retail prices, limited coverage in many non-urban areas, and general low market awareness. The market slowly began to move in 2004 and 2005 as the incumbent Eircom, and the regulator, Communication Regulator, combined to diversify it.

The number of Irish homes with an internet connection has swelled by 74,000, according to new figures from the Central Statistics Office of Ireland. The agency said in its "Information Society Statistics" for 2004 that about 537,000 homes in Ireland are connected to the net, compared to 463,000 in 2003. It also reported that 650,000 homes, or 46 percent of Irish households, now have a personal computer, a rise of 67,000 over a year.

Most of the statistics from the Central Statistics Office indicated that the population of Ireland is continuing to accept PCs and the internet at a steady pace, although individuals who have traditionally been reluctant to take to the "Information Society" remain outside the loop. For example, the CSO said that computer usage is highest for students and persons in employment and is lowest for those aged 65 or over. Home computer ownership and internet access are higher in the Southern and Eastern regions, compared to the Border, Midlands and Western regions (CSO, 2009 and Amarch, 2008).

Ireland was also shown to be behind many of its neighbours in Europe, such as Denmark, where in 2003 79 percent of households had a computer and almost two-thirds had internet access. In Ireland, 42 percent of households had a computer and about one-third had internet access in 2003. Likewise, in Norway, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK, more than half of all homes had access to the internet, the Central Statistic Office noted. Still, the report was full of signs that Ireland is progressing, with virtually all businesses now using computers, the internet and e-mail. Businesses mainly use the internet to search for information, to avail of banking and financial services, and to monitor markets, the Central Statistic Office said, adding that 18 percent of businesses use Digital Subscriber Line broadband to connect compared to 9 percent a year ago (Com Reg, 2009 and CSO, 2009).

Sales in Ireland using e-commerce account for about a quarter of industrial turnover, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) added. But it tempered this figure by noting that only half of all businesses have made some purchases using e-commerce, and said that such purchases still account for a small percentage of total purchases, except in the retail and wholesale sectors, where about 8 percent of purchases are by EDI (Electronic Data Interchange). Among the general population, the agency said that about 727,000 people use a computer every day, while about 373,000 use the internet at least once a day.

The use of the internet for e-commerce has grown rapidly in relation to the increase in commercial web sites. Information can be requested and provided, orders placed and filled, products delivered and services performed. It has also impacted upon the barriers to export entry and has provided hope to millions of small and medium sized enterprise attempting to enter foreign markets by allowing them to communicate globally as efficiently as any large business (Gilmore et al, 2007).

With ever increasing prominence and the importance of the internet in today's Irish society, people are now using the internet differently compared to five years ago. People are now using the internet as their first point in gathering information about products or services to compare price differences, availability and different features. A lot of customers find the internet more convenient for gathering information and for purchasing online, for example through websites like amazon.com or ebay.com especially for products that are hard to find in Ireland. With the internet, businesses regardless of their size or location in the world have an equal chance in the online global market place as a large multi-national company (Amarch, 2008).

Marketing on a budget

Marketing in small firms is different to marketing in the larger organisation. This is because small businesses have less money and expertise for marketing their products/services. Small business marketing approaches are considered to be more intuitive, competency based, revolving around networking and operating under financial and human resource/time constraints. Whilst the traditional strengths of SME are their ability to serve a niche market and develop strong relationship with customers, these are diluted by internet enabled businesses of any size. The threat of entry from larger regional, national and international firms is greater because of the lower transaction costs involved in entering markets dominated by SMEs. There is little doubt that the internet is changing marketing practices, from the direction of what consumer need to manage their relationships with companies, from this research company 2, 3 and 5 stated that over 69% of first point of contact from their customer comes from their business websites.

With the internet, people can interact with the product/service content provided by companies, expressing their opinions, suggestions, and comments. As the internet has penetrated people lives and companies' business practices, providing interactivity and commercial support, it has had a great impact on marketing practices (Schimdt et al, 2008).

Large firms have traditionally commanded a competitive advantage over small firms. One explanation is that large companies use substantial resources to conduct extensive market research, mount powerful advertising campaigns, place their products in readily accessible outlets and dominate selected markets with their products. Large firms enjoy advantage such as economies of scale, experience, brand name recognition and market power that typically eludes the smaller organisation.

Interestingly, traditional advantages that once belonged exclusively to the large firms are now being eroded. The cost of technologies used in communicating with customers, suppliers and internal personnel has decreased dramatically over the past decade. Small businesses are taking advantage of new media in marketing more and more as a means of levelling the playing field of their larger competitors. 72% of the small business contacted for this study demonstrated a high usage of social networks as this new media marketing tool is free to use by businesses and has a huge customer buy in. They found these sites help to create a stronger awareness of their product/service in the market place. This is in line with Mangold et al (2009) research into use of social networks site as a marketing tool and in this tough economic climate, minimum costs of advertising is becoming more cost efficient. By using the internet for global advertising and marketing research, low cost e-mail to communicate with customers for order taking and field sales, small businesses have to been able to establish a local presence with a global reach on a shoestring budget (Lynn et al, 1999).

Current marketing spend for a small business

In the interest of privacy for the small business owners, they were not asked to disclose the exact figure of their business marketing budget. So the businesses were asked two question how they set their marketing budget and rough percentages of what they actually spend on various marketing techniques i.e. Sponsorship, Brochures, sales promotion, direct marketing, signage for the business, public relations and advertising. In the first question the small business owners were asked “How do you decide how much money your company spends on advertising and marketing throughout the year?” The following options were given to the business owners:

- No set marketing and advertising budget
- Based on the previous year sales
- Whatever the business can afford.

Their response was as follows 42.1% of small business owners state that “Whatever the business can afford” is compare with to 31.5% who base their budget on the previous year sales figure. 26.3% of respondents stated that they have no set marketing budget.

From the in-depth interviews company 1 and 5 stated they set their yearly marketing budget based on their current work load. Whereas company 2, 3 and 6 stated that their yearly budget is based on a mixture whatever they can afford and previous year is sales. Company 4 stated its only has a small marketing budget and uses it to its best abilities. Literature sates that the level of spending on marketing and advertising by small business in Mayo and Sligo are in line with national averages (Gilmore et al 2007). This is where online marketing has become very affordable and effective because it is the relatively cheaper option for example the social network sites have free subscription. Other marketing tools for example website development are more affordable with companies more competitive with their quote in order to stay in business. When the business owners were asked to give rough figures of what they think they spent last year on brochures, sale promotions, signage for the business, direct marketing, sponsorship, public relations, online presence, advertising and other marketing techniques i.e. billboards and print campaign, etc the average spend on individual tool were from 0-15% of their overall marketing and advertising budget. This is in line with the larger organisation but their budget are larger with wider target market (Chaffey, et al 2006, Daniel et al, 2002, De Pelsmacker et al, 2004 and Gilmore et al 2001). It was interesting to see that a lot of business owners actually use a lot of the marketing communication techniques to get their message out into the marketplace in various degrees (Medcalf, 2004). The small business owners when pushed on this fact in the interview felt that a wider amount of exposure is required to help create their brand name and this can be gained through using multiple marketing communication techniques. But when asked in the past if they measure the effectiveness of these techniques, the answer was no. There isn't really an easy to use way of analysing the financial worth of using certain techniques.

Online presence

From this study the two most popular of method of online presence which emerge are firstly the information/brochure website (this is where the website contains a list of products or services available to the general public or business to business customers, usually a price list and contact information for the business which will hopefully lead to sales leads for the business). The small business owners find these websites easy to use and to maintain as they

don't require a lot of training beforehand. They normally outsource the construction and yearly maintenance of the website.

The second method is an e-commerce website –this is where the physical store becomes a virtual store on the World Wide Web that can be accessed in any part of the world and their products can be sold overseas. This type of website is getting more and more popular with small business owners because an online store requires a limited outlay of money where as a physical store requires a lot of time, money especially with the outfitting store with stock and the running of the store with general costs like electricity, employees, and telephone, etc. As the customer base becomes larger and global, it doesn't matter about the size of the business and location of the business as long as it fulfils the role customers expect it to(0). When all the small business owners were asked about training in online marketing techniques, 57.9% of business owners oversee all of their business websites updating and improvement themselves. 31.6% of business owners employ an outside source to update their company websites. Also, in the interviews this question was also asked and from the following quotes shows that it is in line with those small business that were issued with the questionnaire.

Most of the updating responsibility falls on to the small business owner.

Company 1 stated the following: "Since we are a small business with only 7 employees everyone has access to the company website pages so they can update information on the websites whenever it's necessary."

Also Company 6 stated the following: "In this business, two people have the responsibility of updating the websites with both people they have more flexibility in updating the sites and can following through with sales promotion".

From previous research in the earlier half of the decade, small business owners generally outsourced their websites construction and management to a third party (Edi et al, 2002, Daniel et al, 2002, Lin et al, 2010, O' Connor, 1997 and Strauss et al, 2003). With the advent of Youtube, Myspace, LinkedIn, etc., the use of these programme to develop a companies online presence has become so easy a child as young as eight can do it (AMA, 2010)

Security concerns in relation to e-commerce website are in some ways peripheral to normal business working, but serve to highlight just how important it is that business users feel confident when using IT systems. Security will probably always be high on the IT agenda simply because cyber criminals know that a successful attack can be very profitable. This

means they will always strive to find new ways to circumvent IT security, and users will consequently need to be continually vigilant. Whenever decisions need to be made about how to enhance a system, security will need to be held uppermost among its requirements. For small business owner, being happy with their online security features is very important and as they need to reassure that their credit card information won't be stolen. A lot of the small business owners use payment system like PayPal and Realex Payment system as payment options for the customers (AMA, 2010, Borges et al, 2009, Shyan et al, 1998 and Spickett-Jones et al 2006).

Internet access has been known to cause problems particularly in the West of Ireland because the infrastructure has been very slow in its progression. This area was discussed at length by all of those surveyed and those interviewed had opinions about this subject area, the following is a sample of opinion that was given with regards to internet speed and availability in county Mayo and Sligo; the businesses that were surveyed had a mixed attitude towards the internet speed in the west of Ireland.

Company 1 stated the following "The internet speed can cause trouble particularly with uploading and downloading speed levels when you're trying to send copies of online brochures through emails."

Company 4 stated "Yes, the infrastructure available isn't very reliable and the government lack of focus will be costly in the future."

Company 5 stated "Internet speed in this area can very troublesome personally this business has been with six different providers before we finally found an internet provider with the strongest speed levels for this area."

Company 6 stated "It doesn't affect our business, we are really lucky because the business unit we are working from has great internet access system available to all clients base here, so internet speed hasn't been a problem it would probably be a problem. If the business wasn't based in this enterprise centre."

From the businesses that were interviewed their opinion slightly varies from those that were surveyed about internet speed and availability in Counties Mayo and Sligo.

Company 2 said “Yes, it affects the way we conclude business because internet speed has caused trouble in getting in contact with suppliers and customers that prefer to conclude business online rather than on the telephone.”

Company 3 stated the following “Since the business is very new in the marketplace, getting to grips with what type of internet provider to use was an interesting process as most providers offer different are more geared to larger businesses, not small business with only 2 employees.”

Company 4 opinion was the following “In the beginning, it was a little troublesome to find an internet provider in our area that understood the needs of this business as opposed to a larger business. It was a learning curve for us as a business to figure out internet access for not only ourselves and our customer base.”

From the opinions, stated above, companies in County Mayo and Sligo are having various different experiences with their internet access, from discussion with various small business owners, it would appear that where a small business is based can have a major impact on the way the small business owner can carry out their business online. A lot of the small business owners did state that they feel that there isn't enough pressure being placed on the government bodies to insist on the improvement of internet infrastructure in the west of Ireland. A lot of government policy has been put into place to encourage more small indigenous businesses throughout the country with emphasis in particular being focused on the Border Midland West (BMW) region but unfortunately due to current economic environment these policies have been put on the back burner. Also the government seems to be missing the direction of focus on the Irish economy and its future.

Return on investment

With the cost of building and maintaining various online marketing techniques, small business owners were asked in their opinion what percentage of their business overall sales comes from their online marketing tools. Literature states that measuring the return of investment is important for business owners because it is the only way to measure the effectiveness of their marketing tools. In Ireland most small business owners admit that they do not measure their return of investment of the marketing tools they employed. (Chamber Ireland 2008). From those surveyed in this project, 84.6% estimate that sales figures increased with their online presence with most of these only having catalogue format website. 100% of those interviewed stated that they estimated that they had increased their sale

through their online shop sales technique. With the development of new website and other online marketing tools, it is hoped that it will help to create new leads for the business that will lead to new sales or repeat business.

Social networks

The acceptance of social media as an online marketing tool, that can bring the customer base closer to the business has caused a lot of debate among experts in the field of marketing. At one extreme stand the social media “anoraks” who insist that companies that don’t tweet, blog or connect on social networks are dinosaurs. At the other are those who dismiss it all as a fad; as a result, they may miss business opportunities and sometimes are unaware that their corporate or personal reputations are in trouble in this virtual environment (Mangold et al, 2009 and Stephen et al 2010). There are a growing number who realise the power of social media but often need to be convinced of the business value. The reality is that there can be considerable tangible benefits, once there is a strategy in place focused on a business imperative, on the channels to use and on how to manage them. A couple of facts we need to know about social media and its prominence in Ireland come from figures stated by the Irish Internet Association. Since January 2009 Facebook numbers of active users has quadrupled to 1.6million.

Almost a third of that customer base access Facebook on their mobile phones. 55% of Irish users are female and there is rapid growth in adoption levels among the over 35’s who now account for 30% of users. The reach of social media sites makes them difficult to ignore. Facebook is best used in a business to customer context but works better for some brands than others as a marketing and communication channel. Managed well, LinkedIn can be valuable for business to business relationship building, lead generation and recruitment. Twitter offer value for customer service, special offers and crisis communications. All three and the choice of other social media platforms, present opportunities as well as challenges. Having a social media strategy is a starting point. In 2009, the average internet user was online for 13.2 hours a week compared with 10 hours a week the previous year according to ComReg (2010) figures.

Small business owners or entrepreneur in this current economic climate are trying to get past this current economic storm. The unfortunate mismanagement of the banking system in Ireland and the government in-action in relation to inflation and the over inflated housing and property market, have had a negative impact on all business but has made staying afloat for

small business very difficult with the shortage of investment finances and the lowering of the disposable income available to customers to spend. With the Celtic tiger, came an attitude from majority of people in Ireland that this economy high point will never end, there won't be a so called "rainy day" in the future. Unfortunately, in the space of three weeks the Irish economy has been changed in such a way, that the country was on the brink of bankruptcy twice in the past two year and most recently in the last few months along with various other European Union member countries (Irish Independent, 2010). Many small businesses are finding themselves in financial difficulties and in order to stay in business. They resort to cutting their marketing budgets to save money which has the opposite effect as customers and potential customers begin to lose awareness of the business brand and products. It then limits the companies brand worth which may affect sales and market position.

Conclusion

"No man is an Island", nor is a business, in today's business environment a small business can be a global player with a couple of clicks and by positioning itself differently online. Marketing communication has help to create awareness and increase the profile of product/services available to its target customer base. Through sales promotion, sponsorship, public relations, signage for the business, advertising and direct marketing these marketing communication or promotion tools, small businesses use these tools in varying degrees when promoting their business. Unfortunately, small businesses do not generally measure their return of investment when employing the various marketing communication tools particularly traditional marketing communication techniques.

Traditional marketing communication methods are more popular with small businesses owners because these methods are tried and tested. New media methods are now becoming more popular with small business owners due to their wide availability, easy of usage and their wider target market. With of these various communication methods available to small business owners there is a wide choice available and they need to choose carefully what marketing tools will be suit to their business because with the wide variety of communication/promotional tools available, the business owner can pick unsuitable promotional techniques for their business.

From this study, small business owners in County Mayo and Sligo have adopted internet marketing and continue to grow in their usage of different elements of internet marketing tools. The small businesses have had various success with using online marketing methods

and those that took part in the research 100% of the participants had some sort of internet presence and over 63% attribute their online presence to their overall sales.

From this study, it has also emerged a more stream line approach to measurement is required for small business owners to decide on what marketing communication/promotional tool best suits their budget and their target customers. The small business owners stated that they do not usually review their marketing tools to see which is working best for them to attract their target customer base. How internet marketing is carried out nationally is a subject area which requires more research and in turn then policies, effective measurement tools and education can be effectively put in place to support this type of industry which provides vital employment to small communities. This studies finding are in line with what is available in Ireland in relation to the bigger business so it is comforting to see that the Celtic Tiger did encourage small business o follow the lead of the big gun in attempting to market their products not just locally but nationally and internationally.

Limitation

With every research project, there will be a certain amount of limitation experienced by the researcher for example, limited time frame to carry out the study, limited budget and unwillingness of participants. For this study, the main limitation was getting small business owners to agree to take part in this research, a lack of knowledge of the research process and it benefits was a major contributor to this limitation. With a much larger sample pool this issue may not have come to light. Small business owners are largely unsure about the value of research in helping creating stronger and more efficient business methods.

Another limitation encountered in this study was the limited time frame in which to conduct the research with small business owners, as a lot of the business owners were busy. The time of year didn't help either because it was height of the holiday season for some of the businesses that were targeted for interviews and online questionnaires. The economy was a major limitation to participation of companies as some felt that if they divulged any of this type of information, they may affect their business ability to survive in this small market place

Recommendation

Marketing communications involved various aspects of promotion including: public relations, sponsorship, direct marketing, sale promotion and internet marketing. There are various aspect of this subject area that can be researched further not only in Ireland. Ireland can also

be compared to other European countries and other international markets. Also from this research, the researcher learned that small business owners are not only using one or two marketing communication techniques. They are using a number of different promotional tools i.e. brochure, signage, websites, etc. Research could be carried out to investigate which promotional tools work more effectively for small business and have a good return on investment.

Online marketing is beginning to prove its worth not only to large businesses but also small business owners, with the internet it helps to create a level playing field for all businesses regardless of size and the amount of money companies put into their online presence. Today, customers are more tech- savvy and conduct research especially for much larger purchases using online information to gain a bigger picture about their purchase i.e. a car or a house in a new area, etc. Researching the customer's perceptions of their products in relation to other brands can help small companies to become more effective in gaining customer satisfaction and help in increasing their sales and brand loyalty.

The development of a measurement tool for assessing effectiveness and efficiency is needed for small businesses because in this economic climate spending money on promotion tools that are relatively ineffective can be very costly for small businesses. This measurement tool could be developed in conjunction with small business owners in various industries and then can be tailored to specific industry needs. This development will require further research.

Small business owners did state in the interviews that they would like to further their training and education in different aspects of internet marketing with emphasis being put real life experiences; the good, the bad and the indifferent with particular interest noted in online marketing methods and their effectiveness. This could be a project for enterprise boards to developed and front in order to help the indigenous industries to survive in rural Ireland.

Chapter Six

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Chapter Seven

Appendices

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**Appendix 1 Small business approach to marketing communication –
Questionnaire Cover letter**

Cloonaphsia,

Knockanillaun,

Ballina,

Co. Mayo.

3rd/June/2010

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am currently undertaking MSc in Marketing in the Institute of Technology Sligo. As part of my dissertation I am conducting research into internet marketing techniques used by small business in County Mayo and Sligo. This study aim is to discover the level of use and types of internet marketing techniques small business employed and how they are managed.

I would be grateful if you could return your completed questionnaires, in the stamp addressed envelope provide before 5th July, 2010. A reminder letter will be forwarded to you in 2 weeks time, if you have returned the questionnaire please ignore this but if you have not returned the questionnaire please reconsider returning it at that time as your information is important to this study. If you have any questions in relation to this study please feel free to contact me any time at the above number or by e-mail and I will gladly answer your questions.

You're sincerely,

Appendix 2 Small businesses approach to marketing communication questionnaire

Q1. How do you decide how much money your company spends on advertising and marketing throughout the year?

Based on previous year sales ____ No set marketing and advertising budget ____

Whatever your business can afford ____

Q2. In your opinions, what percentage of your budget do you spend on the following areas of marketing:

	Percentage %		Percentage %
Brochures		Sponsorship	
Sales Promotion		Public Relations	
Signage for the business		Online presences	
Direct Marketing		Advertising	
Other			

Q3. What kind of online presence does your business have?

Information website ____ Brochures website ____ E-commerce website ____

Social Networks pages i.e. Facebook, twitter, etc ____ None ____

Q4. In your opinion, what percentage of your business overall sales is generated from your online presence?

0-20% ____ 21-40% ____ 41 -60% ____ 61 -80% ____ 81 -100% ____

Q5. Who has the responsibility for updating information on the websites?

Yourself ____ A Employee ____ A Outside Source ____

Q6. How often do the person who has responsibility for the online marketing tools update the business information online and offer sales promotions online.

Once a day ___ Every 2-4 days ___ Once a week ___ Once a month ___
 Never ___

Q7. How effective is the following online tools in your business?

	Very Effective	Effective	Neither effective or ineffective	Ineffective	Very ineffective
Websites					
Facebook					
Twitter					
Online store					
Advertising on other local websites i.e. tourists sites of the local area					
Online sales promotion					
Internet ads					
Company or employee blogs					

Q8. Do you interlink your online marketing with your traditional methods i.e. print brochure/poster, etc?

Yes ___ No ___ Haven't thought of it ___

Q9. Do you feel your online presence has helped to create awareness of your business/product brand?

Yes ____ No ____ Don't Know ____

(a) If yes, how has your online presence improved your business?

Thank you for your co-operation

Appendix 3 In-depth questions for small business owners

Q1. How do you decide what funds your company spends on advertising and marketing throughout the year?

Q2. In your opinions, what percentage of your budget do you spend on the following areas of marketing:

	Percentage %		Percentage %
Brochures		Sponsorship	
Sales Promotion		Public Relations	
Signage for the business		Online presences	
Direct Marketing		Advertising	
Other			

Q3. What kind of online presence does your business have?

Information website ___ Brochures website ___ E-commerce website ___

Social Networks pages i.e. Facebook, twitter, etc ___ None ___

(a) If you have tick none in regards to the previous question about types of online techniques your business uses, why have you decide against this marketing approach at this moment and would you change your mind in the future with regards to online marketing?

Q4. How long has your business being using online marketing techniques?

0-6 months ___ 7-12 months ___ 13-18 months ___ 18 months plus ___

Q5. In your opinion, what percentage of your business overall sales is generated from your online presence?

0-20% ___ 21-40% ___ 41 -60% ___ 61 -80% ___ 81 -100% ___

Q6. Who has the responsibility for updating information on the websites and what type of information i.e. price, special offer product list, etc is most often updated?

Q7. How often do the person who has responsibility for the online marketing tools update the business information online and offer sales promotions online.

Once a day ___ Every 2-4 days ___ Once a week ___ Once a month ___ Never ___

Q8. Does the person who has responsibility have previous training in online marketing methods?

Yes ___ No ___ Don't Know ___

Q9. How effective is the following online tools in your business?

	Very Effective	Effective	Neither effective or ineffective	Ineffective	Very ineffective
Websites					
Facebook					
Twitter					
Online store					
Advertising on other local websites i.e. tourists sites of the local area					
Online sales promotion					

Internet ads					
Company or employee blogs					

Q10. Has your business carried out online sale promotions online through the various internet tools that you can use?

Yes ___ No ___

(a) If yes, please discuss their uses and the level of response you got from this campaign?

(b) If no, please discuss, the reason why you think this method isn't suitable for your business?

Q11. Do you interlink your online marketing with your traditional methods i.e. print brochure/poster, etc? Describe if you do?

Q12. Do you feel your online presence has helped to create awareness of your business/product brand?

Yes ___ No ___ Don't Know ___

(b) If yes, how has your business online presence improved your business?

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(c) If no, why do you think your business online presence hasn't improved your business?

Thank you for your co-operation

Appendix 4 Additional results to small business approach to marketing communications questionnaire

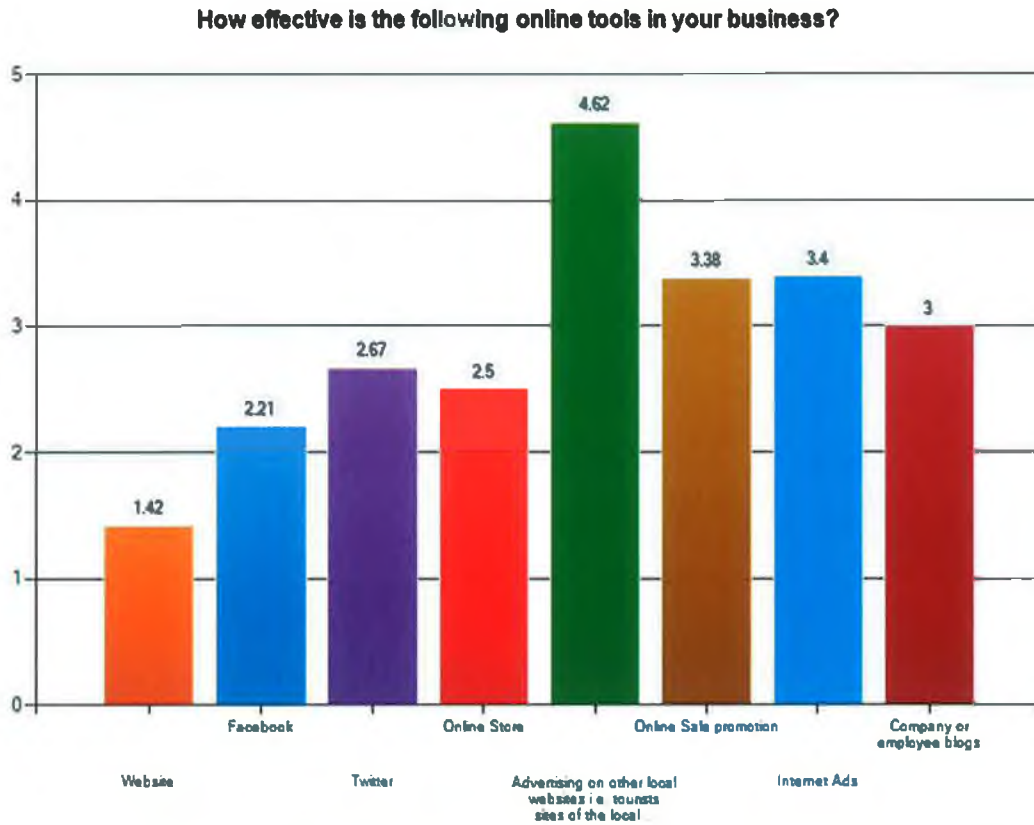


Figure 11. Question: How effective is the following online tools in your business?

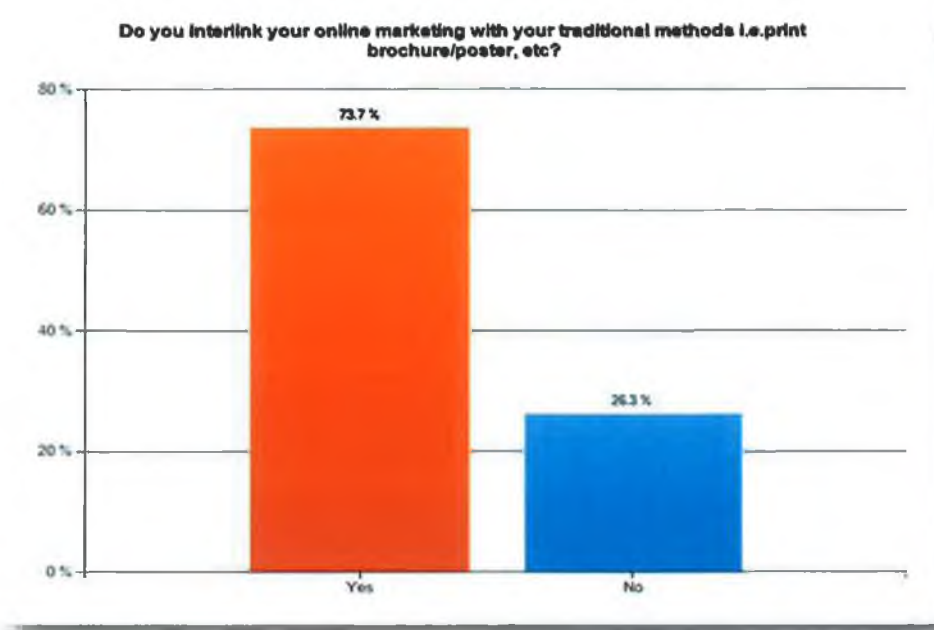


Figure 12. Question: Do you interlink your online marketing with your traditional methods i.e. print brochure/poster, etc?

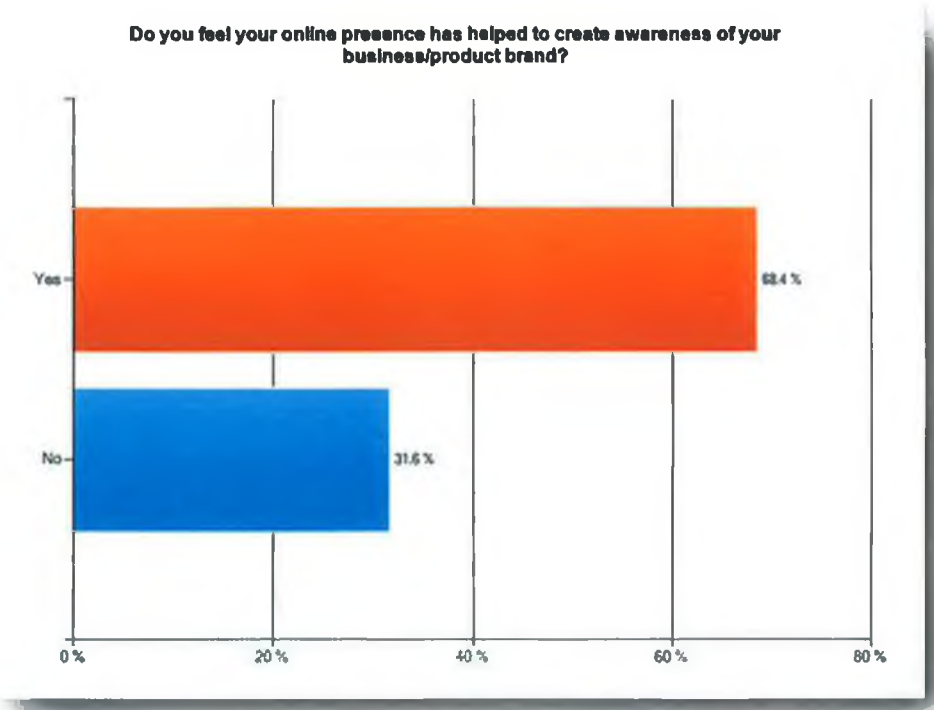


Figure 13. Question: Do you feel your online presence has helped to create awareness of your business/products brands?

Appendix 5 Additional results to in-depth interview questions done with small business owners

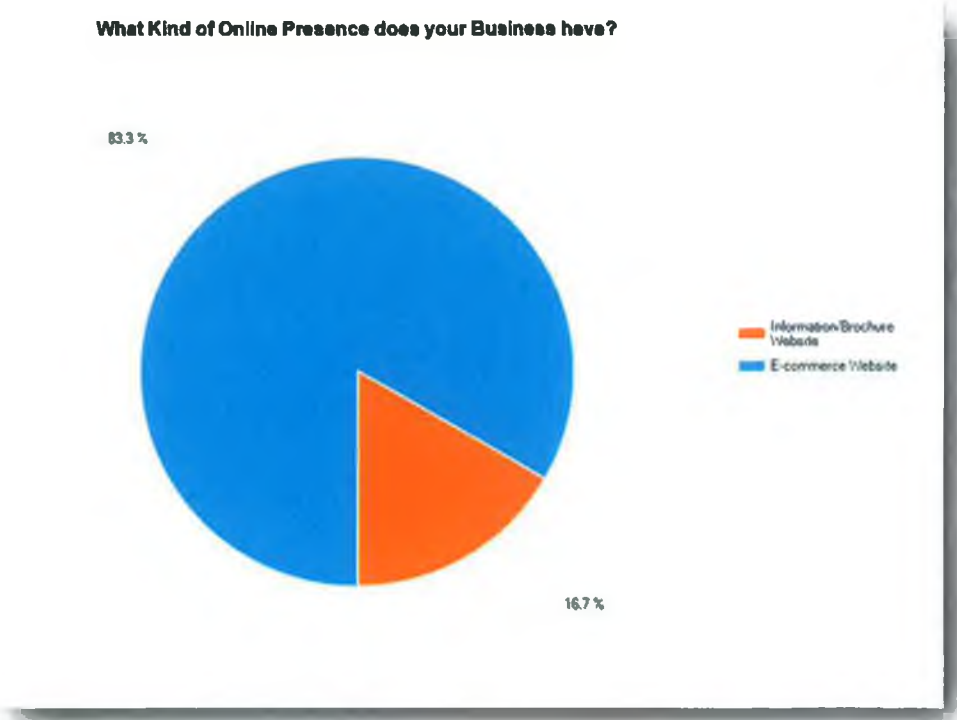


Figure 14. Question: What kind of online presence does your business have?

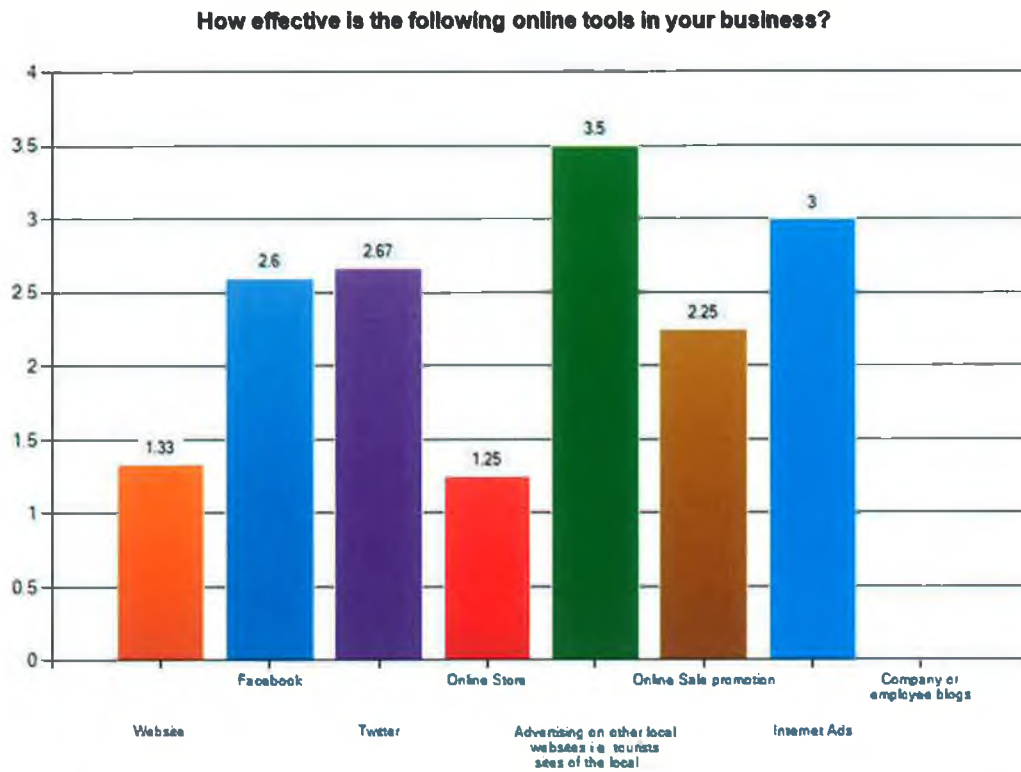


Figure 15 Question: how effective is the following online tools in your business?

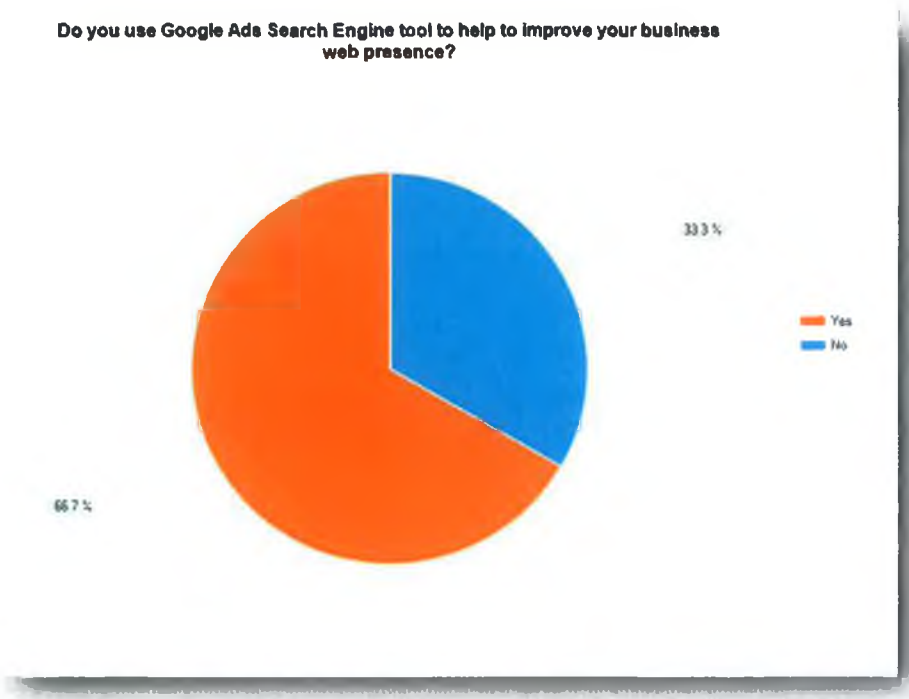


Figure 16. Question: Do you use Google Ads Search Engine tool to help to improve your business web presence?

Has your business carried out online sale promotion online through the various internet tools that you can use?

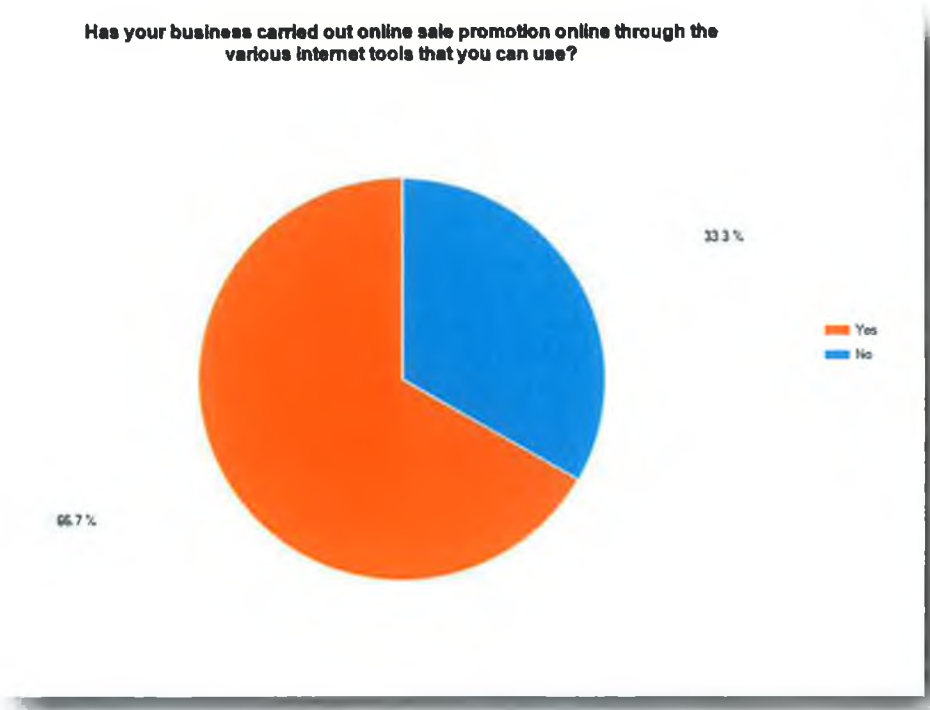


Figure 17. Question: Has your business carried out online sale promotion online through the various internet tools that you can use?