



**An exploratory study of marketing activities employed by Irish Epos Software
Development companies**

Submitted by: Enda Harte BBS (Hons), MMII (Grad.)

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**Department of Marketing, Tourism and Leisure
School of Business and Humanities
Institute of Technology, Sligo.**

Abstract

The focus of this research is on the marketing activities employed by Irish Epos software development companies. Epos stands for Electronic point of sale which is another name for a computerised till system. It assists in the management of a retail or hospitality business and can perform many functions such as stock control, sales analysis etc. Such a study is important to understand what message Epos Solution providers wish to communicate and how they are going to communicate it. This area of research has been chosen as the researcher has worked in the Irish Epos sector for nearly seven years and there have been no previous studies conducted on this area before. Innovative technology such as SAAS will mean that traditional epos software companies must implement drastic change to their marketing approach in order to survive. There are many different marketing tools available, however, it is essential that the tool chosen is appropriate and delivers results. An organisation can have various marketing objectives which are dependent on the stage of the product lifecycle. Objectives range from educating the market, brand building and generating sales. The research approach taken was mixed methods which include qualitative and quantitative data collected from Epos Solution Providers and Epos Solution Buyers in the form of a self-completed online questionnaire with a follow up interview by phone. This is further enhanced with commentary based on secondary research of SAAS Solution providers to gain a holistic view of the entire marketplace. A comprehensive literature review was also conducted in order to gain an academic appreciation of the various issues surrounding this subject area. The main findings from the research provide evidence that

- 1. Solution buyers turn to their fellow colleagues the most for advice on Epos solutions;*
- 2. While traditional solution providers are using appropriate marketing communications, they are ignoring the digital aspect;*
- 3. Implementing a selection of Marketing Metrics will enable solution providers to properly evaluate their Marcoms and adjust their strategies accordingly.*

Future direction for research projects are put forward.

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Attestation

Student Name: Enda Harte

Date of Submission: 16th September 2013

Title of Submission: An exploratory study of the effective marketing activities employed by Irish Epos software development companies.

Supervisor Name: David O'Halloran

Certification of Authorship:

I hereby certify that I am the author of this document and that any assistance I received in its preparation is fully acknowledged and disclosed in this document. I have also cited all sources from which I obtained data, ideas or words that are copied directly or paraphrased in the document. Sources are properly credited according to accepted standards for professional publications. I also certify that this document was prepared by me for the purpose of partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters Degree Programme.

Signature: _____

Enda Harte

Date: _____

16th September 2013

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List of Abbreviations

Epos	Electronic Point of Sale
SB	Epos Solution Buyer
SP	Epos Solution Provider
CP	Cloud Solution Provider
MARCOM	Marketing Communications
IMC	Integrated Marketing Communications
B2B	Business to Business
B2C	Business to Consumer
PC	Personal Computer
FMCG	Fast Moving Consumer Goods
SM	Social Media
SNS	Social Networking Sites
MPMS	Marketing Performance Measurement Systems
MM	Marketing Metrics
MPM	Marketing Performance Measurement
REI	Retail Excellence Ireland
IT	Information Technology
SAAS	Software as a Service
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
SEO	Search Engine Optimisation

1 Introduction

Measuring the success of marketing activities has been a challenge for marketing academics and practitioners for many years. What is measured depends on the objectives that were set out at the beginning along with the methods used (Kitchen, 1999, p.259). In the current economic reality that this country faces, marketing must prove its worth to an organisation.

According to Forbes and Market Share partners (2011), "Marketing departments are finding themselves under increasing pressure to justify their spending, prove the effects of their marketing campaigns, and demonstrate program success... or risk losing their budgets."

The arrival of cloud technology and the Software as a Service (SAAS) business model is the innovation that will radically redefine the way software solutions are consumed. This in turn will pose significant challenges to traditional software development firms in how they deliver and market their products.

With every threat, there is also opportunity. While traditional Irish Epos firms may face competition from global companies in the domestic market, they too can enter new foreign markets. The surge in internet access over the last ten years means the new consumer is much more informed and has accumulated a lot of technical knowledge.

The core competencies of a software development firm lie in their ability to engineer and develop innovative software solutions. While marketing and selling the finished product are essential to the success of the firm, how well do software vendors really know their buyers? Do vendors communicate the right message in the right place to the right people?

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1.1 Research Rationale

An epos solution is a very complex product for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a physical product because of the hardware technical specifications, storage capacity, style of barcode scanner, speed of receipt printer and performance of the actual unit. There are the attributes of the software such as functionality, usability and speed. All of this is combined with initial consultation, demonstration, comprehensive needs analysis, training, installation and is further augmented by on-going service and support. Software is categorised as a hybrid of a product and service (Moen, Endresen & Gavlen, 2003).

The entire software industry is currently undergoing massive change both in the way their products are being delivered and the pricing model utilised. This is because of the growth of the SAAS model. This innovation opens up the market to make it a truly worldwide market place. In the past, users' choices were limited when choosing software due to lack of available information and the number of players in the market. The internet has helped change all this and become a popular source of information when researching potential new suppliers, particularly software.

As there have been no previous studies carried out on the Irish Epos sector, the researcher felt it would be an interesting area to research. It is hoped at the end of this piece of research to provide Epos Solution Providers (SP's) with information on what Epos Solutions Buyers (SB's) look for in an Epos solution. In addition, the researcher hopes to discover what marketing activities are most suited to selling Epos software.

A number of recent studies have been carried out in the UK regarding the marketing activities of software companies. These studies recommended areas for future research including;

Jones & Rowley, 2009:

1. Exploration of the impact of size relative to access to marketing expertise as a determinant of marketing approaches adopted by small businesses.

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2. An exploration of the customer's purchasing decisions in order to examine the decision criteria and processes associated with the decision to purchase software products or services.
3. Further exploration of the role of network relationships in the marketing and innovation processes associated with software.

Jones, Rowley & Kupiec-Teahan, 2012:

1. External reliability could be improved by carrying out a large scale survey of technology SMEs aiming to discover their perceptions of marketing, how they undertake marketing and how it affects their performance.
2. Fully explore customer perceptions and expectations of software suppliers, in order to understand the factors they deem important when selecting a software supplier and the perceived risk they associate with dealing with software SMEs.

This area of research has been chosen as the researcher has worked in the Irish Epos sector for nearly seven years. Innovations such as SAAS will mean that traditional Epos software companies must implement drastic change to their marketing approach in order to survive.

1.2 Research Objective

Critical to the value and logic of the research in this study is an understanding of the marketing challenges Irish Epos software development companies face, in particular how do they ensure that their marketing efforts really are suitable? To achieve this, a review of the relevant literature is undertaken so that a clear understanding of the term 'marketing activities' is established. The term "marketing activities" covers all marketing communications (MARCOM) or integrated marketing communications (IMC). Guidance models and frameworks for creating, communicating and ultimately selling of goods & services are assessed to aid companies in their marketing efforts.

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In order to understand how Solution Providers (SP's) currently market themselves and their offerings, all Irish SP's are surveyed. While there are many suppliers of Epos solutions in Ireland, not all of them develop and provide the entire solution. Some develop their own software, some resell and some supply software only with support provided by a separate company. The criteria used for the selection of the SP population is that they must be an indigenous Irish company who develop, market, sell, install, train, maintain and support the entire epos solution to include all associated hardware and software.

The reason for this is to research companies that are similar in nature. It represents a significant financial investment to develop and support an Epos solution indicating that the SP is seriously committed to this area. After extensive research, the number of companies that met these criteria was 16.

The research strategy includes both online self-completed questionnaires with follow up brief telephone interviews to clarify responses to a select number of SPs. An online questionnaire will also be sent to a selection of Irish SB's to discover what is important to them in an Epos solution and where they look for information.

The reason for choosing an online questionnaire was speed and costs. Using an online service makes it easier for respondents to participate. They click on the link to the survey and complete it in a web browser window. Aside from being user friendly, it will also help with the analysis of the data later. Mistakes from data entry are reduced as the researcher does not have to manually enter data into a statistical package for analysis at a later stage. Given the subject of the research, an online questionnaire was thought to be an appropriate method for data collection.

Follow up telephone interviews were also used in order to gain a further insight into participant's views. This allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the responses. This was thought appropriate as some of the information gained will enable the researcher understand why respondents answered in a certain way.

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The innovation of Cloud software providers (CP's) is at the introduction phase in Ireland and is billed as the future of the entire software industry. Therefore, it is important to understand the marketing activities these companies engage in. Once this research is completed, a universal understanding of the entire marketing activities from the various perspectives (SP's, SB's & CP's) will result in the proposal of best practice marketing mix for Epos software in Ireland.

1.3 Research Problem

The overall aim of this research is to discover what marketing activities an Irish SP can engage in to deliver optimum results. However, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to gain an insight into the SP's current marketing activities, learn what is important to SB's and where they look for information. Finally, uncover the tactics used by Cloud providers that win business.

The research question being addressed in this dissertation is:

What marketing activities are available to an Irish Epos solution provider?

In order to achieve the primary objective, a number of sub-objectives will be addressed as follows:

1. Capture the opinions and thoughts SB's;
2. Explore the current marketing activities of SP's and investigate methods used by CP's to see if these can be implemented by traditional SB's;
3. Identify the available marketing activities for a SP.

This research has two primary objectives. The first is to answer the research question and the second is to propose recommendations to improve marketing activities amongst Irish SP's as demonstrated in the research findings.

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1.4 Overview of Research

This section provides a brief overview of the subsequent research chapters.

Chapter 2: This chapter explores the term Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC); defines marketing objectives; explores marketing strategies particularly those favoured by SME's including advertising and direct sales. It goes on to explore various marketing metrics and their implementation; highlights internet marketing and discusses the impact and future of Software as a Service. Various models and frameworks are presented throughout to complement the literature.

Chapter 3: This chapter discusses and justifies the research strategy used. It also defends the data collection techniques for both the self-completed questionnaires and brief telephone interviews. Details of the sample are provided, along with a framework for analysis of the qualitative data. In addition, the limitations to this research are discussed, in terms of validity and reliability; as well as the ethical considerations of the adopted approach.

Chapter 4: This chapter reports on the findings from the survey research, the online self-completed questionnaires along with the brief telephone interviews. The chapter revolves around the description of the empirical data and synthesis of the presented empirical results against the literature findings. To help focus the findings in terms of reflecting the main objectives of the study and ease the analysis of the data, the findings are structured according to themes as follows: Solution Buyers (SB's) Influences; Objectives; Perceptions and desires. Solution Providers (SP's) had two main themes operations and opinions.

Chapter 5: This chapter revisits the overall aim and specific objectives of this research study. The findings are summarized and related to the specific research objectives: Capture the opinions and thoughts of SB's; Explore the current marketing activities of SP's and investigate methods used by CP's to see if these can be

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implemented by traditional SP's; Identify the most suitable marketing. Conclusions are then derived and recommendations for future research are presented.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This Literature Review will examine the marketing communications function in a business to business (B2B) sector by reviewing all relevant areas to gain a full understanding as to what the most appropriate and relevant marketing options are for a SP. As outlined in Section 1.3, the research objectives are as follows:

1. Capture the opinions and thoughts SB's;
2. Explore the current marketing activities of SP's and investigate methods used by CP's to see if these can be implemented by traditional SB's;
3. Identify the available marketing activities for a SP.

The literature review focuses on Objective 3, while Objectives 1 and 2 will be met through the empirical data collection and analysis, and the ancillary objective of identifying the most suitable marketing activities available to an Irish Epos solution provider is derived as a result of the findings from Objectives 1, 2 and 3.

Exploring the literature has a significant contribution to this piece of research. It is important to clarify what is meant by the term 'marketing activities' so that a clear understanding of the concept can be proposed. In order for marketing to be effective, one must have metrics in place to gauge whether the task has actually been a success. Innovations in the technology sector such as SAAS is a hot topic in the entire software industry and is redefining how software development companies deliver and market their end product. The internet is not only a channel for distributing electronic goods such as software but also a major method of communicating with potential and existing consumers.

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Various models and frameworks for marketing and metrics to assist companies to succeed in their marketing efforts are also evaluated. The value of studying the above-mentioned literature is to provide a meaningful context and analysis of integrated marketing communications, so as to facilitate a critical understanding of the marketing activities available to a SP as determined from the primary research findings.

2.2 The defining moment

Epos stands for Electronic Point of Sale and often called a computerised till. The hardware part of an Epos solution is usually comprised of an integrated touch screen computer, barcode scanner, receipt printer and cash drawer. Software is then installed by an Epos software developer or a reseller.

The marketing approach taken by the software industry is quite complex. Software is a hybrid of a product and a service. Moen et al (2003) point out the various differences between the typical service and software:

Intangibility: Software does not exist on its own; it is part of something else.

Simultaneity: Users do not experience software at the same time as it is produced.

Perishability: Software cannot be inventoried by developers, it can however be inventoried by resellers e.g. Microsoft packaged software on a shelf in a computer store. Once software is developed, it can be duplicated and delivered electronically at no additional variable cost.

Heterogeneity: It is argued by Moen et. Al (2003) that the quality of the service cannot be judged before the customer receives the service. In certain cases, this is not the case. In the software sector, there are two types of software: standardised and customised. Standardised means the software package is developed to provide a general solution to the end user. An example of this would be Microsoft's Dynamics – a retail management application. If a customer has used this software previously, they can be certain of what they are receiving. One of the main benefits is that once the software version is the same as the one a user is familiar with, they are guaranteed the exact same experience. It must be made clear that software must run on a PC of similar specification. If the pc has a lower specification than the original one the user worked

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on, then the software may run much slower. This would have a negative impact on the end-users experience.

Marketing activities are also known as marketing communications or MARCOM. It is mostly concerned with the 4th P of the marketing mix – Promotion. It is probably the one most people are familiar with as they are constantly being bombarded with various marketing messages throughout their daily lives. The term MARCOM is used to describe

‘all the promotional elements of the marketing mix which involve the communications between an organisation and its target audiences on all matters that affect marketing performance.’

Pickton & Broderick (2001, p.3)

A more comprehensive definition is proposed by Fill (2005):

‘Marketing communications is a management process through which an organisation converses with its various audiences. The aim is to influence the perception and understanding of the organisation, and/or its products and services, with a view to generating specific meanings and attitudinal and behavioural responses.’

Fill (2005, p.269)

The researcher agrees with this more comprehensive definition as it includes the three main dimensions as follows:

Dialogue: MARCOM enables organisations to converse with their audience in a multitude of ways.

Relationships: MARCOM is the vehicle that enables organisations establish, develop and maintain trusted relationships. Trusted relationships are essential, especially in high involvement purchases such as that of an Epos solution.

Cognitive Response: MARCOM should be designed to include the necessary information in order to help an organisation cognitively engage with the company.

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2.3 The role of marketing communications

Marketing communications has many functions which are to: Inform, Persuade, Remind, Reassure and Differentiate. Medcalf (2004, p. 3). Fill(2005) condenses this further by proposing the acronym DRIP

D – Differentiate – organisations, products and services.

R – Reinforce – by reminding and reassuring current, lapsed and potential customers.

I – Inform – and educate customers and other stakeholders of organisational issues and product features and benefits.

P – Persuade – target audiences to think or act in a particular way (Fill, 2005, p.270)

The marketing communications mix

This is an umbrella term to encompass all the tools that are available to an organisation wishing to communicate a specific message to a particular audience. Companies actively use a variety of combinations to successfully achieve their goals.

The marketing communications mix		
Advertising	Public Relations (PR)	Sponsorship
Personal Selling	Direct Marketing	Sales Promotions

Figure 2.1 The marketing communications mix

Source: Medcalf(2004, p.8)

While advertising is a popular choice when marketing business to consumer (B2C) products, it is not as effective when selling business to business (B2B) products, such as Epos solutions. Figure 2.2 outlines the key characteristics of the key marketing tools. Fill et. al rate each of the tools on a scale of low – high as to their performance. Absolute costs refers to the total costs associated with this activity e.g the time involved in planning and design, design costs and actual printing costs of an advertisement. Wastage refers to the potential of the activity to be ‘wasted’. From the figure, Advertising and Public Relations are the highest as people can choose to ignore them or not read them. It is hard to ignore someone who is personally selling to you so wastage is low, likewise with direct marketing, as the communication can be personalised, wastage is low also.

	Advertising	Sales Promotion	Public Relations	Personal Selling	Direct Marketing
Communications					
Ability to deliver a personal message	Low	Low	Low	High	High
Ability to reach a large audience	High	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium
Level of interaction	Low	Low	Low	High	High
Credibility given by target audience	Low	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Costs					
Absolute costs	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium
Cost per contact	Low	Medium	Low	High	Medium
Wastage	High	Medium	High	Low	Low
Size of investment	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium
Control					
Ability to target particular audiences	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Management's ability to adjust the deployment of the tool as circumstances change	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High

Figure 2.2 A summary of the key characteristics of the tools of marketing communications.

Source: Fill (2005, p.302)

A variety of factors must be taken into consideration when an organisation is deciding what communications to use to convey their message. Medcalf (2005, p.13) outlines 12 factors that influence the choice of elements in the marketing communications mix.

1. **Characteristics of the product:** If a product is complicated, expensive and very technical (such as an Epos solution), personal selling may be required to achieve a sale. Smaller inexpensive items such as confectionery may only require advertising or point of sale merchandising.
2. **A product's stage in the product life cycle:** The four stages of the product life cycle – introduction, growth, maturity and decline require different tactics. At the introduction stage, an organisation needs to educate the consumer and persuade them to trial something new, e.g. Cloud Epos solution. Whereas, at the decline stage, various promotions are used to maintain sales levels.

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3. **Type of market in which it operates:** FMCG companies invest heavily in advertising, whereas B2B companies attend trade shows and utilise personal selling to increase sales.
4. **Level of control required:** Some parts of the marketing mix are easier to control. Advertising enables organisations to communicate a consistent message every time unlike direct sales teams who may omit certain messages or aspects of the offering during their presentations/pitches.
5. **Company policies:** If a company is a subsidiary, the parent company may have complete control over marcom activities.
6. **Government and EU legislation:** Certain industries are limited in how they can communicate e.g. Tobacco companies are not allowed to advertise anymore and there is doubt over alcoholic companies sponsoring sporting events.
7. **Profile of senior management team:** The size of the marketing budget is often influenced by the board. Most boards are comprised of finance and HR people who view marketing as an expense and not an investment. If there is a board member who understands marketing, they are more likely to offer a suitable budget.
8. **Available budget:** The financial resources available to marketing activities usually decide what marcoms to use.
9. **Internal marketing team:** The in-house skills of the staff responsible for marketing can often dictate what marcoms are used. E.g some companies may recruit staff as they excel in a given area such as personal selling or direct marketing.
10. **Marketing communications agency:** If an organisation engages the services of a marcom agency, they may have a specific agenda. E.g if they get commission by using certain mediums such as radio or tv, they may push these activities.
11. **Competitive environment:** Many companies use the same methods their competitors use to reach out and engage with their existing and potential

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consumers. Medcalf (2005, p.15) recommends companies to turn to relationship marketing for those operating in an industry with a high 'churn' rate (customers regularly changing supplier e.g. mobile phone industry)

12. **Economic environment:** When an economy is booming, there is plenty of money to spend on marketing such as brand building, advertising and sponsorship which was a regular site during the recent Celtic Tiger years in the Irish economy. However, when the economy is in a recession, the marketing budget receives severe cut backs. Consumers are much more receptive to 'value' offerings such as those offered by sales promotions or loyalty during economic uncertainty.

What is Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)?

There are many definitions of IMC, however, they all encompass the same concept.

Authors	Definition
Betts et al., (1995, p.16)	IMC is the strategic choice of elements of marketing communications which will effectively and economically influence transactions between an organisation and its existing and potential customers, clients and consumers
Kotler et al. (1999, p.781)	IMC is the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent and compelling message about the organisation and its products
Reported in Schultz (1993, p. 17)	IMC is a concept of marketing communications planning that recognises the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communications disciplines for example, general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and PR – and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communications impact (American Association of Advertising Agencies)

Figure 2.3 Definitions of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC).

Source: Pickton et. al (2001, p.66)

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While all of these are quite comprehensive, Pickton et. al (2001, p.67) build upon the above and offer their own definition which the researcher agrees with:

‘Integrated marketing communications is a process which involves the management and organisation of all ‘agents’ in the analysis, planning, implementation and control of all marketing communications contacts, media, messages and promotional tools focused at selected target audiences in such a way as to derive the greatest economy, efficiency, effectiveness, enhancement and coherence of marketing communications effort in achieving predetermined product and corporate marketing communications objectives.’

There are many benefits to be realised by implementing IMC, such as:

Creative integrity	Operational efficiency
Consistent messages	Cost savings
Unbiased marketing recommendations	High-calibre consistent service
Better use of media	Easier working relations
Greater marketing precision	Greater agency accountability

Figure 2.4 Benefits of integrated marketing communications

Source: Linton and Morley, 1995 (Cited in Pickton et.al, 2001, p.68)

After a greater understanding of what marketing activities involve, the next aspect of the research is how to measure the effectiveness of the marketing communication. This revolves around selecting and implementing the most appropriate marketing metrics.

What is a metric?

A metric is:

a measuring system that quantifies a trend, dynamic, or characteristic. In virtually all disciplines, practitioners use metrics to explain phenomena, diagnose causes, share findings, and project the results of future events. Throughout the worlds of science, business, and government, metrics encourage rigor and objectivity. They make it possible to compare observations

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across regions and time periods. They facilitate understanding and collaboration. (Farris, Bendle, Pfeifer and Reibstein, 2006, p.1)

The American Marketing Association defines marketing accountability as:

The responsibility for the systematic management of marketing resources and processes to achieve measureable gains in return on marketing investment and increased marketing efficiency, while maintaining quality and increasing the value of the corporation. (Cited in Ambler and Roberts, 2008, p. 735)

Marketing metrics and accountability are more important in times of economic recession as marketing must justify its existence. If the marketing function can prove its worth, management may not be so quick to cut the marketing budget or workforce.

2.4 Decisions, Decisions, Decisions.

Theories of decision-making behaviour generally fall into one of two schools of thought.

1. **The cognitive paradigm:** This focuses on the individual's thought process when making a decision. The person discovers a need, researches options, seeks advice and guidance from trusted peers. There are three sets of products: the total set (which is everything - this is usually not possible); awareness set (all the options the customer knows about) and finally the evoked set (where the individual refines the list to make the decision making easier). The objective of all sellers is to get their product/service into the evoked set. Most cognitive models are arranged in similar patterns:



2. **The behavioural paradigm:** Supporters of this paradigm generally believe that it is not possible to know what is going on in the human mind. Instead of the decisions being based on personal information processing, this approach suggests that stimuli are generally found in the world around us. When

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communicating marketing messages, the focus should be on creating the correct cues so the response can be monitored. An example of this would be a SP showing how much money will be saved by implementing their system.

Pickton et.al (2001. pp. 244-246)

2.4.1 The influences on decision making

There are three main influences on the decision-making function: personal, social and psychological as outlined below.

Personal Influences	Social Influences	Psychological influences
Demographic	Reference Groups	Perception
Situational	Culture and subcultures	Ability, knowledge and experience
Involvement		Personality
		Attitudes

Source: adapted from Dibb et al. (1997,cited in Pickton et.al, 2001, p.249)

Dependant on the product, the level of involvement can be high or low. Low involvement goods are usually inexpensive; simple with very little risk attached to them and can be purchased with very little thought put into it e.g. confectionary. High involvement goods can be complex, expensive and may have serious repercussions if the purchase does not work out. Buyers of such goods usually spend a lot of time researching and evaluating various options. Buyers of low involvement goods follow the Do-Feel-think pattern. This means that they acknowledge a need, solve it by purchasing something and then reflect upon the experience. In a high involvement good, such as an Epos solution, the pattern is Think-Feel-Do. Buyers consider the problem, evaluate different ways to solve the problem, and then carry out the necessary activity such as purchasing. Bendixen(1993, p.25) is in agreement with this and goes on to point out that the extent of consumer involvement has a direct correlation to the length of time it takes to make a purchase decision. E.g. the purchase of an Epos solution is a considerable decision due to the cost and affect it has on a retailers business, therefore, it will take time for a decision to be reached.

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Bendixen also points out that potentially, brand loyalty can be overcome on the basis of 'rational or emotional rhetoric'. This implies that advertising at the point of purchase decision could have an influence on the choice of product. The researcher agrees with Bendixen to a certain degree, however, would only apply this concept to low involvement goods.

2.5 The role of advertising

Lavidge and Steiner (1961, p. 60) discussed the various objectives of advertising. They put forward the hypotheses that the greater the commitment required for the purchase of a particular product/service, the longer it will take to bring consumers through the various steps. It was a simplistic view to have that advertising was merely designed to 'pave the way' for the salesman by making potential clients aware of the goods/services i.e educating them. Once consumers are educated, they may look positively on how these goods/services could benefit them. Lavidge et.al postulates that it would be foolish to assume that every potential customer is 'on the same step' or in the same position in the buying process. Some may have developed negative opinions on a product which moves them even further away from purchasing. The first job is to get these people off the negative steps before they can move closer to buying behaviour.

There are many theories of marketing communications such as Elmo Lewis's AIDA model of Awareness → Interest → Desire → Action. Lavidge et. al suggested the link should be Awareness → Knowledge → Liking → Preference → Conviction → Purchase.

Vakratsas & Ambler (1999, p. 26) reviewed more than 250 journal articles and books to uncover how advertising works. Their research indicates that advertising effects should be studied in a space, with affect, cognition, and experience as the three dimensions. They propose the following framework for how advertising works:

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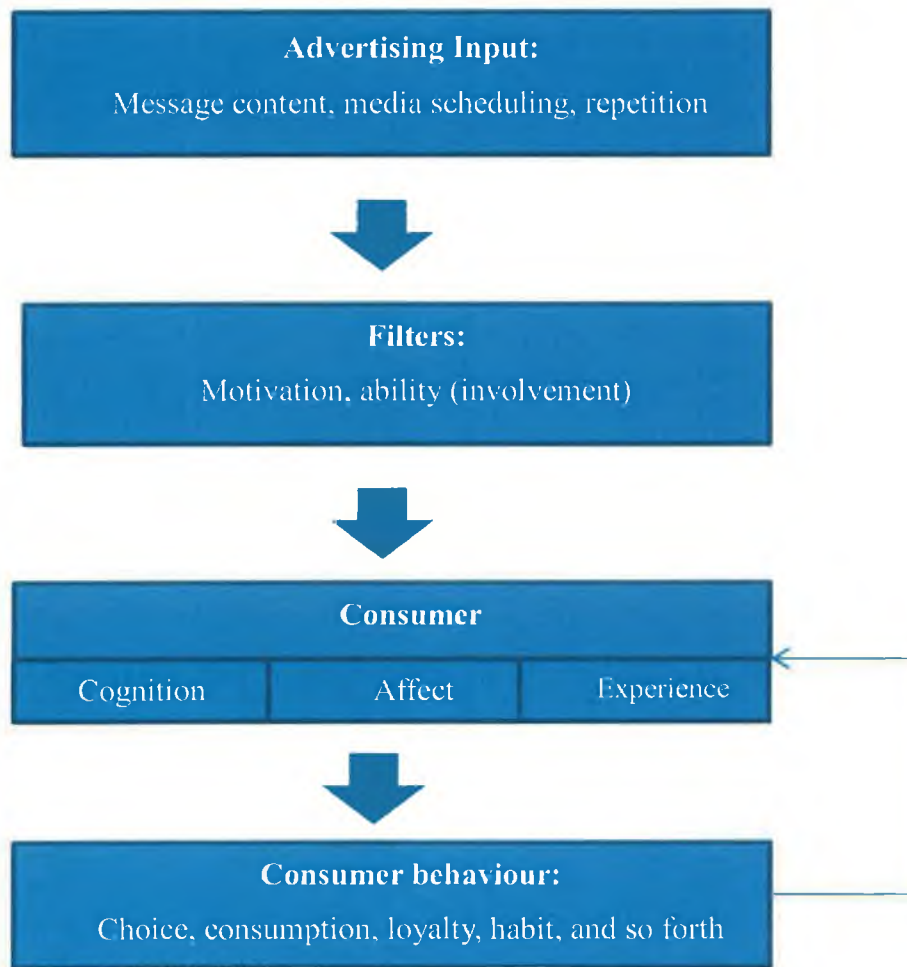


Figure 2.5 A framework for studying how advertising works

Source: Vakratsas et.al, 1999,p.26

2.5.1 Determining Advertising Budgets

Kotler et. al.(1984) highlights that advertising budgets can be determined in several ways. Four possible methods include:

1. **The affordable method:** Advertising budgets are set at the highest level that can be afforded.
2. **The percentage-of-revenues method:** A given percentage of current or anticipated revenues is budgets for advertising.
3. **The competitive-based method:** A given proportion of what a competitor or group of competitors spends on advertising is budgeted for advertising.

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4. **The objective-and-task method:** The amount budgeted for advertising equals what it is expected to cost to perform the tasks that will allow the achievement of specific advertising objectives.

The authors and researcher both prefer the last method. (Kotler et. al, 1984, p.248). Aside from deciding on how much to spend, decisions must also be made on how the budget should be allocated across different mediums and brands.

2.6 SME Effect

From empirical research, the majority of Irish Sp's fall within the small to medium sized enterprise sector. Enterprise Ireland defines a Small Enterprise as an enterprise that has fewer than 50 employees and has either an annual turnover and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding €10m. A medium sized enterprise is defined as: an enterprise that has between 50 employees and 249 employees and has either an annual turnover not exceeding €50m or an annual Balance Sheet total not exceeding €43m. (www.enterprise-ireland.com, 2007)

There are a number of factors that restrict the SME marketing function which include poor cash flow, lacking marketing expertise, business size, tactical customer-related problems and strategic customer related problems. O'Dwyer, Gilmore & Carson (2009, p.46)

O'Dwyer et. al point out that lack of expertise and lack of finances is one of the major constraints to small business marketing; this is in agreement with Jones & Rowley (2009). While finance is a major consideration in the current climate, smart use can be made of online marketing which is substantially more cost effective than off line methods. Jones et. Al (2009) investigated the marketing activities of companies in the educational software sector and found the main marketing issues to include: problems locating the customer, price, technical competence of end users, word of mouth recommendations and partnerships. Word of mouth marketing is very powerful as a lot of the decisions consumers make are based on recommendations made by their peers, whom they trust and respect. (Castronovo & Huang, 2012).

While small software companies may not be able to compete with marketing spend, they are in a much better position to form long term partnerships with customers. This

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is made possible by the ability of smaller firms to customise part of their offerings to suit the customer's needs. This is a much more personal approach, customers find smaller companies more flexible and faster to respond to their needs. (Jones et. al 2009)

Striking a balance between customer orientation and innovativeness is imperative to the success and ultimately the survival of the software firm. Crucial to this is the company culture & managerial style but most importantly - delivering on a promise. Customers must be consistently delighted with their experiences when dealing with a software company and using their software. At the very least, the software must do what it is supposed to do, when it should and within a reasonable price point. This is all living up to the promise (Parry et. al, 2012).

O'Dwyer et. al (2009, p.56) take into account the various components of innovative marketing and propose a conceptual model. They conclude by stating SME owner/managers can achieve a sustainable competitive advantage by encouraging strong market orientation which stems from engaging in innovative practices; a key factor in SME profitability, long-term growth and survival.



Figure 2.6 Conceptual model for innovative marketing in SMEs.

Source: O'Dwyer et. al (2009, p.56)

2.7 Selling software

A complete Epos solution will represent a significant investment in hardware, software, consultation, services and training whereas, changing software provider will be substantially less if a SB is using their current hardware. It is worthwhile noting that any capital investment in a recession will be a high involvement purchase to a client.

Viardot (2004, p. 222) lists all the available communication strategies for High-Tech products. It is interesting to note that what is very important to business to consumer (B2C) markets is completely the opposite when dealing with business to business (B2B) markets. While the below figure illustrates the importance of each strategy, it could be enhanced if there was a correlation to value of sale, perhaps on another diagram.

Communication Strategy for High-Tech Products

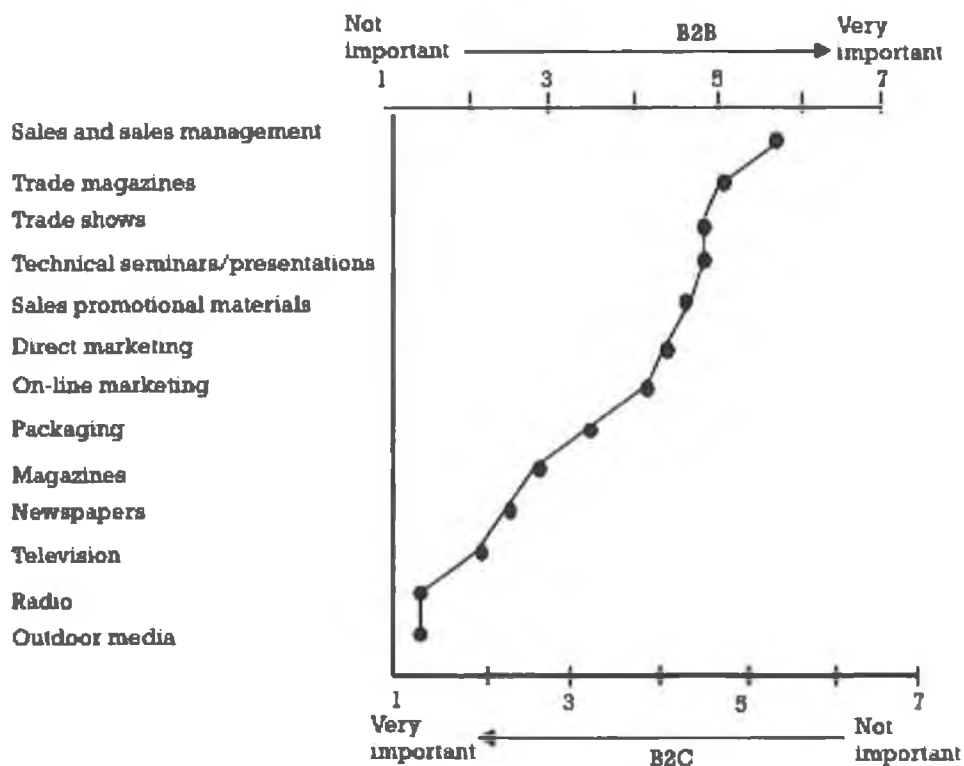


Figure 2.7 Importance of promotional tools used by high-tech firms.

Source: Viardot, 2004, p222.

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As can be seen, one of the main strategies employed by B2B companies and sellers of high-value/involvement products (such as Epos solutions), is Sales & Sales Management. Reid et. al (2002, cited in Fill,2005, p.335) determined three major sales behaviours, namely, getting, giving and using information.

- **Getting information** is about obtaining knowledge. E.g the market, competitors, clients;
- **Giving information** refers to passing information onto clients and other stakeholders. E.g. sales pitch;
- **Using information** is knowing how to put the information already gathered to the best use. E.g a comprehensive needs analysis of a client's requirements will enable a sales person recommend the most suitable solution to solve their problem.

Guenzi (2002) highlighted 8 main sales activities and what they mean in Figure 2.8

Activity	Explanation
Selling	Leading prospects (and established customers) to a successful close.
Prospecting	Finding and using leads to create new customers.
Inbound information	Reporting information to the organisation about customers and associated stakeholders
Outbound information	Reporting organisational information to customers and associated stakeholders about products and organisational issues.
Market Research	The analysis and forecasting of market trends and related activities
Sales team coordination	Developing strong internal links with sales support teams
Customer relationship management	Developing mutually satisfying relationships with customers

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Sales service	Pre-sales support to encourage buyer engagement and trust prior to any transaction. Post-sales support to provide reassurance and formative collaborative gestures.
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Figure 2.8 Sales Activities explained

Source: Adapted from Guenzi (2002, cited in Fill, 2005, p.336)

Fill,2005 advises that personal selling should be a major part of the promotion mix when the product/service you are trying to market has any of these characteristics.

1. **Complexity** – essential when there is a medium to high level of relationship complexity. Such complexity could arise due to the nature of the goods/services e.g. Epos Software
2. **Buyer significance** – How important is this purchase to the buyer? E.g. purchasing a company van may be a substantial investment for a start-up firm, but a standard purchase to a large organisation who are used to such transactions and the financial risk is not as high if something goes wrong.
3. **Communication effectiveness** – There is only so much information other forms of communication can convey. E.g. an advertisement for an Epos solution may focus on 5 key benefits of the product. It may only be when a sales person demonstrates and explains these benefits on site, where a SB can see and touch the hardware, will they then become emotionally involved and more likely to purchase.
4. **Channel Factors** – If the MARCOM strategy combines a larger amount of ‘push’, rather than ‘pull’ activities, then personal selling is required to provide the necessary communications for the other members of a network.

Cravens (1987) identified the importance of advertising and personal selling in various scenarios. For example, when buyers' information needs are high or the product is complex, advertising is not important as it is limited as to how much information can be conveyed. In this instance, personal selling is more appropriate.

	Advertising relatively important	Personal selling relatively important
Number of customers	Large	Small
Buyers' Information needs	Low	High
Size and importance of purchase	Small	Large
Post-purchase services required	Little	A lot
Product complexity	Low	High
Distribution strategy	Pull	Push
Pricing Policy	Set	Negotiate
Resources available for promotion	Many	Few

Figure 2.9 When personal selling is a major element of the communications mix

Source: Adapted from Cravens (1987, cited in Fill, 2005, p. 340)

Assignment of selling functions

It is important to identify the strengths amongst an organisations team. Some of the most qualified sales people are not actually part of the sales team. Sometimes it is beneficial to send a technical person to meet a potential client who may have a lot of technical questions. Weld Coxe, a well-known management consultant, sees a need for firms to have the following people performing various selling functions:

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1. **Closer:** One who ultimately delivers the professional proposal to the client and wins the contract.
2. **Courter:** One who, during the get-acquainted stage, wins the confidence of the client in the firm's ability to do the job.
3. **Lead Finder:** One who knocks on doors or otherwise finds the leads to be courted and closed.
4. **Coordinator:** One who maintains the firm's selling resources and pulls together the statements of qualification, proposals, interviews, presentations, and so on, whenever they are needed in the selling process.
5. **Marketing manager/director:** One who is ultimately responsible for seeing that it all happens. (Cited in Kotler & Bloom, 1984, p.205)

It is essential to make use of all staff that could assist in any of the above tasks. This is particularly important when trying to sell technical products such as software or Epos solutions. E.g. a person in an administration role may make an excellent lead finder or coordinator.

There is no doubt that Kotler's 4p's are the foundations of modern marketing; product; price; place and promotion are still key considerations. Some academics feel the 4p's can only be applied in a B2C context or need to be looked at differently when selling complex products. Ettenson, Conrado and Knowles (2013, p.26) criticises the 4p's and feel that they need to be interpreted to serve the needs of the B2B marketer much better. They propose a framework called SAVE which is heralded as a 'new solution selling strategy'.

SAVE refers to: **S**olution; **A**ccess; **V**alue and **E**ducation.

Solution encourages the focus to be shifted onto the overall solution to a specific problem a product can bring rather than highlighting product features.

Access develops an integrated cross-channel presence.

Value encourages the shift away from price and focus on value for money.

Education provides relevant information to the customer at each stage of the purchase cycle.

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Instead of Product	Focus on SOLUTION Define offerings by the needs they meet, not by their features, functions, or technological superiority.
Instead of Place	Focus on ACCESS Develop an integrated cross-channel presence that considers customers' entire purchase journey instead of emphasizing individual purchase locations and channels.
Instead of Price	Focus on VALUE Articulate the benefits relative to price, rather than stressing how price relates to production costs, profit margins, or competitors' prices.
Instead of Promotion	Focus on EDUCATION Provide information relevant to customers' specific needs at each point in the purchase cycle, rather than relying on advertising, PR, and personal selling that covers the waterfront.

Figure 2.10 SAVE framework

Source: Ettenson et. al (2013)

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2.8 The power of the internet

Marketers are still investigating the decision of whether or not they should implement e-marketing (Chong et. al. 2009, p310). The internet has revolutionised the way in which companies can market their goods and services. One of the major benefits of this innovative technology was the potential for SMEs to reach a global audience.

Once these companies created and marketed their websites, they were open for new business worldwide. While traditional companies selling physical products have to think through the logistics and costs associated with getting the product to the buyer, Epos software companies do not have such worries. The improvements of broadband availability and speed has made it possible to not only download purchased software, cloud technology can make it available to a user anywhere, anytime through the convenience of a web browser.

Chong et.al (2010) offers an e-marketing framework for B2B commerce. Companies should participate in a B2B e-marketplace and make proper use of the tools available to them such as banner ads, e-catalogue and search engine optimisation. An example of this for a cloud software firm could be Google's chrome store. Within their web browser, users can click on the software marketplace and make use of freeware, trialware or premium software offerings from an array of software companies. The overall benefits of participating in such a marketplace include increased sales, reduced marketing costs, competitive advantage and increased web traffic.

Chong, Shafaghi & Tan (2011) identified nine factors that have a direct impact on the success of B2B e-commerce:

1. Successful customer relationships
2. Supply chain facilities
3. Global competitiveness
4. IS/IT performance
5. Transparency and visibility of information
6. Top management support and commitment
7. Government encouragement and commitment
8. Security and trust
9. Cultural consideration

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2.8.1 Social Marketing

Social media(SM) marketing poses an attractive proposition. It offers businesses the chance to engage with their existing and potential customers like never before.

Woodcock et. al's (2011) definition of Social Customer Relationship Management - 'SCRM is how we...

- Help you engage with us, whenever you need to, wherever you are, in ways that are convenient to you;
- Provide you with the personal experience you need to keep you engaged, informed, interested and maybe even entertained;
- Transact with each other or through third parties, in ways that are mutually valuable;
- Get to know each other over time so that we can tailor what we do (and how we do it) with you in mind.'

There are endless choices of social media that users can discuss what they like, love or hate about your brand, product or service with others who share similar opinions.

What is more remarkable about all these sources of potential innovation and feedback is the availability of software solutions to 'listen' to what others are saying about a company. There are many SM(social media) monitoring platforms that facilitate companies in analysing what is being said about their product, service or campaign.

An exploratory study carried out by Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011, p.1153) on B2B SMEs and their social networking practices. The study showed that over a quarter of UK SMEs are using Social Networking Sites (SNS) to achieve their brand objectives, which is most important to attract new customers. The majority of users do not adopt any metrics to assess the SNS effectiveness, yet, over half the respondents said they were going to increase their marketing spending on this channel.

Castronovo proposes a model to address the lack of a coherent model that incorporates all social media and enables a firm achieve their various marketing objectives in Figure 2.11.

Social Media Tools & their objectives	
Tools	Objectives
Chat Rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve customer service • Create a sense of community • Garner customer feedback
Blogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive WOM recommendations • Build meaningful relationships • Increase loyalty
You Tube	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harness power of video to increase embedding of content in other sites
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising • Develop a community • Target specific audiences
LinkedIn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with professional communities
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer engagement • Conversation propagation
Four Square	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase local and mobile connectivity • Increase network engagement

Figure 2.11 – Social media tools and their objectives

Source: Castronovo et. al, (2012, p.123.)

IMC (integrated marketing communications) is the future of successful marketing strategies. A consistent message must be communicated across all platforms employed by the company. As software firms are by their very nature rooted in the technology sector, there is a high expectation that their website and online presence will be representative of the product they can provide and the service they can deliver.

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With a surge in social media, the conversation prism was created to categorise each different website as to its function and purpose. Figure 2.12 illustrates the hundreds of social media websites, their categorisation and their role. It is important for an organisation to discover what sites are relevant to a firm's potential customers and either listen or engage with customers.



Figure 2.12 – The conversation Prism

Source: Brian Sillis and Jess3 theconversationprism.com

2.9 Cloudy Future

Sultan (2011) points out that cloud computing may be the way forward for software usage. This will be a significant adjustment to the software sector for a number of reasons. It will radically change the supply chain as end-users can source software directly from the developer bypassing the traditional supply chain. Previously, the software would have been acquired through a reseller or from a consultant. Cloud software is primarily browser based, meaning in theory, once a user has access to the internet and a web browser, they can access their data from anywhere in the world. A major change will be the financial structure of purchasing or utilising cloud solutions. There will be a move away from paying to purchase the license and paying an annual renewal fee. The most popular model is SaaS – software as a service. This is a pay as you go software offering. Users do not have to make any upfront or annual payment, nor will they have to invest in substantial hardware technology. There is usually a low monthly payment depending on a number of variables such as functions used, number of users, and number of transactions or value of business processed. “Cloud computing... is likely to be an attractive option for many SMEs, particularly in the current global economic crisis, due to its flexible cost structure and scalability.” (Sultan, 2011).

2.10 Metrics Matter

"Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half".

A popular saying illustrating how difficult it was to reach potential customers using traditional advertising is attributed to John Wanamaker US department store merchant (1838 - 1922). There are many terms for measuring marketing effectiveness such as MPMS Marketing Performance Measurement Systems or MM – Marketing Metrics.

‘to be effective, an advertisement must be ... seen, read, believed, remembered, and acted upon’ (Starch, 1923, cited in Kitchen, 1999, p.269). O’Sullivan et. al(2009, p.845) propose a conceptual model of marketing performance measurement (MPM). Figure 2.13 puts forward the idea that once an organisation has the ability to set objectives and select appropriate activities, with regular monitoring, leads to improved

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firm performance and overall satisfaction with the marketing function from senior management.

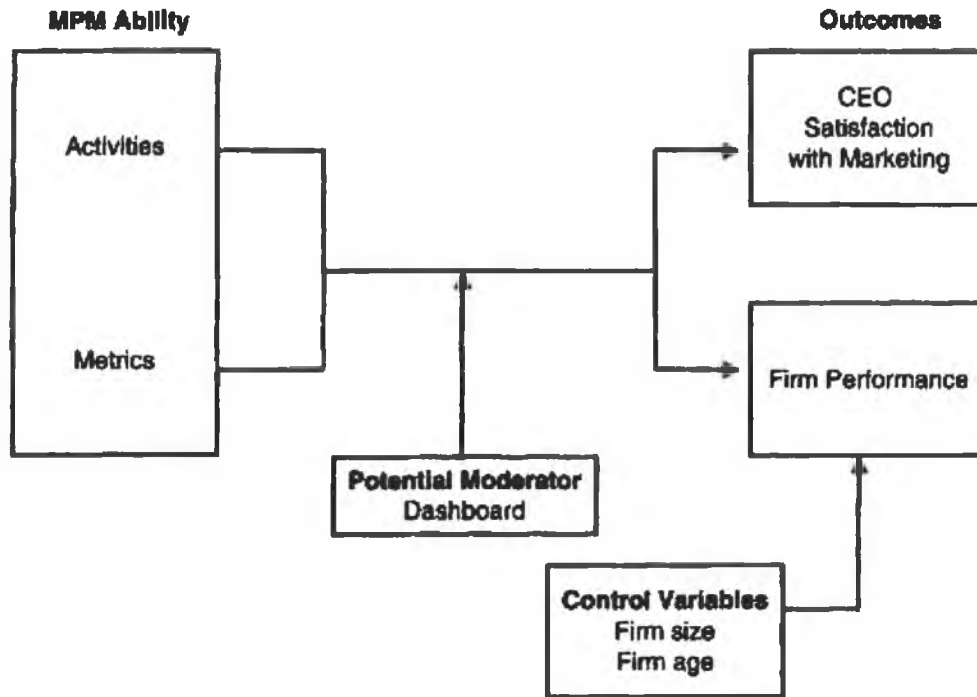


Figure 2.13 Conceptual model of marketing performance measurement (MPM).

Source: O'Sullivan et. al(2009, p.845)

Ambler (2003) postulates that clear and credible measures as to what extent marketing has impacted on firm performance dictates the perceived impact of marketing and in turn the level of satisfaction. There are many options available to an organisation to measure the effectiveness of their marketing activities such as Return on marketing investment ROMI etc. More information is available on suitable metrics in the appendices.

Barwise & Farley (2003) are of the opinion that no single metric is likely to be a 'perfect fit'; recommend to use a portfolio or dashboard of metrics and advise to view market dynamics from various perspectives to arrive at a triangulated strategy or solution. Patterson (2007) is in agreement with Barwise et. al (2003) and highlights the importance of marketing performance measurement dashboards. Vision Edge marketing (cited in Patterson, 2007, p.274) outline 6 things that a good dashboard should achieve:

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1. Shows how marketing is ‘moving the needle’;
2. Helps assess what is and isn’t working;
3. Fosters decision making – is actionable;
4. Provides a unified view into marketing’s value;
5. Enables better alignment between marketing and the business;
6. Translates complex measures into a meaningful and coherent set of information.

When creating a dashboard for the organisation, it is essential to recognise the most significant measures that will indicate success. Patterson points out that a good dashboard maps out the relationship between business outcomes and marketing performance. Figure 2.14 illustrates VisionEdge marketing’s metrics continuum. They separate out what metrics can be used for each activity e.g. Activity based: counting trade show leads from a trade show, click through rates on a website etc.

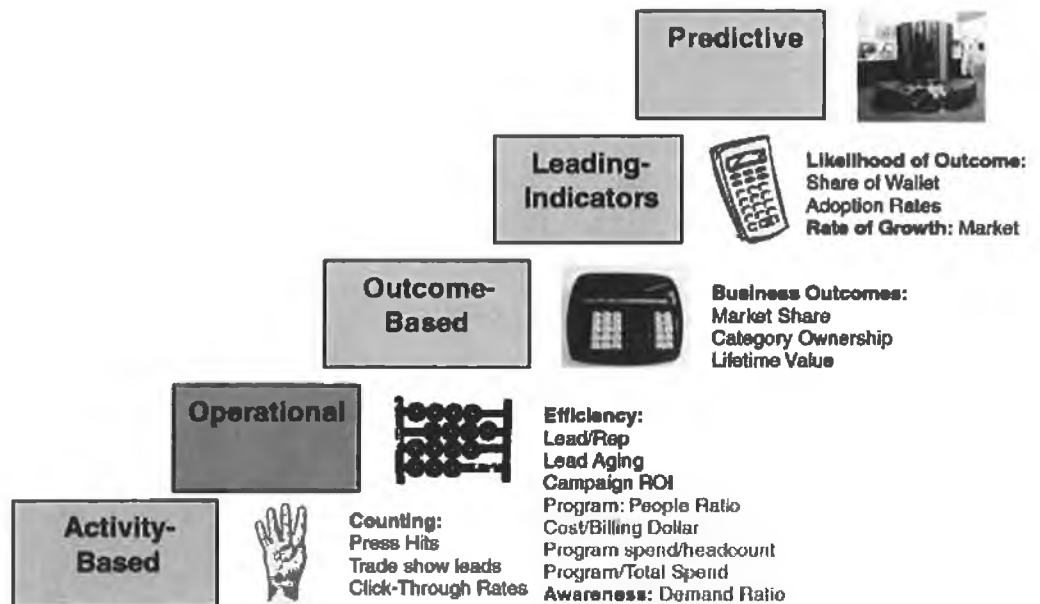


Figure 2.14 VisionEdge marketing’s metrics continuum

Source: Vision Edge (cited in Patterson, 2007, p.273)

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An audit of marketing activities is necessary in order to ascertain where the organisation is on the continuum. While this can be carried out internally, it is recommended to engage an outside company so they are completely objective. Once this is established, dependant on organisational objectives, suitable metrics can be selected and implemented.

2.11 Conclusion

The study of the pertinent marketing literature shows how complex and vast the area surrounding the selection of suitable MARCOMS actually is. As there is no specific literature referring to marketing of Epos solutions, relevant concepts and themes were compiled from other areas of marketing.

An explanation of the term 'marketing activities' is explored and is considered to be contained within the MARCOM literature. The researcher endorses Fill's (2005) comprehensive definition that "Marketing communications is a management process through which an organisation converses with its various audiences...with a view to generating specific meanings and attitudinal and behavioural responses."

The literature acknowledges that while there may be a variety of marketing communications options open to a SP, there is only a certain amount suitable due to the product being sold. There are a number of challenges to overcome due to the fact that all Irish SP's fall within the SME category. The challenges include poor cash flow, lacking marketing expertise, business size, tactical customer-related problems and strategic customer related problems.

The impact of the internet on the Irish Epos marketplace as both an opportunity to market and a channel to distribute their product directly was discussed. Epos solutions by their very nature are a very complex product to sell so it is important to use relevant strategies such as direct selling. There are varying types of sales person as was outlined in an organisation who may not necessarily work in the sales function.

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To measure whether a MARCOM activity was a success, it is important to set objectives at the start and then monitor progress using a selection or 'dashboard' of metrics to give a 360 degree view of the marketing function within the organisation.

There were many MARCOM models utilised which helps explain the process of marketing, how it works both in SME's and High tech companies along with metrics models.

This review analysed the relevant literature in the selection of suitable MARCOM's for Irish Epos software development companies. There is a requirement for empirical data on the MARCOM's used by Irish Epos SP's in order to learn if suitable MARCOM's have been chosen. In order to learn more about how Irish SP's market themselves, if there are any factors limiting their marketing potential and propose a best practice approach, empirical research will be collected.

The next part of this study will outline the research methodology employed to capture the empirical data, including details of the research strategy to be adopted, data collection techniques, sample selection and management of the researcher's role.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

One of the main objectives of this study is to identify the marketing activities available to a SP. In order to achieve this objective, it is essential to gain insight into various stakeholders' views. There is massive scope to gain a real understanding from a universal view of the entire Epos sector in Ireland. The findings from such a study will contribute greatly to the understanding of marketing software products in Ireland.

As the literature review outlined, there are many ways a SP can market itself. This is dependent on their stage in the product life cycle and other internal factors such as finance or expertise. There is also significant information to be discovered by carrying out a large scale survey on what decision criteria is important to SB's when selecting a SP. With the recent roll out of fibre powered broadband throughout Ireland, Software as a Service (SaaS) is now a viable alternative to the traditional software model.

Buyers will no longer have to invest large sums up front for software and simply take full advantage of the pay-as-you-go model. Some researchers liken SaaS to another utility bill for business (Brynjolfsson et. al, 2010) which may be over simplifying a very complex organisational function. Traditional SP's needs to radically rethink their marketing mix particularly their method of communications in order to compete and ultimately, survive.

This methodology chapter sets out the details of the research strategy adopted to address the research objectives, together with the means of collecting and analysing the data. The potential research limitations and ethical considerations are also acknowledged.

3.2 Research Strategy

There are various research strategies available to choose from, however, the one chosen must be tried and tested. This is of paramount importance as the research strategy must have academic credibility and is appropriate to the research (Biggam, 2007, p. 83). The research question being addressed in this dissertation is:

What marketing activities are available to an Irish Epos solution provider?

A key element of this research is the view of stakeholders namely, Solution Buyers (SB) and Solution Providers (SP). As such, exploratory research formed the basis of this study. In an effort to understand the entire process, both perspectives will be investigated along with research on SaaS providers to take a holistic view.

Domegan and Fleming (2007, p. 66) state that exploratory research is about establishing 'trends, patterns and ranges of behaviour' that are unknown. As SP's are all SME's, they may be caught up in day-to-day operational issues and just continuing to 'do what they have always done' when it comes to MARCOM activities.

Biggam (2010, p. 86) describes quantitative research as 'research that is concerned with quantities and measurements'. This was used in part but is not sufficient to fully appreciate the complexities of the research question. Instead, a mixed methodology approach was used where qualitative research, which is linked to in-depth exploratory studies (Biggam 2010, p. 86), was the basis of the research and was supported by quantitative methods.

Creswell & Clarke (2010, p. 5) propose the following definition of mixed methods:

In mixed methods, the researcher,

- Collects and analyses persuasively and rigorously both qualitative and quantitative data (based on research questions);
- Mixes (or integrates or links) the two forms of data concurrently by combining them (or merging them), sequentially by having one build on the other, or embedding one within the other;

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- Gives priority to one or to both forms of data (in terms of what the research emphasises);
- Uses these procedures in a single study or in multiple phases of a program of study;
- Frames these procedures within philosophical worldviews and theoretical lenses; and
- Combines the procedures into specific research designs that direct the plan for conducting study.

Mixed methods were chosen as information must be gathered from a variety of sources in a variety of ways to truly answer the original research question. While quantitative data can uncover what methods are used and by how many participants, it cannot tell us why these methods are used. This study aims to find out what the most suitable Marcoms are for an Irish SP so it is essential to use qualitative data to capture the view and opinions of SB's. It was felt that by combining both quantitative and qualitative data will lead to more comprehensive findings.

To tackle the research question, both SB's & SP's were

1. Sent a self-completed questionnaire which was followed up with a brief telephone interview to clarify some of the answers and themes that arose from the research. The reason for researching both parties was to gain an understanding of the entire marcom activity from both angles. This is enhanced further by research on SaaS providers.
2. Secondary data has been analysed in the form of a comprehensive literature review carried out in the relevant marketing areas. Once the researcher has grasped the main concepts pertinent to the study, only then can survey research commence. (Domegan et.al, 2007, p.182)

Interestingly, the combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches can add even more value: neither qualitative nor quantitative methods have universal applicability, but qualitative methods can be used to determine the plausibility of quantitative research. (Millikin,2001, cited in Domegan et. al, 2003, p. 182)

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A link to the online questionnaire was sent to all respondents as it was deemed by the researcher to be the most economical and convenient approach.

There are many advantages and disadvantages to online surveys, as highlighted by Sue & Ritter (2007, pp. 12-13)

Advantages

Speed: If posted on the right website, you can have a high response rate within a short time frame

Audience: The link can be posted on various sites (with prior permission) that specifically target the people you wish to survey

Economy: Web surveys are the most cost effective way to administer surveys to a large amount of people. Furthermore, any costs associated with data entry are eliminated as the respondent is entering all their own data manually.

Added content options: Some surveys enable you to embed pictures, sounds and other media to enhance the survey experience. One needs to be careful as this may affect the download rate and speed.

Expanded Question Types: A wide variety of questions may be asked and logic built in so that the user can skip to a particular question based on their answer of a previous question. E.g. If you answer no to a certain question, please skip to question 5.

The ability to ask sensitive questions: As there is no researcher present, people are more willing to answer sensitive or embarrassing questions (Schaefer & Dillan, 1998, cited in Sue et. al, 2007)

Anonymity is preserved: There is no email address linked to a generic survey response unless you are tracking responses purposefully.

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DISADVANTAGES

Limited populations: There is an upward bias in socioeconomic status of internet users which means online surveys cannot be used to draw conclusions about general populations.

Abandonment of the survey: Users can easily quit the survey by clicking a button. Best practice includes keeping the survey short, questions brief and if possible 'fun' to complete. Pre testing should highlight any weak points e.g. Respondents quit at Q3. Perhaps, rewording or removing the question may encourage more users to complete the survey.

Dependence on software: Researchers must use software to develop and administer their online surveys. There are a host of free and premium solutions available to researchers. Free tools can often be limited in the number of questions or amount of surveys allowed or may be cumbersome to use.

While the use of an online survey will uncover the marcom strategies employed and elicit the opinions of both SP's and SB's, it does not allow further probing. This is the reason for follow up interviews with respondents.

3.3 Sampling

There are two separate populations of interest to the researcher. The first is the SP's of Ireland. As previously mentioned, while there are many suppliers of Epos solutions in Ireland, not all of them develop and provide the entire solution. Some develop their own software, some resell and some supply software only with support provided by a separate company. The criteria used for the selection of the SP population is that they must be an indigenous Irish company who develop, market, sell, install, train, maintain and support the entire Epos solution to include all associated hardware and software. The reason for this is to research companies that are similar in nature. It represents a significant financial investment to develop and support an Epos solution indicating that the SP is seriously committed to this area. After comprehensive research, the number of companies that met these criteria was 16 which is a manageable size to research and it is therefore, feasible to approach all members of this population. All

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companies were extensively researched through their own company websites and then contacted to see who the most appropriate person was to send the online questionnaire to.

The second population was SB's which encompasses all Irish retailers. There are two main markets for Epos in Ireland – retail and hospitality. As the requirements and functionality differ greatly between the two types of solutions, it was decided by the researcher to focus on the retail sector. Another reason was the low number of indigenous hospitality solution providers in Ireland. In addition, the research was concentrated around independent retailers for a number of reasons. Firstly, the number of independent retailers is much higher than multiples in Ireland. Secondly, multiples usually operate on a 'recommended' supplier list where options are limited to one or two providers or the multiple may have developed their own in house solution. Finally, the resources of a large retailer are much greater than that of an independent retailer who may have limited access to funds, expertise, IT knowledge and may have a greater need for ancillary services such as on-going support whereas a large retailer may have their own in house IT department.

According to retailireland.ie, there are 44,000 retail and wholesale businesses in Ireland. For practical reasons such as time and resources, it was decided to aim for a sample of 1,000 retailers to research. This figure was selected in recognition of the low response rate for surveys in general and was achievable given the time scale for the research. A larger sample provides a greater number of responses. While there is no directory available that lists every independent Irish retailers contact details, it was decided to contact retail groups such as Retail Ireland and Retail Excellence Ireland (REI) in order to compile a list specifically for this purpose. While any group that was contacted declined to offer any list citing data protection issues and protecting member's privacy. Retail Excellence Ireland (REI) was asked if they would send a link by email to their members, which they declined. However, upon request they did assist by allowing the researcher post a request for participation on the REI Facebook page. Boards.ie forum was also utilised but was only responsible for a single reply.

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The researcher started to compile a list by using the phonebook to contact retailers. After a number of conversations with retail staff in various shops, it was time consuming phoning the same retailer to seek participation, contact details and information on the most appropriate person to send the survey to. The reason for this was that the appropriate person was busy, on holidays, unavailable or other reasons. The researcher returned to using secondary resources to compile a sample list. This list was compiled using freely available information such as chamber of commerce websites for each county, group websites of independent retailers and a year book for Irish pharmacies. This strategy enabled a sample list of over 1,000 emails to be drawn up.

Non-probability sampling was used for the survey research. Bryman & Bell(2007, p.177) explains that non-probability or non-random sampling involves selecting a sample that is not random. The reason for this as outlined above was for convenience and based on the information freely available to the researcher. Non-probability convenience sampling was used for the in-depth interviews.

The sample size for research of the SB's was 1,000. There were 144 valid responses to the SB's survey. A sample size of 10 was taken at random for follow up telephone interviews to expand and clarify the answers given to the survey.

The target participants for the survey on SP's were those that are directly involved in and responsible for the Marketing Communications of the organisation. The target participants for the survey on SB's were those that made or would be responsible for the decision of SP in the organisation.

3.4 Framework for Data Analysis

There is no standard procedure of qualitative data analysis as outlined by Domegan et. al (2007, p. 458), typical steps in the analytical process include:

1. Sorting, organising and filing the data into a more manageable form;

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2. **Becoming familiar with the data through examination and detecting patterns and themes emerging in the data which the researcher then develops into broad conceptual categories;**
3. **Re-examination and refining of identified categories;**
4. **Looking for links and relationships between categories;**
5. **Drawing together and interpreting the findings in a manner that addresses the research project objectives.**

When analysing qualitative data, the researcher is looking for patterns, themes and relationships between elements in the data as there are no statistical tests for significance in qualitative research studies (Domegan et. al, 2007, p. 458). Bryman et. al.(2011, p.624) point out that a theme is more likely to be identified the more times the phenomenon it denotes occurs in the course of coding. This process may also account for the prominence given to some themes over others when writing up the fruits of qualitative data analysis. An implicit quantification may be in operation that influences the identification of themes and the elevation of some themes over others.

SurveyMonkey was the online questionnaire solution that was used to administer the surveys to both the SB and SP. Once the data has been collected, it was then collated in excel to group common themes. With regards to the survey on SB's, in order to avoid introducing bias and limiting the responses, respondents were encouraged to enter their answers in free-format text boxes for a number of questions so they insert their own answer instead of being limited to selecting from a pre-defined list. The findings from the survey and follow up telephone interview research were also compared to the themes that emerged from the Literature Review.

3.5 Research Ethics

Ethical considerations were addressed at each stage of the research study. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants was protected at all times. Research was carried out in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1988 – 2003) as detailed by the Data Protection (2012) and in line with the guidance provided by the Institute of Technology, Sligo.

There are four main areas regarding ethical principles as broken down by Diener and Crandall (1978, cited in Bryman et.al. 2011, p.128)

- Whether there is harm to participants;
- Whether there is a lack of informed consent;
- Whether there is an invasion of privacy;
- Whether deception is involved.

For the research survey, SP's on the sample list were initially telephoned to request the e-mail address of the most appropriate person to send the online questionnaire to. Participants were provided with the background information to the research; were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality; and were informed of how the data would be used in the e-mail accompanying the link to the online questionnaire. Participants were also required to consent to participation by opting-in to the survey, i.e. answering yes to question 1, before progressing to the main body of the online questionnaire. A copy of the self-completed questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

To administer the SB survey, an email was sent to the contact email address obtained outlining the reason for the email, background information about the research, were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality.

From an ethical perspective, the most important aspect to the SP survey was to point out that the researcher worked in the sector for what could be a potential competitor of

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theirs. The company name of the researcher's employer was given to enable the SP establish whether this was the case or not. In the case of the SB surveys, it was mentioned that the researcher worked in the sector but did not give the name of the company as it was deemed inappropriate for the purpose of this research.

3.6 Research Limitations

The lack of probability sampling inherent in this study means the results cannot be generalised. However, the researcher considered it appropriate to sacrifice generalisation as a study of this nature has never been carried out on the Irish Epos sector before.

Due to the disclosed fact of the researcher being employed by a company active in the Irish epos sector, it may have an effect on the SP's participation in this study.

The research took place over the summer months which meant a lot of people were on annual leave or were under pressure because of other employees were on annual leave. The researcher received a number of emails apologising for lack of participation due to such reasons. Time is always a limitation when carrying out research. If there was more time available to carry out the research, it may increase the response rate.

3.7 Conclusion

Biggam(2010, p.104) recommends that researchers focus on informing the reader of exactly what, why, who and how the research will be undertaken as opposed to providing a dull list of data collection techniques that are available to researchers in general.

This chapter has specified the details of the research strategy adopted for this study and the thought process behind it. The ethical issues associated with this study and the limitations of the research together with the approach taken to minimise potential criticisms have also been outlined. The next chapter discusses and analyses the findings from the research.

4 Survey Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings from the research - the online self-completed questionnaires along with further information obtained with follow up interviews. The overall aim of this research is to discover what marketing activities are available to an Irish SP. However, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to gain an insight into the SP's current marketing activities, learn what is important to SB's and where they look for information. Finally, uncover the tactics used by Cloud providers that win business.

The research is broken up into three main parts: opinions of solution buyers (SB's); views of solution providers (SP's) and analysis of marketing communications utilised by cloud providers (CP's). As there is information from different sources being analysed, this section will be split out accordingly.

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4.2 Opinions of Solution Buyers (SB's)

The empirical research analysis is approached in a structured way. To focus the findings in terms of reflecting the main objectives of the study and ease the analysis of the qualitative data, the findings of SB's are grouped according to themes as follows:

- Influences;
- Objectives;
- Perceptions;
- Desires.

These themes are in keeping with the overall objective for this part of the study on SB's.

4.2.1 Industry Background

Out of the 144 valid responses obtained, the following gives an insight into some industry background. Firstly, respondents were asked if they had an Epos solution installed. The responses indicated that there was high uptake of Epos solutions with 81.8% of retailers surveyed responding yes.

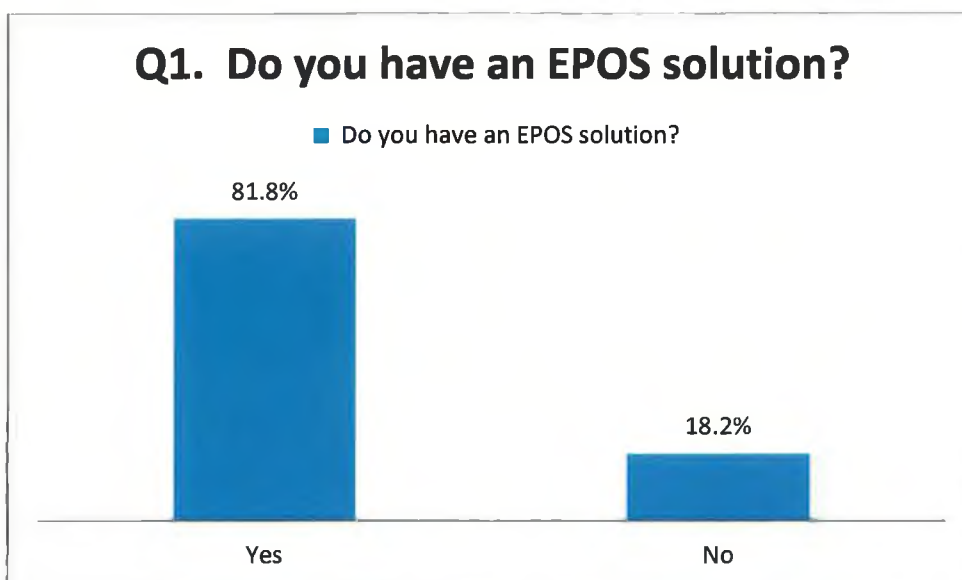


Figure 4.1 – Level of Epos uptake



Figure 4.2 – Number of selling units per store?

The majority of respondents have 2 selling units in operation (36%), followed by a single unit (22%).

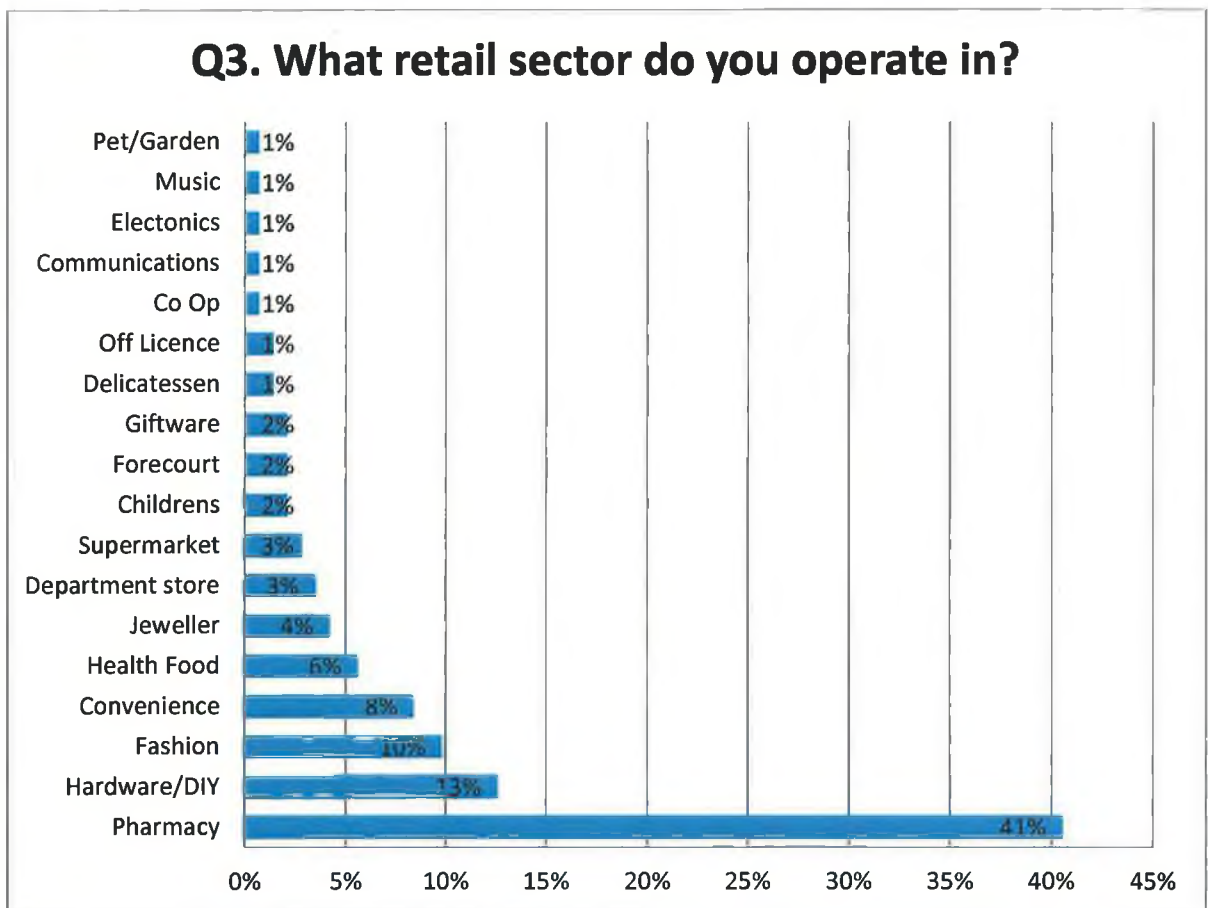


Figure 4.3 – Breakdown of retail sector by respondent

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The majority of respondents were from the pharmacy sector (41%), followed by Hardware/DIY(13%), fashion(10%), convenience (8%), Jewellers (4%), Department Stores & Supermarkets accounted for 3% each, giftware, forecourt and children's were 2%. Due to the large response rate from the pharmacy sector of 41%, this could introduce bias to certain aspects of the research. As the majority of Irish pharmacies are independent, their requirements for an Epos solution will be similar to those of any other retailer.

4.2.2 Theme 1: Influences

The aim of this section is to explore any factors that have an influence on the selection of Epos software or the Epos solution provider (SP) by a retailer (SB).

Q4 of the survey asked respondents if there was any factor(s) limiting their choice of Epos provider. Only 24.5% answered yes, the majority said No (57.3%) and the remainder answering not applicable N/a (18.2%). Those that answered positively to the question were asked to outline these factors. While these results may not be significant as only 24.5% have limiting factors, a SP should bear the fact there may be limitations for a SB and know what the most common ones are.

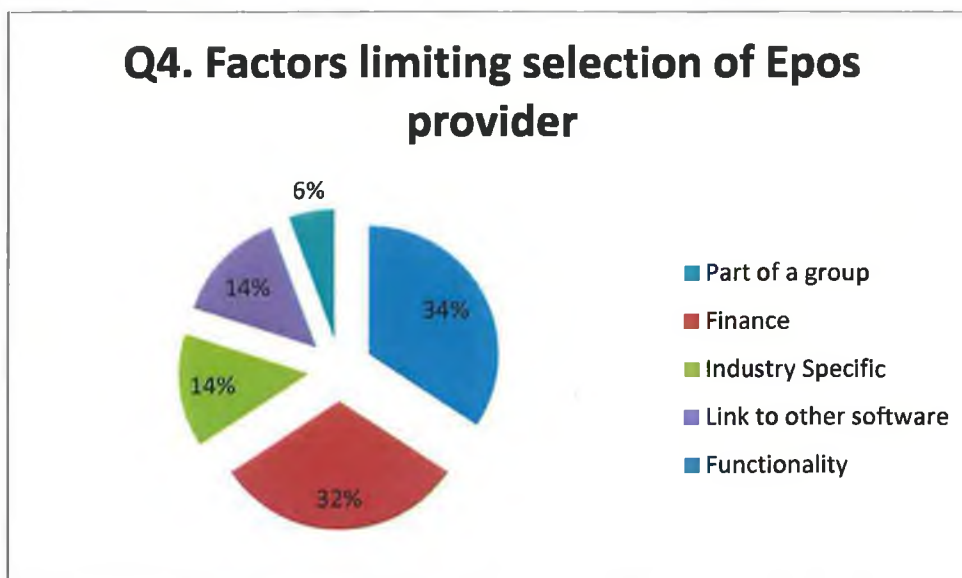


Figure 4.4 – Factors affecting selection of Epos provider.

The next area that influences SB's is where they turn to for information.

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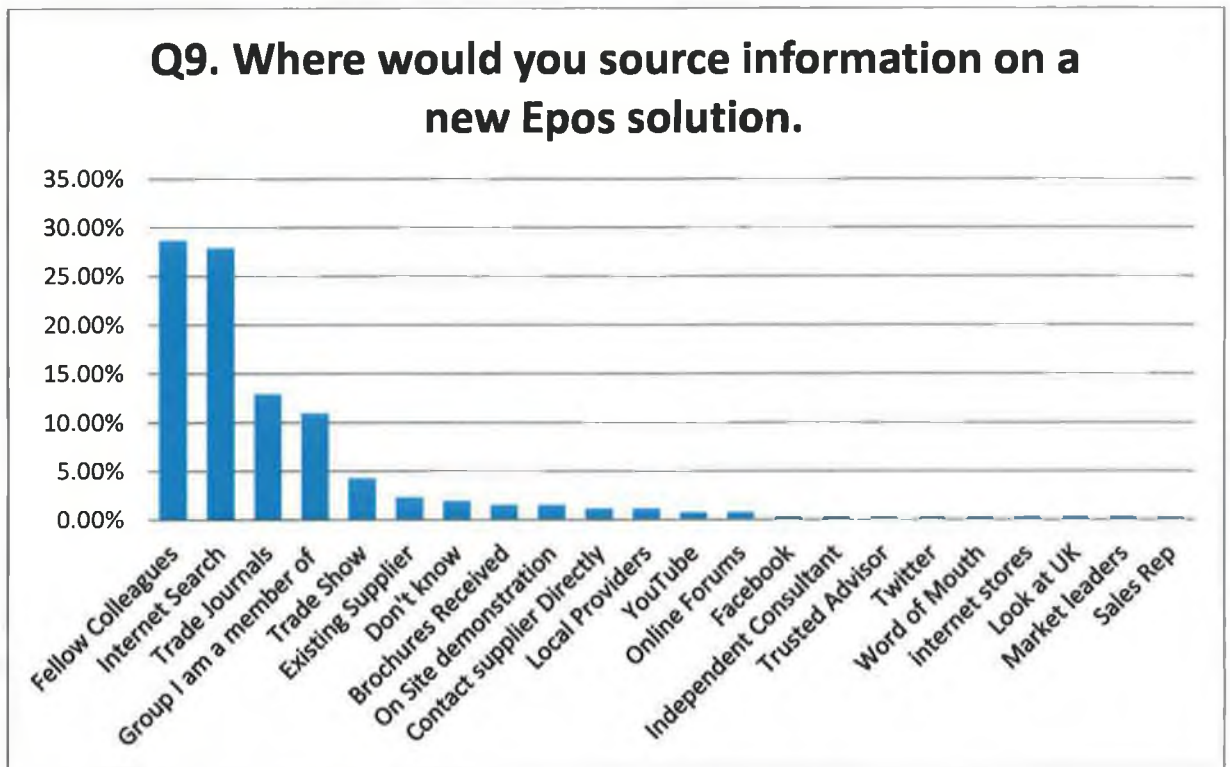


Figure 4.5 – Where SB's look for information on a new solution.

The main answers to this question were Fellow colleagues (this included peers, competitors, operators within the same industry or locality) 28.74%; Internet Search 27.95%; Trade Journals 12.99% and Group I am a member of 11.02%. While it may be questioned whether there is an actual need for marketing because of the results, marketing is essential for informing, educating and reinforcing the benefits of a SP. Peers become aware of and are reminded of SP's because of relevant marketing.

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Q13 focused on the most important factors in the selection of an Epos solution.

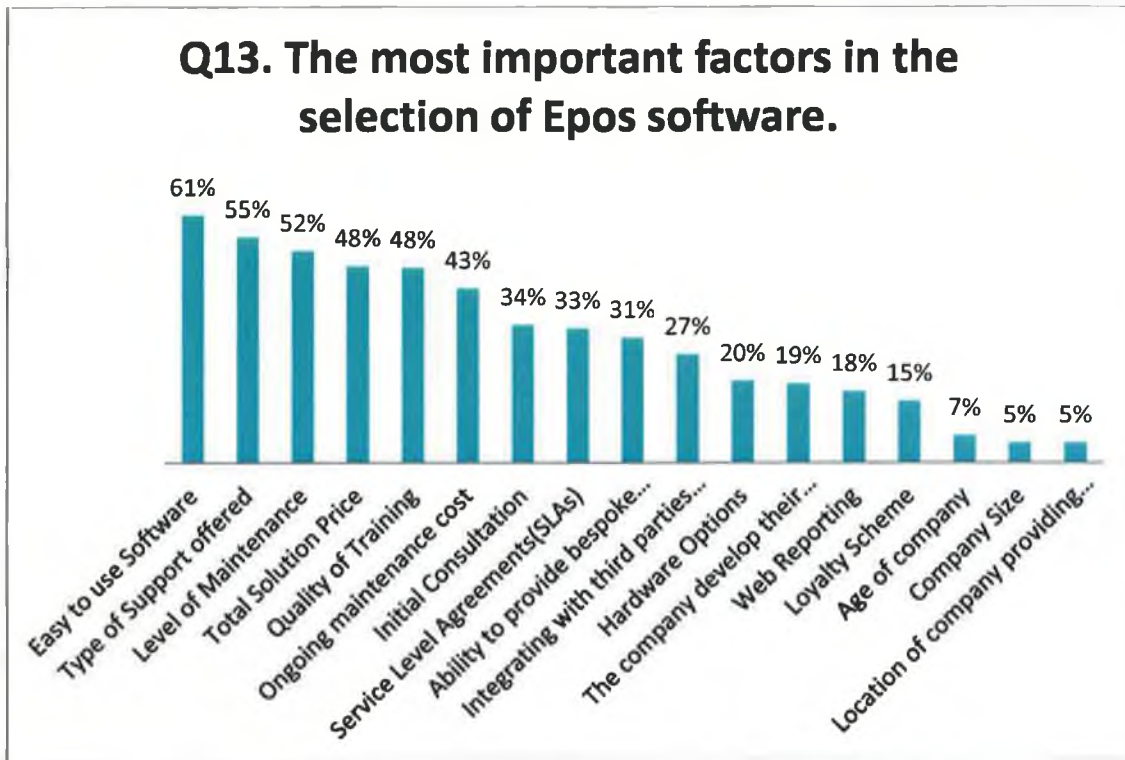


Figure 4.6 The most important factors in Epos software selection

The main factors deemed 'critically important' were Easy to use software 61%; Type of Support offered 55%; Level of maintenance 52%. The top factors deemed not important were Location, Company Size and Age of company. This was in agreement with the interviews 'simple software' was a common answer so all staff could use it.

4.2.3 Theme 2: Objectives

The aim of this section is to identify objectives SB's had in relation to Epos.

Q4 asked if there were any limitations in the selection of the SP, whereas Q5 is asking why the SB chose their existing SP.

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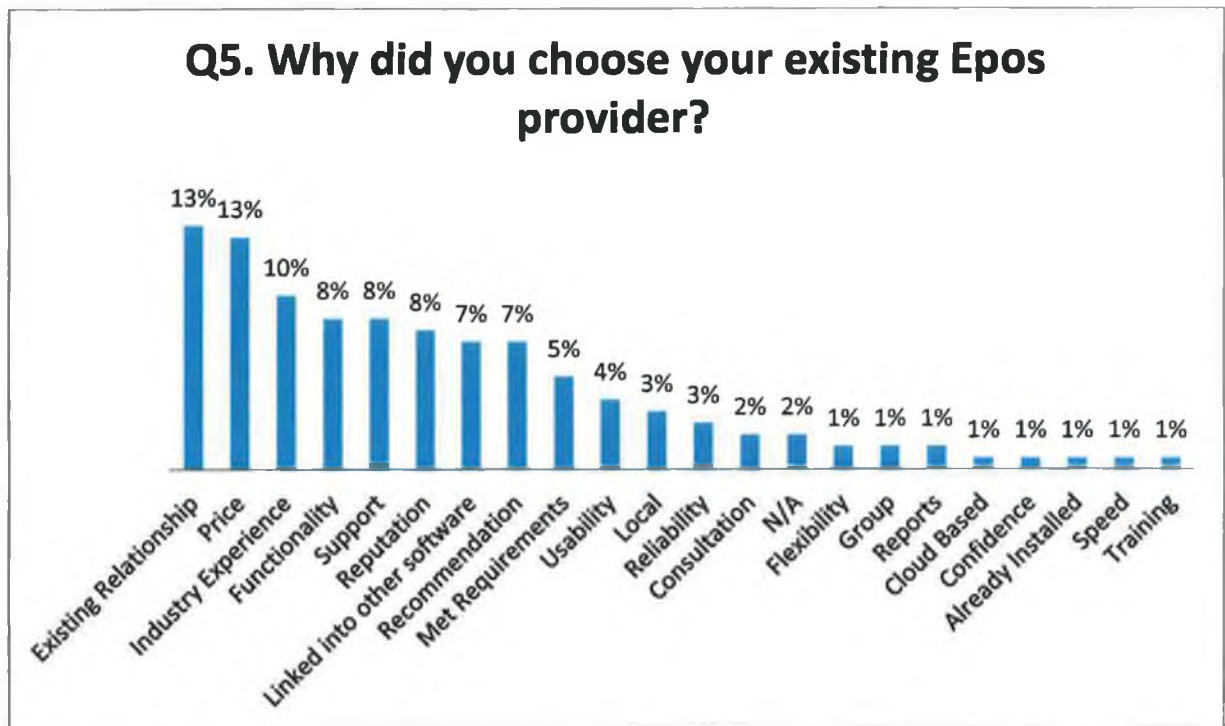


Figure 4.7 – Reasons for choosing existing Epos provider.

The fact they had an existing relationship and price were the overriding reasons at 13% each, followed by the fact the company had previous experience with their sector (10%).

Q6 asked what the SB hoped to achieve by implementing the Epos solution.

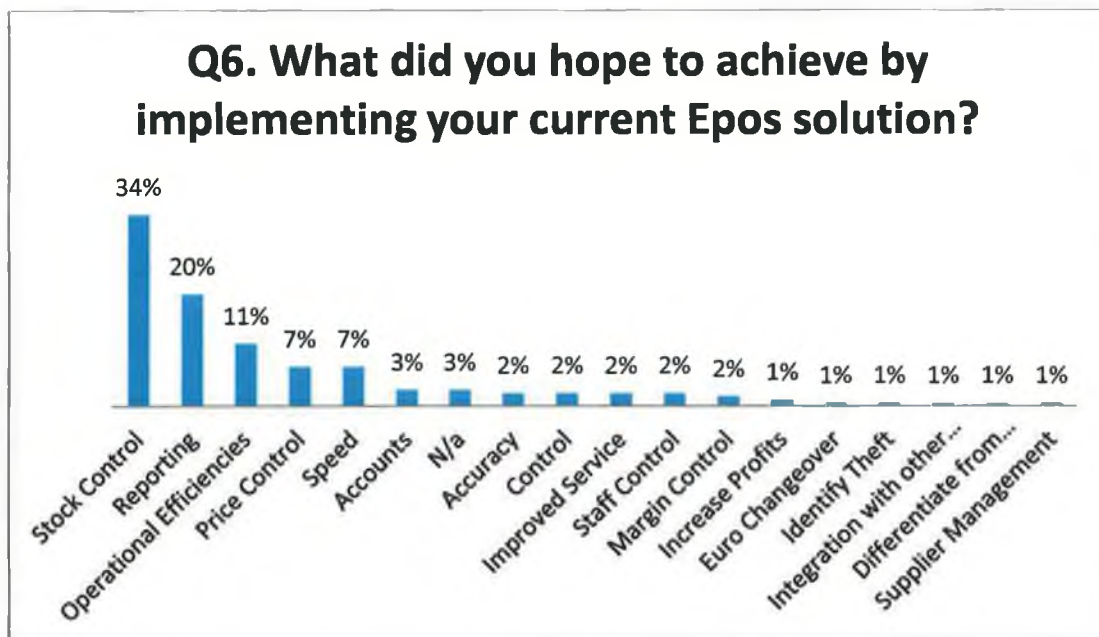


Figure 4.8 – Objectives of implementing current Epos solution.

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The overwhelming response to this question was stock control (34%), followed by reporting (20%) and then operational efficiencies (11%). The interviews reinforced how important stock control is to retailers, especially when dealing with items that can go out of date or expensive items. An efficient ordering system ensures less spoilage, reduces capital tied up in stock and ensures the optimum amount of stock is held.

4.2.4 Theme 3: Perceptions

The aim of this section is to identify the perceptions SB's have about SP's offerings.

Q10 asked respondents about when they were investigating the various epos options, could they identify significant differences between the offerings or if they felt that they were all quite similar. 67% replied stating they found the offerings Quite Similar with the remaining 33% stating they found significant differences.

Q11 asked respondents how confident they would be if their Epos solution was delivered over a broadband connection.

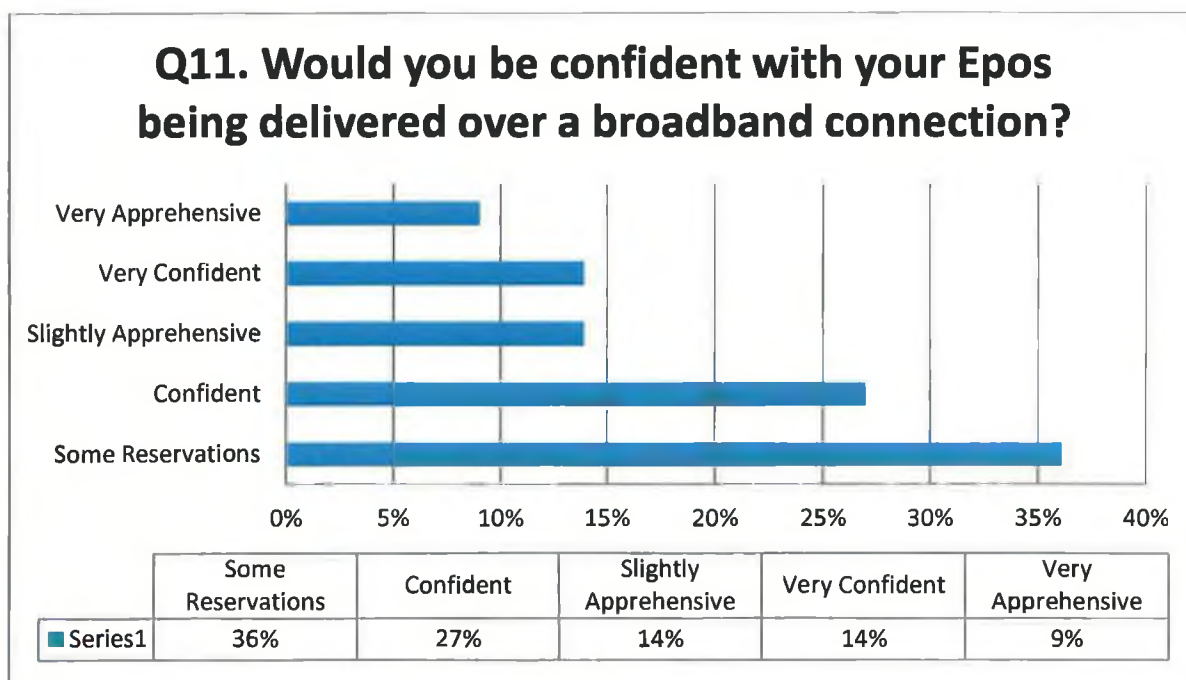


Figure 4.9 – Level of confidence if Epos delivered via broadband.

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The most popular answers were some reservations 36% followed by confident 27%. This indicates that SB's are open to the idea of a cloud deployed solution. While those with some reservations may be undecided on the matter, those that are confident and very confident make up 41% V's very apprehensive and apprehensive at 25%. This is important to the overall question to gauge how open SB's are to cloud providers.

4.2.5 Theme 4: Desires

The aim of this section is to establish what SB's actually desire in an Epos solution. Q7 asked SB's what features are most important to them in an Epos solution.

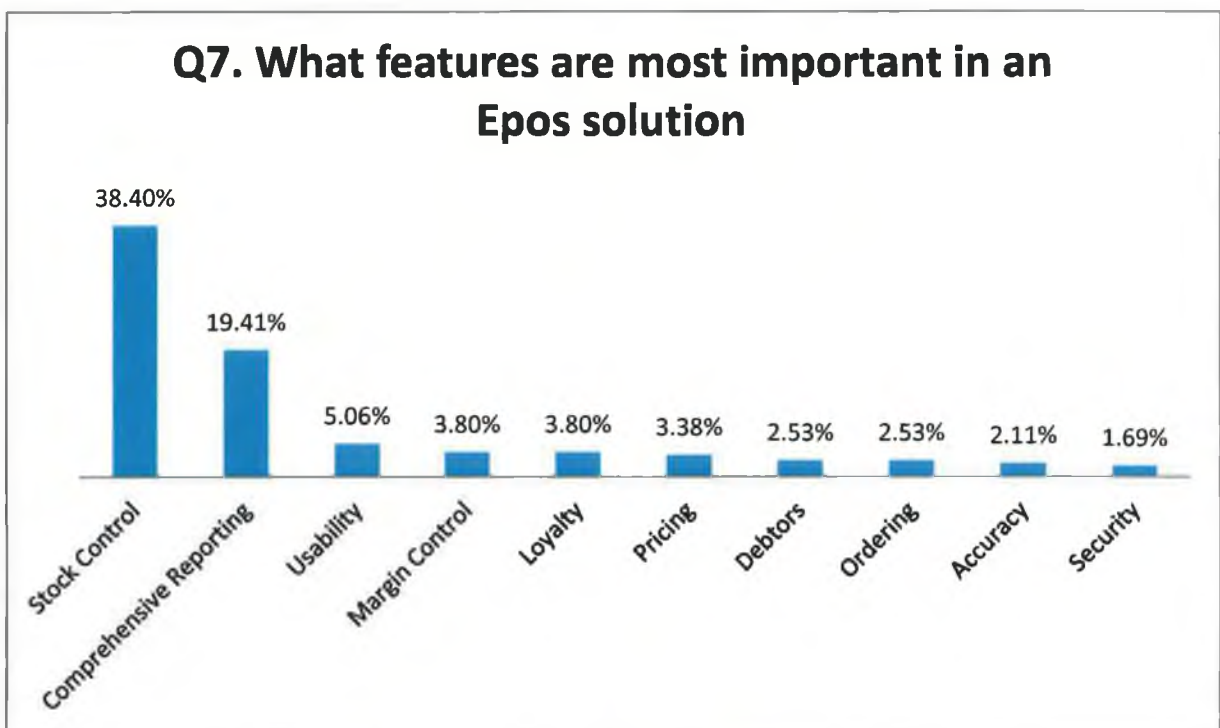


Figure 4.10 – Main features of an Epos solution.

There were varying answers to this question which were categorised by similarity. The overriding feature most requested was Stock Control 38.4%; Comprehensive Reporting 19.41% and usability at 5.06%.

Q8 asked respondents what the most important factor is for them in the selection of a SP.

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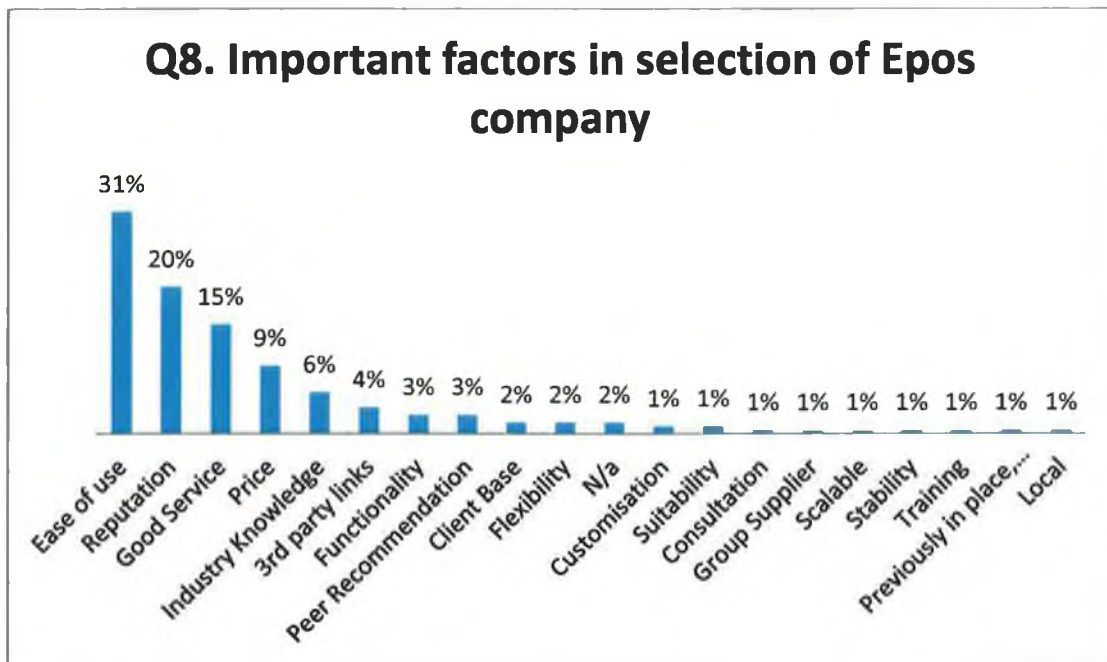


Figure 4.11 Important factors in selection of an Epos company

The most important factor in the selection of a SP for SB's was ease of use at 31%. While ease of use is more a factor in choosing software and not a company, the interviews uncovered that respondents felt this was important. This could be added into reputation – so the SP has a good reputation when it comes to developing and providing easy to use software. The next important factor was reputation at 20% which included peer recommendations and what others had to say about the SP. This highlights the importance of corporate reputation in this industry.

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4.3 Views of Solution Providers (SP's)

The entire population of Irish SP's (16) were approached for participation in the research. There were 6 completed surveys which represents 37.5% of the population.

Respondents were asked for their opinions on various aspects of the marcom strategies and the results are broken down into two main themes: Operations and Opinions.

4.3.1 Operations of SP's

To begin, respondents were asked for some basic information about their company.

Q3 When asked how many employees were working in the organisation, the average number was 11 in 50% of the respondents.

Q4 Enquired whether the company operate in domestic or international or both markets. The answer was a 50/50 split between domestic 50% and both 50%.

Q6. Asked whether there was a structured marketing plan in place or whether it was an ad-hoc activity. 67% did not have a structured plan in place stating it was an adhoc activity compared to 33% who did.

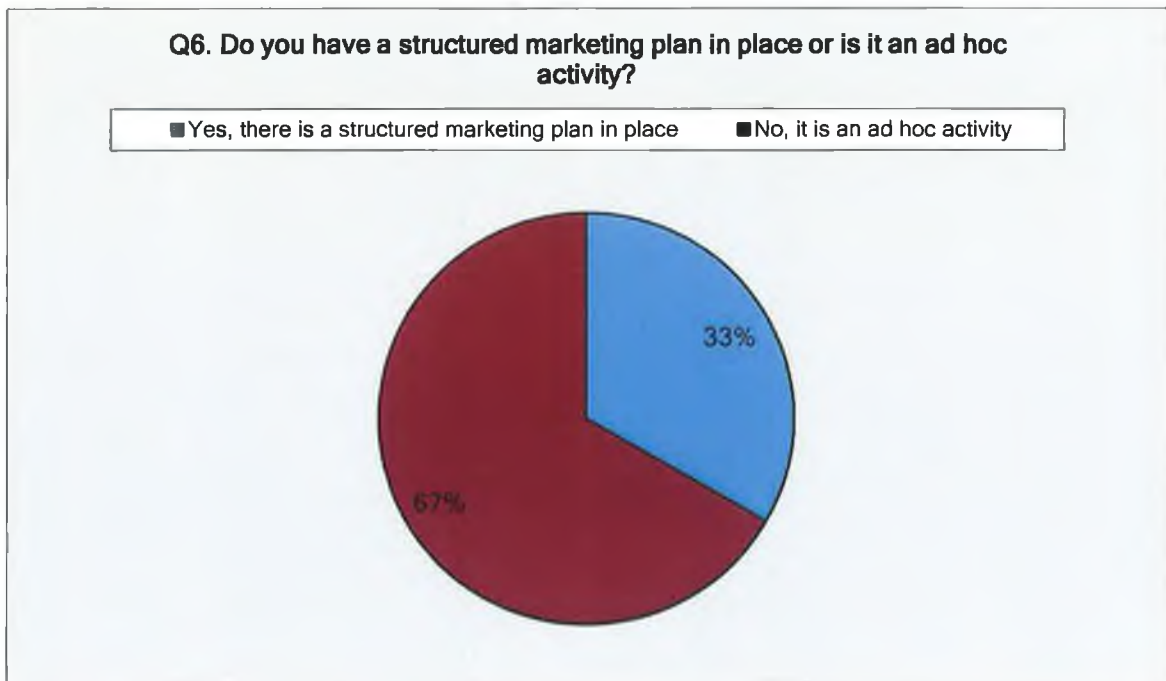


Figure 4.12 – Do you have a structured marketing plan in place.

Q7 Enquired to see if there was a structured way of measuring the effectiveness of marketing activities within the organisation. 83% of respondents said No which

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implies they have no structured way of monitoring effectiveness. 1 respondent stated that they “benchmark against monthly sales”.

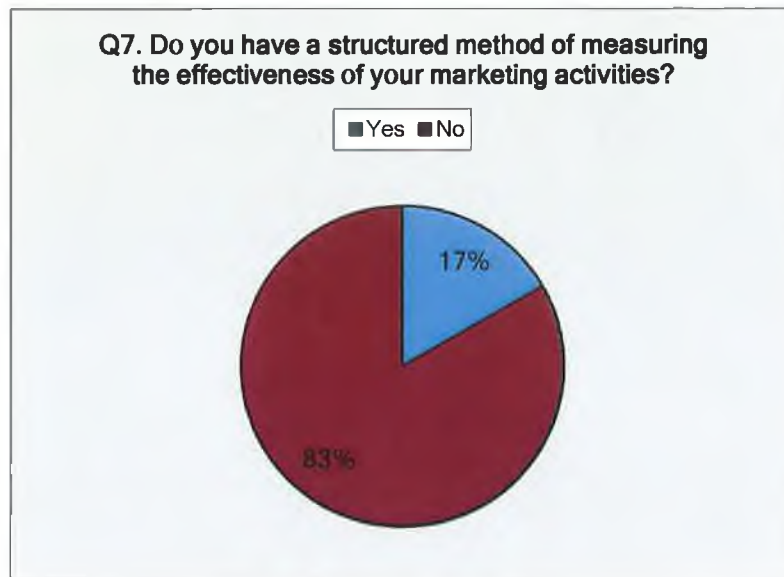


Figure 4.13 – Is there a structured method in place for managing the effectiveness of Marcoms.

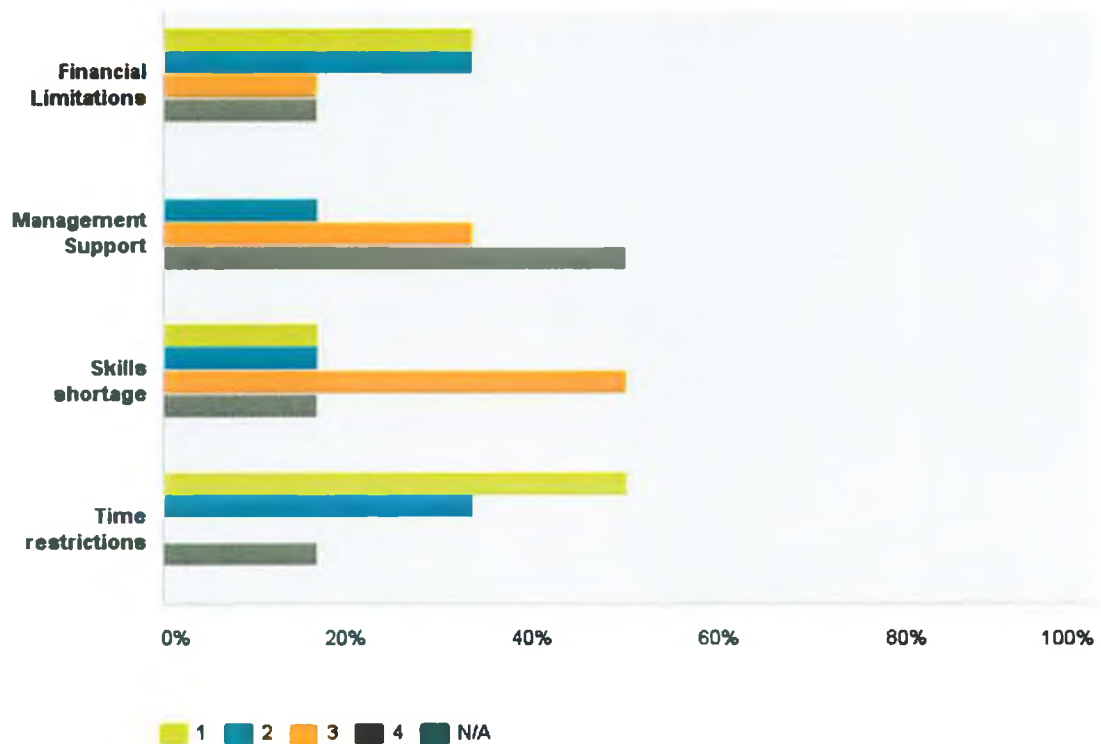
Q8 asked respondents what their main objectives were when carrying out marketing. The three main replies were Increase Sales, Entice Customers to upgrade, Brand building and for entering new markets.

Q9 asked if there were any factors restricting the marketing activities of the company. The main factors limiting marketing activities were Time, Finance, Skills shortage and management support.

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Q9 Please rank in order, what(if any) are the main factors restricting your marketing activities? Where 1 is the biggest restriction.

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



	1	2	3	4	N/A	Total	Average Ranking
Financial Limitations	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	0% 0	6	3.83
Management Support	0% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50% 3	0% 0	6	2.67
Skills shortage	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	50% 3	16.67% 1	0% 0	6	3.33
Time restrictions	50% 3	33.33% 2	0% 0	16.67% 1	0% 0	6	4.17

Figure 4.14 – Any factors limiting the marketing activities.

Q10. Asked at what stage respondents perceived the current Irish epos market place to be. 50% of respondents perceived it to be at the maturity stage.

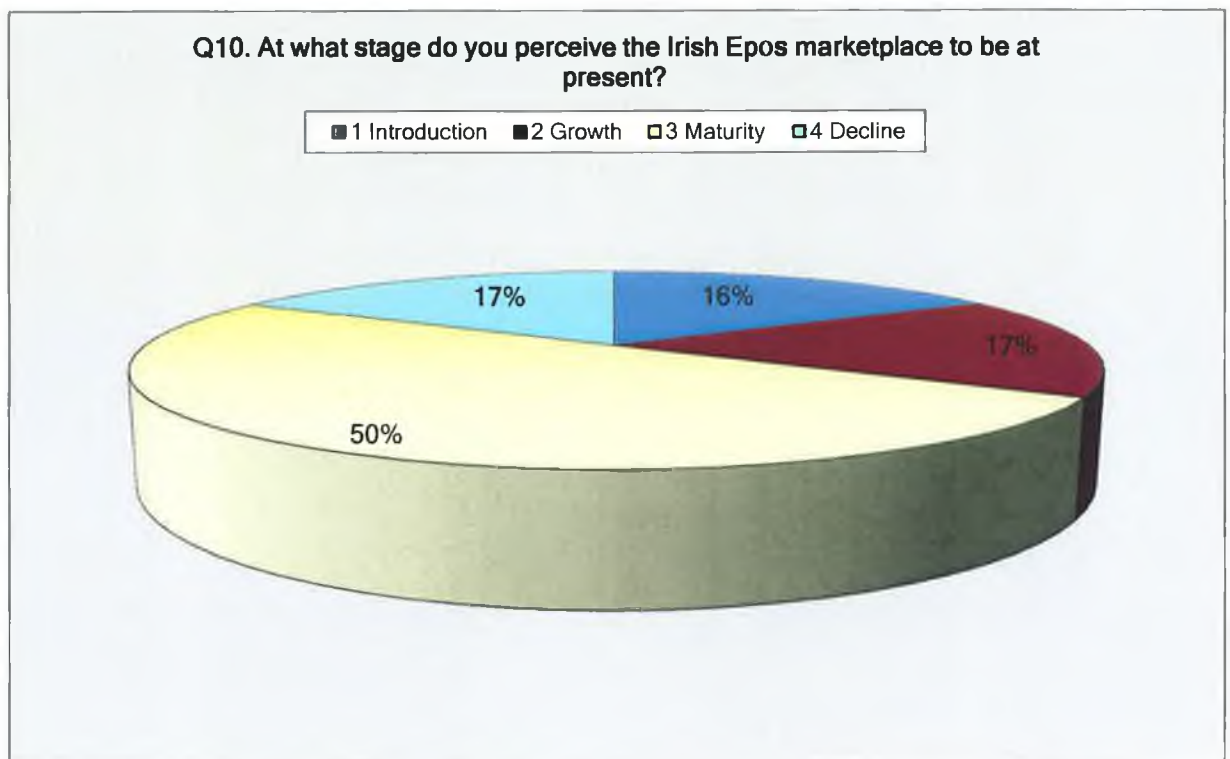


Figure 4.15 – Perception on Irish Epos marketplace from SP's perspective.

Q11. Asked whether there was a specific person responsible for Marcom activities within the organisation. 83% of respondents had one person responsible for this. In 80% of cases, that person had a specific marketing qualification.

Q12. Asked how much respondents had spent on marketing in the last number of years. 66% spent less on marketing with the rest spent more or spent the same.

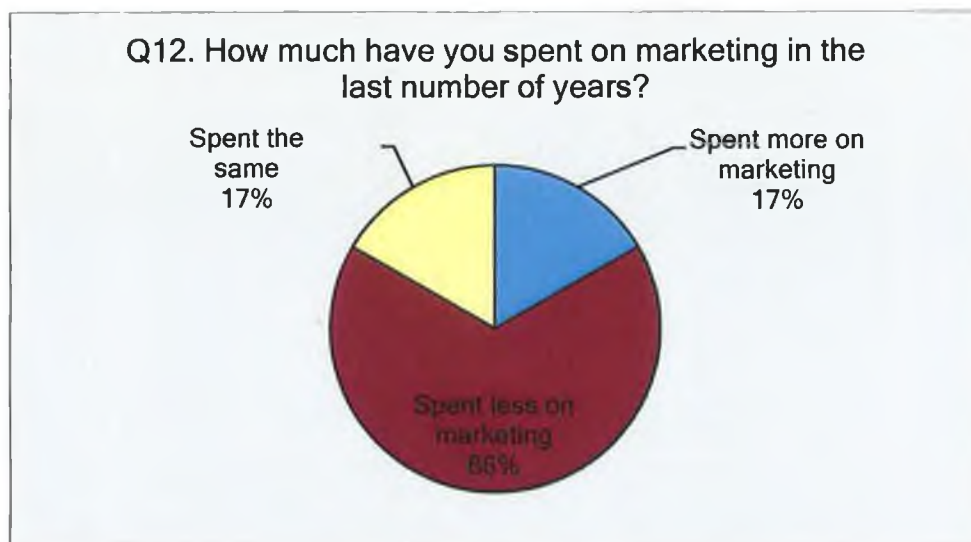


Figure 4.16 – Marketing spend over the last number of years.

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It is interesting to note that typically in an economic downturn, marketing spend is reduced. However, prices fall too for marketing activities such as participation in trade shows or advertising. Although, 66% of respondents spent less on marketing, it is not known whether less marketing activities were carried out or if the same level or more marketing occurred at better value prices.

Q13 enquired as to the breakdown between Traditional and Digital marketing spending. The split indicates that SP's spend 86% of their budget on traditional methods and only 14% on digital marketing.

Q14 asked if the SP had received any government assistance towards marketing. 83% did not with one respondent receiving assistance from their local enterprise board. There are various schemes available from local government authorities which could aid in development of a new website like Enterprise Ireland's innovation voucher scheme or the local enterprise boards Marketing assistance fund.

Q15 asked if all employees were familiar with marcom activities of the firm. 67% were aware.

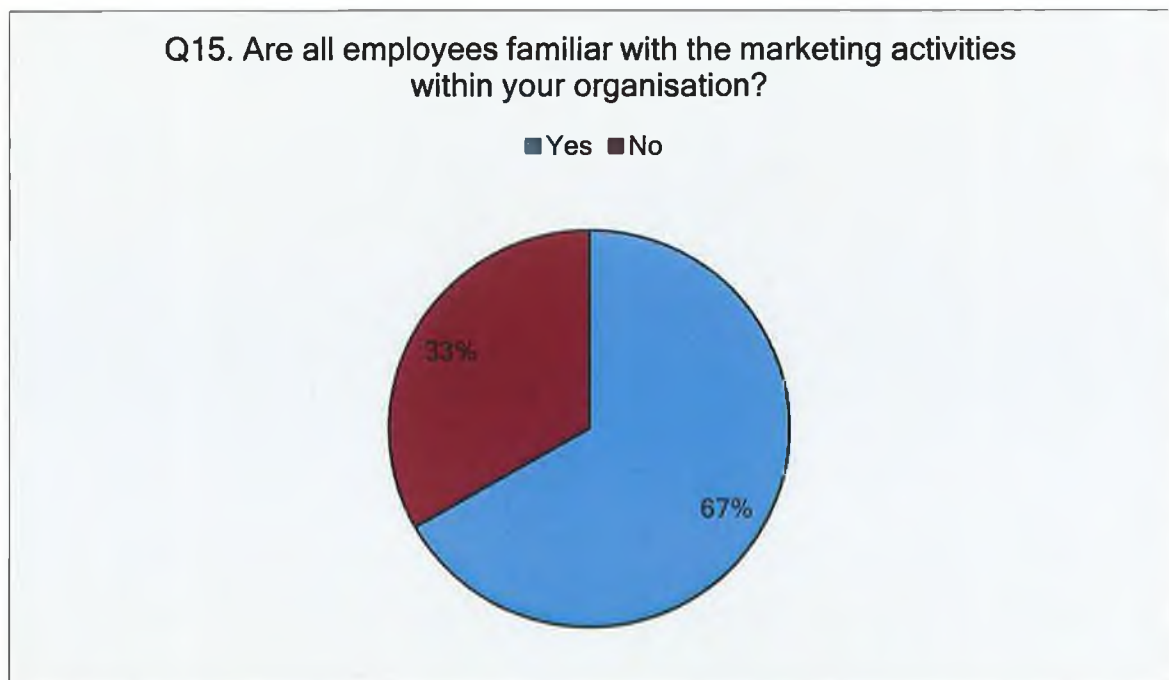


Figure 4.17 – Are employees aware of Marcom activities within the firm?

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Q16. Defined a part time marketer as any employee who has an impact on the overall customer experience. The aim of this question was to learn if all employees were aware of their part in this role and if so, how that message was communicated to them. All respondents answered positively to this question with regular staff meetings being the most popular method of communicating this message.

Q17. Discovered how SP's sell their products and services. The majority (67%) sold directly with the remaining 33% sold through a mixture of direct and reseller. Interestingly, no SP's used third parties only to sell their offerings.

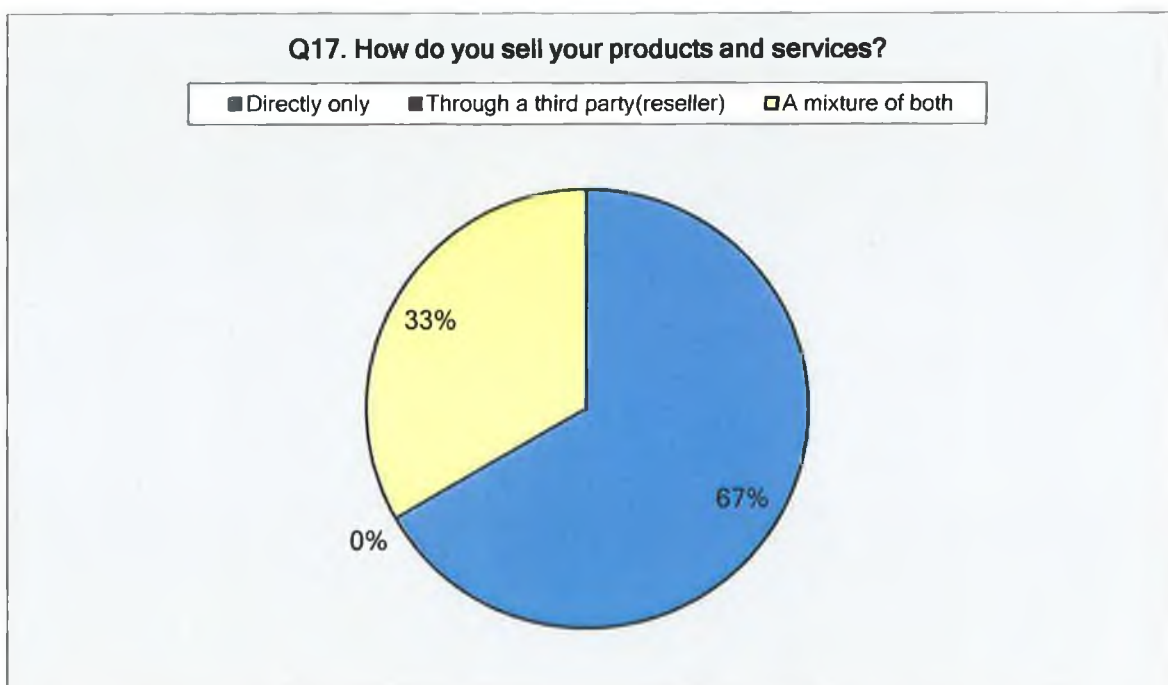


Figure 4.18 – How does your organisation sell?

Q18. Enquired about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within the organisation. Only one company had a CSR policy. CSR policies can inform any stakeholder that the organisation conducts itself in an socially responsible manner. This can be a source of differentiation for a firm.

Q19 was to find out if the company had a corporate website and if customers could buy directly from it. All respondents had a corporate website but none of them offered the facility to purchase anything online from it. Interestingly, none of the respondents had a facility for a demonstration on their sites. When asked in follow up interviews, most cited time as the main reason for this.

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4.3.2 Opinions of SP's

Q20 provided a comprehensive list of traditional marcom methods that are used by SP's. Respondents were asked to rate these options from not applicable to 'main strategy'. The majority of respondents listed the most effective methods to be Personal Selling, Trade Shows and cold calling. The options that were least effective/not applicable were national advertising such as tv/newspaper. Respondents were also offered the opportunity to mention any other method they use effectively that was not on the list. One respondent finds that communicating messages electronically within the software to be an effective means of informing customers of new features, software updates or relevant special offers.

Q20 Please rate how effective you find the following Traditional marketing activities. Poor results means that any sales generated did not cover the cost of the marketing activity. Time is also considered a cost.

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

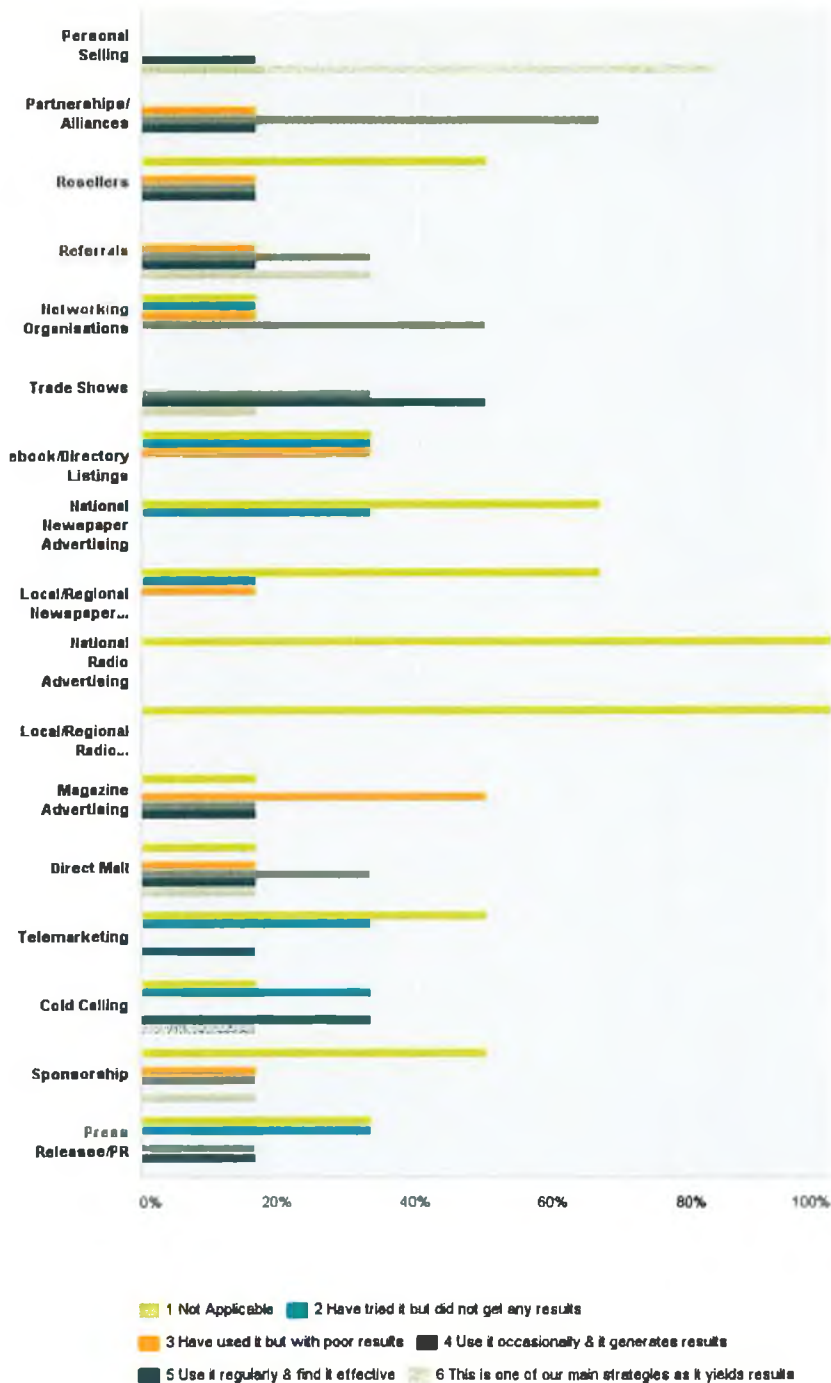


Figure 4.19 – What Marcom methods are most effective?

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Q21 sought to discover the main digital methods used by SP's. These electronic newsletter, search engine optimisation (SEO) and LinkedIn. The majority of Digital methods outlined were chosen as not applicable with some tried with no results such as YouTube.

Q21 Please rate how effective you find the following Digital marketing activities. Poor results means that any sales generated did not cover the cost of the marketing activity. Time is also considered a cost.

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

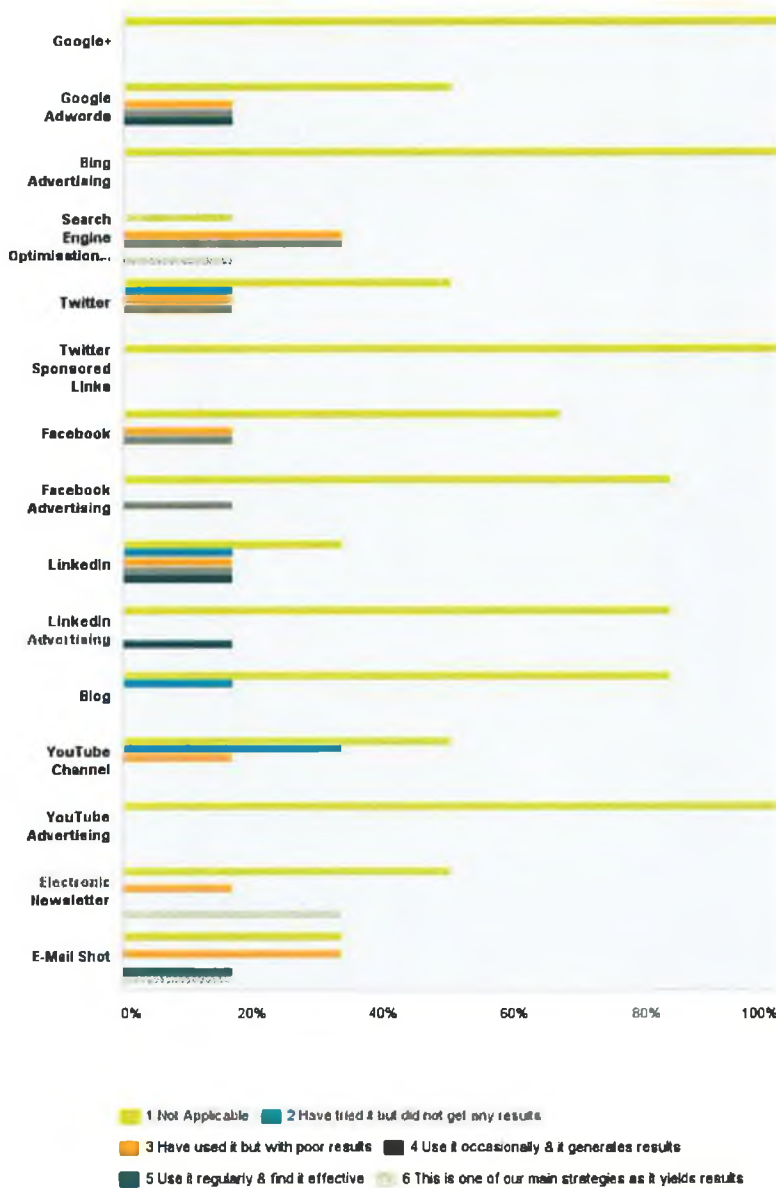


Figure 4.20 – What Digital Marcom methods are most effective?

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Q21. Asked what the most important aspects of Epos software according to SP's.

Functionality was deemed the most important overall with all respondents answering the same followed by Support. The factors that were felt least important were company location and company size.

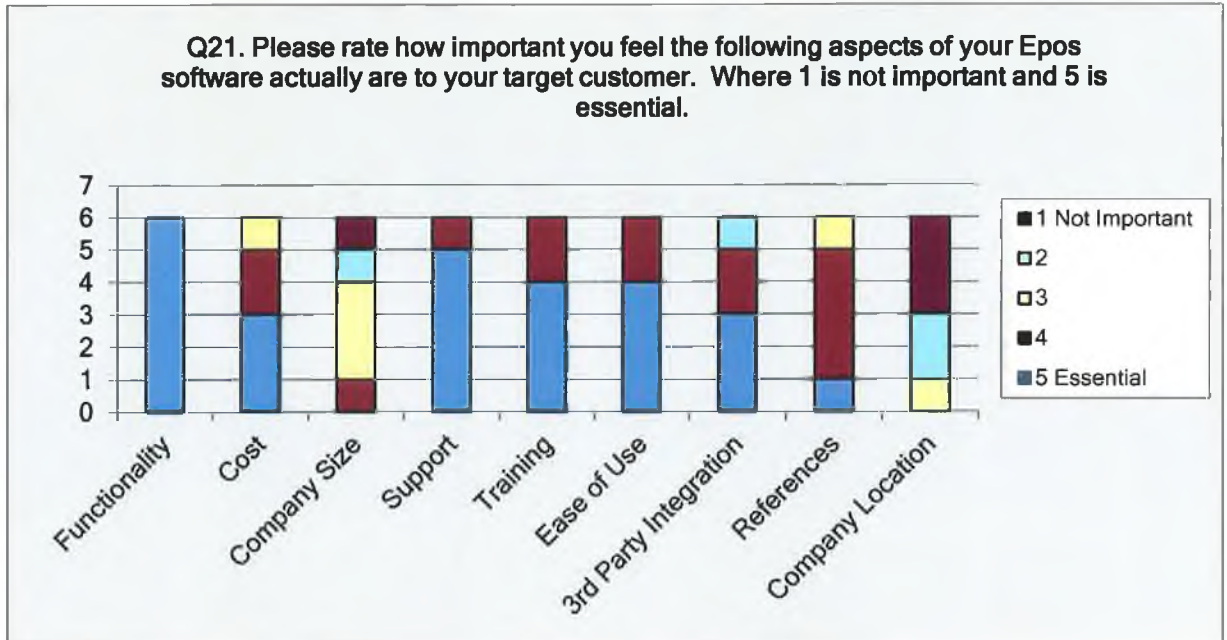


Figure 4.21 – Most important aspects of Epos software according to SP's.

Q23 asked if the respondent had or had not a current cloud offering or if it was in development. 50% of respondents had, 33% were in development and 17% had not.

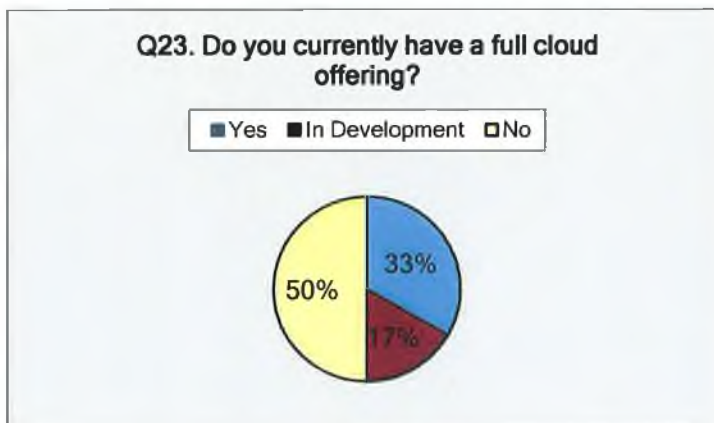


Figure 4.22 – Has respondent a cloud offering.

Q24 asked for the respondents' opinion to see if they viewed SaaS as a threat or opportunity. Most viewed it as an opportunity although there is the very real threat of low cost alternatives to their offering.

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4.4 Analysis of Marcoms used by CP's.

A number of cloud software providers were approached to participate in this study. Two responded that were willing to partake, however, once it was pointed out that the researcher worked in the sector, the communication ceased. In order to acknowledge this innovation to the software industry, comprehensive secondary research was carried out to discover what methods were being used to promote their solution. This secondary research consisted of selecting 5 CP's and analysing their marcom strategies. A thorough review of their websites uncovered how they market, their pricing strategies and channels they use to reach their target customer. The main findings all pointed to a heavy digital strategy along with innovative partnerships and referral networks. Overall the marcom strategies included:

- Comprehensive websites
- Seo
- Google Adwords
- Facebook advertising (adverts appearing in a users newsfeed)
- YouTube
- Twitter
- Linked In
- Pinterest
- Partnering and integrating with third party software such as accounts and ecommerce. E.g VendHq partner with Xero for accounts software and Shopify for ecommerce.
- Recruiting resellers who receive a residual commission on all monies received
- Price: No initial outlay for software – free trials and low cost monthly fee.

A comprehensive follow up interview took place with a retailer who was using a cloud Epos solution and was very willing to discuss their experience. The main motivation the user had for sourcing a cloud based provider was that the available options did not

fully satisfy their requirements and also felt better value for money was possible. “It's on iPad, its cloud based. It's low cost. I can access it from any computer. I use my iPhone for stock takes and it's fun to use.” The SB was able to source all the necessary hardware for about €700 and pays a monthly fee of €59. This fee enables the business access their data anywhere through a web browser and apps on both the Ipad and Iphone. E.g. If they are delivering goods to a customer, if the customer decides to put the sale on their account, the delivery person receives the customer signature on an Iphone/Ipad and the account is updated. They use Shopify for their online webstore which updates stock in real time. The new system was self-installed and training was done by making extensive use of the providers' website, forums and YouTube channel. The SP in this situation provides email support and a comprehensive website for logging support calls, resolutions and requests for enhancements/new features. The respondent was extremely satisfied with the solution and would be willing to recommend it to anyone. The price to install this cloud solution was about €1,000 with the residual monthly fee compared to €9,000 + Vat which was quoted to the respondent for a similar system. When asked if the fact that the company was not based in Ireland nor was there local support, the respondent affirms that it is not an issue. “If something goes, I can replace it. The beauty about cloud is if the computer blows up, I just log into my system from another computer or web browser – I never have to worry about losing information. I am able to access it anywhere which is brilliant when I am away on holiday”.

4.5 Synthesis

The Literature Review, in addressing Objective 3 of this study – *What marketing activities are available to an Irish Epos solution provider?* – drew attention to the many Marcom strategies open to an Epos software company but also outlined how to select the best one.

O'Dwyer et. al (2009) cited finance, lack of marketing expertise along with tactical customer-related problems as the main challenges affecting the marketing function in a SME. This is in keeping with the empirical research which found the main factors

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limiting marketing activities of SP's were Time, Finance, Skills shortage and management support.

Viardot, 2004 set out the communications strategy for high tech products which was evident in the answers from SP's. The majority of respondents listed the most effective methods to be Personal Selling, Trade Shows and cold calling.

Sultan (2011) hails the cloud model as the future of software distribution and while all respondents were aware of this only 50% had a market ready solution.

While Barwise et. al (2003) highlighted the importance of marketing performance measurement dashboards, the findings from SP's indicate that there were no formal marketing metrics in place in any of the companies.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the findings of the research - the online self-completed questionnaires along with follow up interviews. The chapter revolves around the description of the empirical data and synthesis of the presented empirical results against the literature findings.

Despite the presence of some factors restricting the Marcom options open to the respondents, they are still marketing although there are no formal structures in place to measure the actual effectiveness. It is important that all employees in an organisation are aware of the on-going marketing activities which are communicated mostly through staff meetings.

While SP's carry out some digital marketing activities, they are only investing about 15% of their available budget to this area.

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5 Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The research question being addressed in this dissertation is:

What marketing activities are available to an Irish Epos solution provider?

In order to achieve the primary objective, a number of sub-objectives were addressed as follows:

1. Capture the opinions and thoughts SB's;
2. Explore the current marketing activities of SP's and investigate methods used by CP's to see if these can be implemented by traditional SB's;
3. Identify the marketing activities available to a SP.

This research has two primary objectives. The first is to answer the research question and the second is to propose recommendations to improve marketing activities amongst Irish Epos solution providers as demonstrated in the research findings.

This chapter will summarise the findings of the research and offer conclusions based on those findings. Recommendations for future research will also be discussed.

5.2 Summary of Findings and Conclusions

5.2.1 Conclusion 1: Opinions and thoughts of SB's

Fill (2005) advises that personal selling should be a major part of the promotion mix especially when products are complex and are important to the buyer such as that of an Epos solution. Personal relationships and price were shown to be of high importance to SB's which reinforces Fill's thinking that the product is important to the buyer.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from the study of these issues – opinions and thoughts of SB's – is that the purchase is highly involved for the SB and therefore, will be a lengthy process of evaluation. SB's rely a lot on their peers for trusted advice, the research listed SP reputation as being the second most important factor in the selection of a SP indicating customer satisfaction is imperative in order to gain positive referrals for a SP. Consequently, the first conclusion to be drawn from this study is that SB's turn to their fellow colleagues the most for advice on Epos solutions.

While one may postulate that if SB's rely so much on their peers, is there a need for SP's to engage in marketing at all? The answer to this question is a resounding yes.

5.2.2 Conclusion 2: Current marketing activities of SP's and investigate methods used by CP's to see if these can be implemented by traditional SP's.

The literature highlighted that marketing in technology firms may not be as structured which was evident in the empirical research - 67% say it is an 'ad-hoc' activity and no respondent had any structured method of evaluating the effectiveness of marketing activities. The main findings from the research limiting marketing activities were Time, Finance, Skills shortage and management support.

83% of respondents assigned the marketing function to one person with 80% of this figure having a formal marketing qualification. 66% of respondents spent less on marketing in the last number of years which is expected in an economic recession and is also in keeping with Kotlers suggestion on marketing budgets.

It is also worth noting that the cost of carrying out marketing activities has fallen in recent years due to value offerings to stimulate demand. The research can tell us that

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respondents spent less; however, this may not mean they carried out less marketing activities.

The majority of respondents listed the most effective methods to be Personal Selling, Trade Shows and cold calling. The options that were least effective/not applicable were national advertising such as tv/newspaper. This is in keeping with the literature about the most appropriate choice of marcom strategy based on the various characteristics of the product.

Secondary research carried out on Cloud epos providers pointed to a very strong digital marketing strategy such as social networking, seo, social media sponsored adverts and YouTube. This is in stark contrast to traditional SP's who are not investing enough of their budget or implementing internet marketing strategies.

Consequently, the second conclusion that can be drawn from this study is while traditional solution providers are using appropriate marketing communications, they are ignoring the digital aspect and have no metrics in place to measure the effectiveness of any of their marcoms. Perhaps, traditional SP's do not see a need for implementing digital marketing. Some of the SP companies are around longer than the modern day internet. The marcom activities employed in the past have worked for the SP's so why should they change? They may be missing out on potential business by not dedicating some resources. If they trial some new strategies and it generates results it may spur them on to continue down this path.

5.2.3 Conclusion 3: Identify the most suitable marketing activities for a SP.

The game-changing innovation that is software solutions delivered by cloud technology is quickly gaining ground as their technology is what a lot of retailers have been 'waiting for'. Not only do CP's enable a retailer to access their information anywhere, they come with very attractive initial and on-going costs.

While traditional SP's can stick with the strategies that have worked for them in the past, they need to ensure that they are aware of their own place in the product life cycle and keep in tune with the requirements of SB's. At the very least it would be

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worthwhile for a SP to investigate the feasibility of rolling out the SaaS pricing model if they do not yet have a full cloud offering. This way they can attract/retain customers while competing head on with the new entrant and eliminate a USP of a competitor.

The third conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the most suitable marcom strategies for a SP is personal selling. Implementing a selection of Marketing Metrics as outlined by Farris et.al(2006) will enable SP organisations to properly evaluate their Marcoms and adjust their strategies accordingly.

The conclusions are based on a thorough review of relevant literature; along with primary research, by means of survey research and brief follow up interview research, with the result that conclusions are linked to these sources only. It is not the intention of this study to generalise, therefore, the research findings cannot be automatically applied to all Irish software companies.

5.3 Recommendations

This study has two primary objectives. The first is to answer the research question, which has been addressed in the preceding section; and the second is to propose recommendations to improve the marcoms in SPs as demonstrated in the research findings. In order to achieve the latter objective, recommendations will be made for the conclusions from each of the individual research objectives.

5.3.1 Recommendation 1: SP's must invest in customer service training and marketing

The first conclusion to be drawn from this study is that SB's turn to their fellow colleagues the most for advice on Epos solutions. Investing in an Epos solution is a high involvement purchase and therefore will never be purchased on a whim. Knowing where SB's look to for information along with what factors are important to

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them both in terms of a company to purchase from and the features desired in their software will result in successfully generating sales leads.

All staff within a SP company should be made aware of how important positive referrals are for future growth and ultimately the profitability of the firm. Investing in customer service programs will help identify fail points, discover unhappy customers / sources of negative referral and give the SP an opportunity to deal with these problems to turn negative word of mouth into positive word of mouth.

It is said that the three M's – Men, Money and Minutes lead to the successful execution of projects in organisations. SP's can dedicate funds, staff and time into carrying out such research and enhancing satisfaction levels amongst customers through structured customer service programs.

This empirical research was solely concerned with independent Irish retailers. It would be interesting to speak with branch managers in a large organisation to see if they shared the same opinions on what they look for and value most in their Epos solution. Adding a different sector such as hospitality may also introduce new requirements of what is important in Epos software. Further research to capture these thoughts would have a number of benefits. It would greatly increase the population size and eliminate some factors that could limit the selection of Epos provider as larger organisations have larger resources such as finance, IT skills and experience.

5.3.2 Recommendation 2: Invest in Digital Strategy

The second conclusion that can be drawn from this study is while traditional solution providers are using appropriate marketing communications; they are ignoring the digital aspect of their marcoms. While some SP's may argue that they do not need to add digital to their marketing mix, they may be turning their back on the next generation of SB's. The internet is a significant source of information for most people. If a SB turns to the internet for information on SP's and picks a few from the first page of Google, a SP who is not investing in digital will miss out on such potential business.

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The empirical research highlighted the fact that many SP's shy away from investing in digital marketing strategy. In contrast, the CP's invest heavily in their digital marketing, possibly as this is aligned with the channel that is used to deliver the end solution.

The research also highlighted the fact that while all SP respondents had a website, none of the websites were e-commerce enabled meaning a visitor cannot purchase directly on the site. From secondary research conducted on CP's, every company in the sample had a comprehensive, well-structured website with plenty of information. Interestingly, despite the fact that some traditional Epos solutions are close to €10,000, none of the websites of the traditional SP offered a potential buyer the option to download a trial version of the solution to experience it first-hand.

While some SP websites contain a handful of case studies, it would be worthwhile to create a youtube video and embed it on the case studies page of the website. This will enable a prospective buyer to see the solution in action and also see/hear exactly what users have to say about the solution. As was uncovered in the empirical research, user friendly software, positive referrals from fellow colleagues and a providers experience within the purchasers sector are all powerful cues to aid in the purchasing process. One of the main advantages of employing digital marketing is the ease of which it can be measured. E.g website hits, youtube views, google analytics are all key in evaluating a digital strategy.

Further research into what the most successful digital strategies are for a SP once they have actively implemented a substantial digital marketing program would be of great academic interest in the future. This could take the form of a case study which would enable a researcher gain tremendous insight into the organisation and what really worked for them. Alternatively, a survey could be sent to a number of CPs to discover what the most effective digital strategy is. A future researcher may be more likely to gain participation in such a study if they are not an employee of a company involved in the sector.

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5.3.3 Recommendation 3: Implement Marketing Metrics

The third conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the most suitable marcom strategies for a SP are personal selling. Implementing a selection of Marketing Metrics as outlined by Farris et.al(2006) will enable SP organisations to properly evaluate their Marcoms and adjust their strategies accordingly.

While the empirical research championed personal selling as the most effective tool of traditional SP's, it cannot be emphasized enough that the future is cloud. SP's ignore the threat of fresh, young and vibrant competition in the form of CP's at their peril. The costs associated with maintaining a suitable sales force are very high; in fact it is the most expensive method of selling. While it is the most popular method for high involvement, complex and expensive products as discussed from the literature review, what happens when these factors change?

Cloud providers offer simple, streamlined software and are on a crusade to demystify the entire purchase, installation and training for users. The added benefit of technology enabling advanced functionality and greater connectivity between a retailer and their business will only go to strengthen the positive outlook SB's have on this new entrant.

Overheads and cost base are always of concern especially in an economic recession; the SaaS pricing model is very attractive to SB's, especially start-up retailers who are very cost conscious. They wish to open their business with as minimal an outlay as possible to increase profitability and manage their cash flow more prudently.

Understanding key marketing metrics will enable a SP to understand what Marcoms are delivering results and what areas to reduce budget spend and divert resources to. There is no perfect combination of metrics. The position within the product life cycle will dictate what the objectives are E.g. at introduction stage it is all about educating and brand building. From this, a suitable marketing communications 'promotions' mix will be drawn up. Based on the tools being used, metrics can then be selected to find out the required information. It may be worthwhile for a company to use an external company to carry out an impartial audit. Once marketing is seen to be generating a

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return on investment, this ensures budget allocation and security for personnel who work within this function.

The literature points out that implementing metrics is fraught with complications both in the selection and application. While many academics have investigated this area and proposed conceptual models, the body of knowledge would be greatly enhanced with more empirical research on SMEs and their usage of metrics. A study that demystified metrics for the SME owner/manager and suggested the contents of a generic dashboard could be of benefit.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This empirical research work is unique in that no other researcher has carried out a study of such depth among Irish Epos Solution Providers and Irish Epos Solution Buyers. The research offers an insight into what SP's think is important to their customers; what SB's actually value in Epos software and where they search for their information.

Solution Providers must invest more in digital strategy and put in place metrics to measure their return on this investment. It is important to keep in touch with what SB's wish from their software and constantly and consistently deliver it. There are many metrics a solution provider can utilise to aid in achieving a satisfactory ROI. It is imperative to select the correct 'dashboard' of metrics that will give the information needed to judge the marketing effectiveness of Solution Providers.

This has been a highly successful piece of research with many of the themes addressed in the study having a significant contribution to both practice and theory.

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Appendices

Marketing Metrics

ROMI = Return On Marketing Investment.

This is the contribution attributable to marketing (net of marketing spending), divided by the marketing “invested” or “risked”.

ROMI =

$$\frac{[\text{Incremental Rev. Attributable to marketing(€)} * \text{Contribution \%} - \text{Marketing Spending(€)}]}{\text{Marketing Spending (€)}}$$

To Calculate ROMI, the following metrics can be used.

Y_0 = Baseline Sales (with €0 marketing spending),

Y_1 = Sales at Marketing spending X_1 , and

Y_2 = Sales at Marketing spending level X_2 ,

Where the difference between X_1 and X_2 , represents the cost of an incremental marketing budget item that is to be evaluated, such as an advertising campaign or a trade show.

1. **Revenue Return to Incremental Marketing** = $(Y_2 - Y_1) / (X_2 - X_1)$: The additional revenue generated by an incremental marketing investment, such as a specific campaign or sponsorship, divided by the cost of that marketing investment.
2. **Revenue Attributable to Marketing** = $Y_2 - Y_0$: The increase in sales attributable to the entire marketing budget (equal to sales minus baseline sales).
3. **Revenue Return to Total Marketing** = $(Y_2 - Y_0) / (X_2)$: The revenue attributable to marketing divided by the marketing budget.
4. **Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI)** = $[(Y_2 - Y_0) * \text{Contribution \%} - X_2] / X_2$: The additional net contribution from all marketing activities divided by the cost of those activities.
5. **Return on Incremental Marketing Investment (RIOMI)** = $[Y_2 - Y_1] * \text{Contribution \%} - (X_2 - X_1) / (X_2 - X_1)$: The incremental

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Other Metrics

Customer Acquisition Cost

Average marketing and sales cost associated with acquiring new customer.

Example: total marketing investment divided by number of new customers.

Customer Retention

Percent of our customers who keep doing business with us. Customer retention rate is calculated per period, for example, annual customer retention rate.

Customer Defection

Percent of our customers who quit doing business with us. Customer defection rate is calculated per period.

Brand Recognition

Percent of target audience who recognize our brand.

Advertising Effectiveness

Sales or profit generated by our advertising activities. Example: \$ marginal sales divided by \$ advertising activities.

Customer Advocacy

Percent of new customers who were referred by our current customers.

Customer LTV

Average number of years customers do business with us times average annual sales per customer discounted over the years.

Share of Wallet

Our sales compared to total customer purchasing of related products and services.

Sales Trend Metrics

Example: Sales trend by customer segment, sales trend by channel, sales trend by product, sales trend by region, unit volume trend.

Customer Satisfaction

The level of customer satisfaction. Example: percent of customers with above average level of satisfaction, percent of dissatisfied customers, number of customer complaints.

Sales Transaction Metrics

Example: Average order size, average product price.

Innovation and Growth Metrics

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Example: Sales from new products, sales from new channels, sales from new market segments, number of new products.

Customer Base Metrics

Example: Total number of customers, number of customers per market segment, number of new customers, number of lost customers.

Product/Service Availability

Example: Percent of all retailers who sell our products and services.

Profitability Metrics

Example: % gross margin, % net margin, margin per product category, margin per customer segment.

TABLE 1
Marketing and Financial Metrics

Marketing-Mix Activity	Marketing Metrics	Financial Metrics
General metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Market share (units or dollars) •Awareness (product or brand) •Satisfaction (product or brand) •Likeability (product or brand) •Preference (product or brand) •Willingness to recommend (product or brand) •Loyalty (product or brand) •Perceived product quality •Consideration set •Total customers •Share of customer wallet •Share of voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Net profit •Return on investment •Return on sales •Return on marketing investment •Net present value •Economic value added •Marketing expenditures (percentage specifically on brand building activities) •Stock prices/stock returns •Tobin's q •Target volume (units or sales) •Customer segment profitability •Customer lifetime value
Traditional advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Impressions •Reach •Recall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cost per customer acquired/cost per thousand impressions •Lead generation •Internal rate of return
Internet advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Impressions •Hits/visits/page views •Click-through rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cost per click •Conversion rate •Internal rate of return
Direct to consumer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reach •Number of responses by campaign •New customer retention rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cost per customer acquired •Conversion rate •Lead generation
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New product development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Belief in new product concept •Attitude toward product/brand •Expected annual growth rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Expected margin (%) •Level of cannibalization/cannibalization rate •Internal rate of return
Sales force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reach •Number of responses by campaign •New customer retention rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sales potential forecast •Sales force productivity •Sales funnel/sales pipeline
Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Out-of-stock percentage/availability •Strength of channel relationships •Product category volume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Total inventory/total distributors •Channel margins •Sales per store/stockkeeping units
PR/sponsorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Volume of coverage by media •Reach •Recall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Lead generation •Cost per exposure •Total costs

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Table 1. Translating Stakeholder Audience Goals into Effectiveness Metrics: The AGREE Framework

Audience for CSR	Goal Hierarchy	Effectiveness Metrics
Classic Strategic Marketing Stakeholders		
Customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Satisfaction/delight •Availability (supply) •Value for money •Quality of life •Ego fulfillment •Self-actualization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Satisfaction level •Lifetime value •Sales, brand equity •Affective responses •Goals/achievement •Value functions
Suppliers, channel, and other collaborators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Satisfaction/delight •Availability •Value for money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Satisfaction •Lifetime value •Margins, sales
Competitors (industry)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Industry growth •Industry profitability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Market share •Penetration rates •Access
Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Profitable, growing, stable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Brand value, profitability, customer base, return on assets/investments, sales revenue
Other Stakeholders Internal to the Company		
Investors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Maximize returns, minimize risks (across time and across portfolio) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Financial returns, return on investment, abnormal returns •Stock price: mean, trend, variance
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Salaries and other remuneration •Achievement, affiliation, social, and psychological needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Acceptance/retention/turnover rates •Length of term/average cost per employee •Satisfaction, quality of life, performance
Board of directors, internal governance, and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Confidence/reassurance •Power, ego, ease of justification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Formal evaluations •External/internal audits
Personal/individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Maximize positive emotions, minimize negative emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Incidence and extent of physical/mental illness
External Stakeholders: The Community		
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Educated, healthy, wealthy, happy, stable, cohesive community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Quality-of-life indicators: physiological (health), economic, educational, social, psychological •Examples: percentage of population affected, life expectancy, literacy rates, income/nutrition per capita, disease incidence rates, birth/death rate by age
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sustainable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sustainability, improvement in indexes, pollution and toxicity levels (water, air, other)
Regulators, auditors, nongovernmental organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ensuring compliance with existing regulations and identifying new regulations to keep consumer welfare interests in line with corporate profitability goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Credit from regulators, inclusion in CSR indexes
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Providing accurate, timely, and newsworthy information to the public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Quantity and quality of press impact
Financial markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Stability, growth, and profitability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Rates of return, volatility, turnover, and liquidity over time
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Stability, growth, and profitability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Gross domestic product/gross national product, per capita, and overall; debt ratios; foreign exchange reserves

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FIGURE 1
Conceptual Model

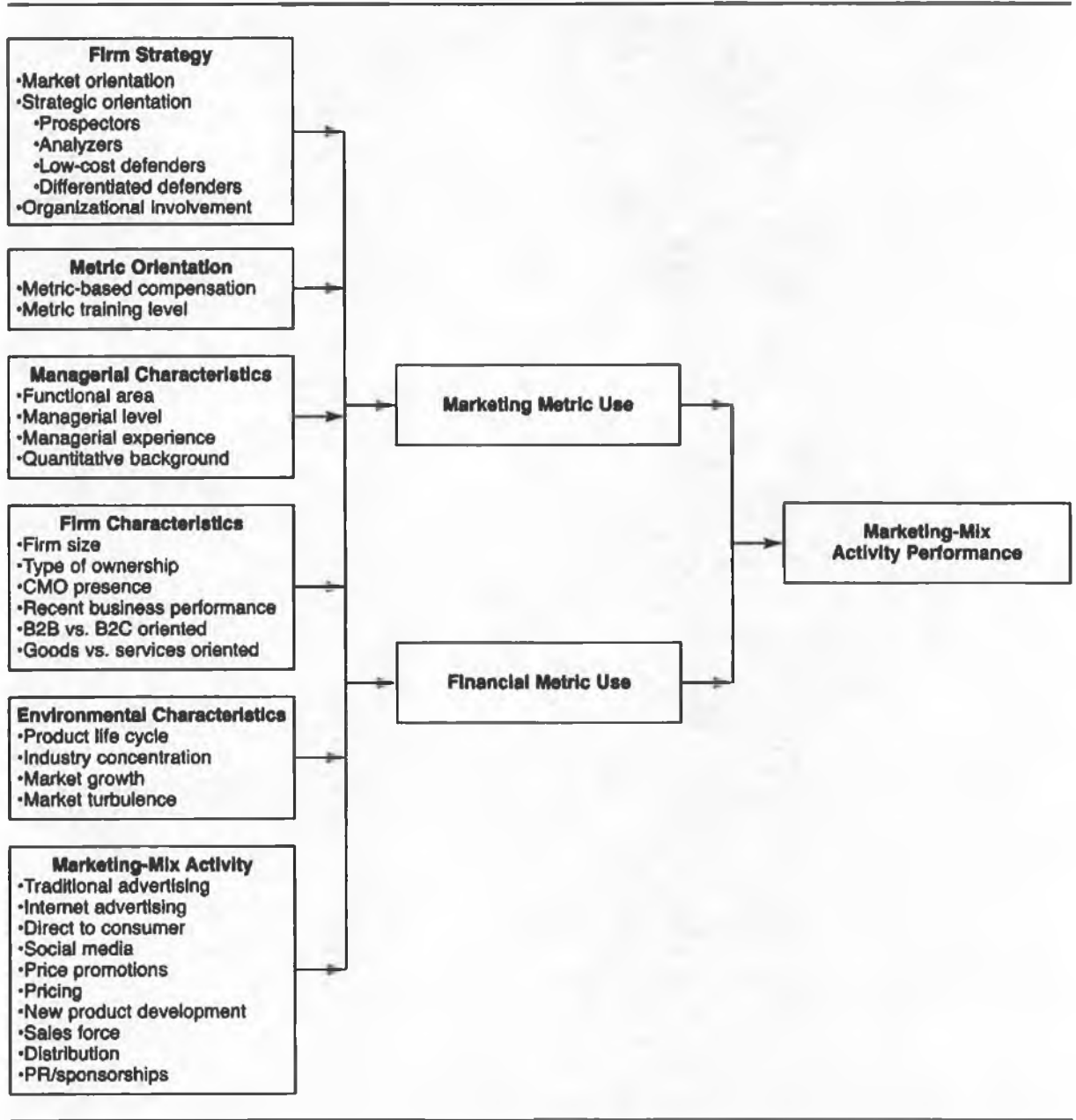


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Translating Stakeholder Audience Goals into Effectiveness Metrics: The AGREE Framework

TABLE 2 Practical issues with marketing metrics within SMEs

Financial Measures	
<p>Return on Investment (ROI)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No track record in forecasting the likely returns of marketing activities, therefore hard to solve the equation. 2. Often cynical view of potential returns from marketing (based on weak and inconsistent usage of marketing tools in the past), therefore little faith in the ROI calculation. 3. Short-term management thinking limits the scope of potential returns to months/single years thus unbalancing the ratio with an investment which may well have a multi-year effect on the brand equity. 	<p>Discounted Cash Flow (DCF)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Considered too difficult or not considered at all. 2. Setting the risk and future assumptions may be beyond the 'comfort/experience zone' of many small company managers. 3. The internal/external data required for the assumptions does not exist (or is not consistent) and not thought valuable enough to acquire.
<p>Brand Valuation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is considered of questionable relevance to non-niche SMEs and often dismissed as 'out of our league'. 2. The process of collecting/analysing the data is considered too onerous for the company and the result has little practical usage. 3. The technical jargon involved is misplaced in a small company and would not gain management support. 	<p>Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This can be a valuable metric to companies with few relatively large customers <i>providing</i> the base data has been collected in the past and is easily available - which typically it is not. 2. The relative CLV of customers is often seen as intuitive knowledge within the business (based on anecdote and aggregated impression - neither of which is accurate), thus there maybe no support for specifically calculating it. 3. Many small companies have 100s or 1,000s of customers, so to calculate CLV, even if aggregated over a number of segment groupings, may be too onerous.
<p>Economic Value Add</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not that useful as the equity capital may be very low, especially in owner-managed situation where it might be negligible, thus the formula is weak. 2. Does not identify which areas of value add were from 'marketing' per se and which from other activities that the firm naturally undertakes. 3. Changes in customer buying can have a big effect on net income which can be temporary and not related to any specific marketing activity. 	

Cont'd

Quantitative Measures	
<p>Market Share</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. External market data is typically hard/expensive to collect and not terribly accurate; whilst internal data is not always kept in a useful format (especially if the company operates across different products/services into different market segments) 2. The extent/scope of the market can be difficult to define which makes it open to debate and possible data massaging. Competitive/technical innovations may explode or contract markets rapidly invalidating previous market share calculations. 3. The usefulness of market share can be limited for companies with low shares – "so we now have 0.09% of the market, up from 0.05%" - how will this change their marketing decisions? Occasionally small companies can have a large percentage of a market, but this is typically within a specific niche - again, knowing the exact percentage probably will not materially affect their marketing decisions, though a negative change over time might indicate remedial activities (or a new niche) are needed. 	<p>Customer Satisfaction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In an SME organisation, the lion's share of revenue may come from a relatively few customers, so customer satisfaction processes in the firm could be heavily skewed to keeping the 'few' happy (at the expense of the many). This may benefit the company in the short term, but over time would increase the dependence on the current customer base thus increasing risk to the business in the event of a single or multiple customer loss. 2. It can be difficult to weight satisfaction results in terms of their impact on the business - should every customer vote be equal, or rank by revenue or rank by profitability? The consequence of this decision will have a large skewing effect on the satisfaction metric results. 3. Being low on a supply chain makes a small company vulnerable to poor satisfaction management by higher chain companies because the end-using customers has to be satisfied with the aggregated quality and service of all chain members not just the SME's contribution.
<p>Customer Loyalty (Retention)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial data on customer's is readily available through the accounting system, but customer profitability is probably not calculable on customer-specific basis as activity-based-costing is not wholly (or even partially) implemented. 2. Top customers may well be personally known to the company management, as will their perceived motivation for staying loyal. Thus, assessing loyalty beyond simple historic accounting data and the management's personal relationships is typically not valued sufficiently to warrant the cost of measuring it. 3. In B2B areas, customer loyalty can 'turn down' with customer staff changes, strategy reviews and so on that are not related to the customer service received or perceived product quality. Equally, though customers can be acquired through the movement of staff from one firm to another. 	<p>Price Premium</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In B2C markets, pricing data is relatively easy to get (by looking around), but in B2B markets this might be too difficult/expensive to achieve, especially where specific project/contract discounts are often given rather than selling from 'list price'. 2. Often small companies are price followers rather than leaders, thus they do not charge a premium. However, in some markets, small companies can deliver more a personal service thus potentially justify a price premium by changing the marketing mix, so measuring the extent of this can be useful in justifying the additional service costs, but only if they can readily capture the competitive data. 3. A sudden change in market structure, such as a large low-cost entrant, could erode an SME's price premium potential without the SME having the financial might to respond protectively

Qualitative Measures	
<p>Perceived Quality</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gathering the data, other than through anecdotal means, can be expensive. Even when gathered, it is quite likely to be part of a larger overall satisfaction survey and not specific enough to help improve quality. 2. Companies with support/maintenance service offers can measure quality through fault analysis, but only if they have an IT system (and supportive processes) for logging faults and resolutions. However, they do not see, and thus can not measure, negative quality perceptions that are not reported as faults. 3. Small companies do not 'have the time' (or more accurately 'set aside the time') for quality circles and other improvement initiatives as part of the culture – they tend to fire-fight instead. Thus having the perceived quality data would not necessarily drive positive systemic changes. 	<p>Brand Awareness</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Many SME's have very small market shares within large markets, thus they tend to focus to a great extent on servicing a) customers that already know them well and b) potential customers that are somehow proximal. In this situation, knowing their brand awareness percentage across the whole market would not materially affect their operational marketing choices. 2. SME's typically would not fund the primary market research to regularly gather comparable brand awareness statistics, preferring instead to rely on anecdotal sources. 3. SME's rarely invest in the extensive and sustained advertising that might be required to drive improved brand awareness in their target markets, thus measuring brand awareness with no reliable means of changing it would be futile.
<p>Customer Satisfaction</p> <p>Already covered above.</p>	
Hybrid Measures	
<p>Brand Equity</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Calculating brand equity would be thought of as too expensive and too difficult. Collecting and collating the volume of data needed as well as defining the calculation weightings are considered beyond the day-to-day competence of marketing staff. 2. SME's typically do not give as much consideration to their brand, its attributes and values, as do larger organisations – thus they might not see brand equity calculations as relevant/valuable. 3. Small companies could find it hard to make specific decisions (within their budget and resource constraints) to manage for brand equity rather than enacting short-term marketing campaigns designed to raise immediate revenues. A rise in brand equity may well be considered merely a beneficial by-product of a revenue-focused activity as opposed to a goal in itself. 	<p>Customer Equity</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Within SME's this would typically be thought of as too difficult to calculate. Setting the future assumptions may be beyond the 'comfort/experience zone' of many small company managers. 2. Relatively small changes in customer spending can represent major swings in CLV for a small firm – these can not be predicted or easily attributed to specific marketing activity and could be more affected by general market conditions instead. 3. Whilst customer equity calculations do give strong indications of future revenue streams they assume a level of repeat purchasing and customer churn. SME's are highly vulnerable to the impact of customer sabbaticals or defections, thus higher risk factors are needed which would lead to a reduced attractiveness for proposed marketing initiatives.

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for Master of Science at IT Sligo, I must undertake a research study. The study will investigate the marketing activities employed by Irish Epos software development companies in an effort to discover what is most effective.

What will the study involve? The study will involve the exploration of the marketing activities of Irish epos solution providers so as to identify the methods that yield the most results. This will be reinforced from research of Irish epos solution buyers.

Do you have to take part? Participation is voluntary; you can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or during participation. You can also withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes. I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the dissertation. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the dissertation will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information which you give? The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the dissertation, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed. No part of any information received will be shared with any third party organisation.

What will happen to the results? The results will be presented in the dissertation. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The dissertation may be read by future students on the course. The study may be published in a research journal.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me:
Enda Harte, 087-7870071 or harte.enda@gmail.com

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Surveys

- 1. Survey of Irish Epos Solution Buyers (SB'S)**
- 2. Survey of Irish Epos Solution Providers (SP'S)**

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Survey of Irish Epos Solution Buyers (SB'S)

5 Min Survey of Irish retailers using Electronic Point of Sale tills

1.

***1. Do you have an Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS) solution? (An Epos solution is a computerised touch screen till system)**

Yes

No

If Yes, What is the name of the company who supplied your Epos solution

***2. How many epos units/till points are in your store?**

***3. What retail sector do you operate in?**

***4. Were there any factors limiting your choice of Epos provider, such as being part of a group or finance?**

Yes

No

N/a

If Yes, What were these factors?

5. Why did you choose your existing Epos provider?

2. Page 2

6. What did you hope to achieve by implementing your current Epos solution?

***7. What are the main features of an Epos solution that are the most important to you?**

E.g Stock Control, Loyalty

8. What factors did you deem important when selecting an Epos solution provider? E.g. Track record, ease of use etc.

5 Min Survey of Irish retailers using Electronic Point of Sale tills

***9. If you were to research a new Epos solution today, where would you look for information?**

1	<input type="text"/>
2	<input type="text"/>
3	<input type="text"/>
4	<input type="text"/>
5	<input type="text"/>

***10. When investigating your Epos solution, were you able to identify significant differences between the various offerings or were they all quite similar?**

- Significant Differences
 Quite Similar

3. Page 3

***11. How confident would you be if your Epos software was delivered by cloud technology over a broadband connection?**

- Very Apprehensive
 Slightly Apprehensive
 Some Reservations
 Confident
 Very confident

***12. How satisfied are you with your current Epos provider with respect to the following?**

	Extremely Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Extremely Satisfied
Initial Price	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ongoing Maintenance Cost	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Software Updates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5 Min Survey of Irish retailers using Electronic Point of Sale tills

***13. How important are the following factors in the selection of an Epos solution, where 1 is not important and 5 is critically important**

	1 Not important	2	3	4	5 Critically Important
Initial Consultation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Total Solution Price	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hardware Options	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Type of Support offered	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Service Level Agreements (SLAs)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of Training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level of Maintenance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Easy to use Software	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Web Reporting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Loyalty Scheme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Integrating with third parties such as an accounts package or credit card provider	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Company Size	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Location of company providing solution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Age of company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to provide bespoke modifications to suit your business needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ongoing maintenance cost	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The company develop their own software	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Is there anything else you would like to add to this survey?

15. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you would like to take part in a further brief telephone interview to clarify some of your answers, please fill in your contact details

Name

Mobile No.

Email address

Enda Harte, An exploratory study of marketing activities employed by Irish Epos Software Development companies.

Survey of Irish Epos Solution Providers (SP'S)

The Marketing activities of Irish Epos Developers

***1. This research forms the basis of a Masters dissertation investigating the marketing activities employed by Epos software development companies in Ireland. The findings will be used to identify the most effective ways to market this product. As part of this research, a survey will be sent to retailers/end users to find out what they are looking for in an epos system and where they look for information.**

The student is an employee of a company active in this sector.

A summary of the findings from retailers will be provided to those who partake in this survey. All contributions will remain confidential. No source, individual or organisation will be identified or comment attributed without the permission of the originator. This research is guided by an accompanying Code of Ethics provided by IT Sligo's Ethics Committee.

Are you happy to proceed with this survey?

- Yes
 No

***2. Company Name:**

***3. How many employees do you have?**

***4. What sector(s) do you operate in?**

***5. Do you operate in the domestic market only or domestic & international market**

- Domestic only
 Domestic & International

***6. Do you have a structured marketing plan in place or is it an ad hoc activity?**

- Yes, there is a structured marketing plan in place
 No, it is an ad hoc activity

The Marketing activities of Irish Epos Developers

***7. Do you have a structured method of measuring the effectiveness of your marketing activities?**

Yes

No

If yes, could you briefly outline how you measure success

***8. What are the main objectives of your marketing activities? (please answer in order of priority.E.g Increase sales, build awareness, enter new markets etc.)**

1

2

3

4

5

***9. Please rank in order, what(if any) are the main factors restricting your marketing activities? Where 1 is the biggest restriction.**

<input type="text"/>	Financial Limitations	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
<input type="text"/>	Management Support	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
<input type="text"/>	Skills shortage	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A
<input type="text"/>	Time restrictions	<input type="checkbox"/>	N/A

***10. At what stage do you perceive the Irish Epos marketplace to be at present?**

1 Introduction

2 Growth

3 Maturity

4 Decline

The Marketing activities of Irish Epos Developers

*** 11. Do you have a specific person responsible for all marketing activities or is it shared amongst a number of staff?**

- Specific Person
 Shared amongst a number of staff

Does this person have a marketing qualification?

*** 12. In the last number of years, have you:**

- Spent more on marketing
 Spent less on marketing
 Spent the same

*** 13. What is the split of your marketing budget between traditional marketing (E.g. Trade Shows, Advertising etc.) and digital marketing (E.g. Website, Social Media etc.)**

% Spent on Traditional Marketing

% Spent on Digital Marketing

*** 14. Have you received any assistance from the Government or other state body towards marketing activities?**

- Yes
 No

If Yes, what assistance have you received

*** 15. Are all employees familiar with the marketing activities within your organisation?**

- Yes
 No

*** 16. A Part time marketer is any employee who has an impact on the overall customer experience. Are all employees aware of their role as a part time marketer?**

- Yes
 No

If Yes, how do you communicate this message to them?

The Marketing activities of Irish Epos Developers

***17. How do you sell your products and services?**

- Directly only
- Through a third party(reseller)
- A mixture of both

***18. Does your organisation have a dedicated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy?**

- Yes
- No

If Yes, how do you communicate this?

***19. Do you have a website?**

- Yes
- No

If Yes, can visitors purchase goods/services directly through the website?

The Marketing activities of Irish Epos Developers

***20. Please rate how effective you find the following Traditional marketing activities. Poor results means that any sales generated did not cover the cost of the marketing activity. Time is also considered a cost.**

	1 Not Applicable	2 Have tried it but did not get any results	3 Have used it but with poor results	4 Use it occasionally & it generates results	5 Use it regularly & find it effective	6 This is one of our main strategies as it yields results
Personal Selling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Partnerships/Alliances	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resellers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Referrals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Networking Organisations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trade Shows	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phonebook/Directory Listings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
National Newspaper Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local/Regional Newspaper Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
National Radio Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local/Regional Radio Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazine Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Direct Mail	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Telemarketing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cold Calling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sponsorship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Press Releases/PR	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please list any other activity that generates results for your company

The Marketing activities of Irish Epos Developers

***21. Please rate how effective you find the following Digital marketing activities. Poor results means that any sales generated did not cover the cost of the marketing activity. Time is also considered a cost.**

	1 Not Applicable	2 Have tried it but did not get any results	3 Have used it but with poor results	4 Use it occasionally & it generates results	5 Use it regularly & find it effective	6 This is one of our main strategies as it yields results
Google+	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google Adwords	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bing Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter Sponsored Links	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Blog	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YouTube Channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YouTube Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Electronic Newsletter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
E-Mail Shot	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please list any other Digital activity that generates results for your company

***22. Please rate how important you feel the following aspects of your Epos software actually are to your target customer. Where 1 is not important and 5 is essential.**

	1 Not Important	2	3	4	5 Essential
Functionality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cost	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Company Size	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ease of Use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3rd Party Integration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
References	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Company Location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The Marketing activities of Irish Epos Developers

***23. Do you currently have a full cloud offering?**

- Yes
- In Development
- No

***24. Do you view Software As A Service (SAAS) as a threat or an opportunity to your current business model?**

- Yes
- No
- Please explain

25. Are there any other comments that you would like to add to this piece of research?

26. Thank you for your time. If you would like to take part in a further brief telephone interview in the future to clarify some of your answers, please fill in your contact details below.

Name:

Mobile No:

Email: