

**Project Title:** E-Marketing Communications: A Case Study

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**Dissertation in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of MSc in  
Marketing Practice.**

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## **Abstract**

This research was undertaken in order to investigate e-marketing communications methods adopted by an Irish SME (Small Medium Enterprise). The investigation was based on a case study of Storm PM Ltd. The aim of the research was to examine the level of adoption and implementation of e-marketing communication. Consideration was given to e-marketing communication tools adopted by the company and the impact of e-marketing on their overall communication strategy.

The research began with a review of the literature on the subject area using books, journals and the Internet. The research method used was the case study method. Within the case study multiple sources of evidence were used, namely: observation, depth interviews and customer surveys.

The results of the study indicated that the adoption of e-marketing by Storm PM was driven mainly by reactive forces and only partially by proactive forces. The company does not have a formal strategic approach to e-marketing and therefore has no clear objectives or strategic plan for the current or future development of their e-marketing activities.

Despite a number of e-marketing communication tools being adopted to varying levels of sophistication and implemented with different degrees of success, it appears that Storm PM does not have a full understanding or is fully aware of its scope and potential. Further development of current e-marketing activities is hindered by challenges such as time and human resource constraints as well as a lack of skills and knowledge. As a result, traditional marketing methods still form the majority of any marketing campaign. Despite this, the enthusiasm and drive exists within Storm PM to make e-marketing a significant part of their communication strategy in the future.

Companies need to weigh up the value of investing time and resources to go beyond the generalist approach of merely having a company website. While businesses will have the principal responsibility for developing and investing in their e-marketing strategies, the appropriate support from government is also necessary to encourage innovation and investment.

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## **Acronyms**

<b>PR</b>	Public Relations
<b>SME</b>	Small Medium Sized Enterprise
<b>SEO</b>	Search Engine Optimisation
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>DETE</b>	Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment
<b>CSO</b>	Central Statistics Office
<b>ICT</b>	Information Communication Technology
<b>B2B</b>	Business to Business
<b>B2C</b>	Business to Consumer
<b>PSS</b>	Professional Services Sector
<b>PSSME</b>	Professional Services Sector Medium Enterprise
<b>E-CRM</b>	Electronic Customer Relationship Management System
<b>SMS</b>	Short Text Messaging
<b>OMC</b>	Online Marketing Communication



## **Introduction**

For many years, marketing campaigns were based on traditional media such as television, print and radio advertisements. But since the web concept was first proposed in the late 1980's by Sir Tim-Bernes-Lee, there have been great changes in marketing communications (Chaffey *et al*, 2009). The digital equivalent of this traditional media is known as e-marketing. In today's business climate, e-marketing is a significant part of the marketing activity surrounding every important brand (Krishnamurthy, 2006, p.51). For Irish SMEs the Internet is described as the SMEs gateway to global business and markets (Liikanen, 2001). However, whether SMEs are as yet using the Internet as an effective and efficient marketing tool remains to be seen. In view of this, the aim of this research was to examine the level of adoption and implementation of e-marketing communications by an SME based in Co. Donegal, Ireland.

This investigation is based on a case study of Storm PM Ltd. Overall objectives of this exploratory study was to identify the e-marketing communication tools the company utilises and evaluate the impact of e-marketing on the company's marketing communication strategy.

For this research, a single case study approach was adopted as the author had the opportunity to spend a 16 week work placement within Storm PM Ltd. Within the case study a number of data collection methods were employed namely: observation, depth interviews and a customer survey. Key finding from this research, show that Storm PM does not have a formal strategic approach to e-marketing. E-marketing is driven mainly by reactive forces and only partially by proactive forces. Storm PM is enthusiastic about e-marketing and sees it as a significant part of their marketing communication strategy going forward. However, in order to develop this e-marketing they must first overcome the challenges that many SMEs face namely: time and human resource constraints as well as a lack of knowledge and skills.

By examining e-marketing within a real life context, this research begins to understand how SMEs are approaching e-marketing and implementing it in order to achieve their overall company objectives.

# Chapter 1 Literature Review

## 1.1. Introduction

Organisations that seek to be successful in the future are striving for the implementation of a successful e-business and e-marketing strategy (Pavic *et al*, 2007, p.320). Implementing e-marketing by SMEs can change the shape and nature of SMEs businesses. Because of the rapid proliferation of the Internet, electronic communication has created fast growing new electronic channels for marketing. For that, the Internet is now playing a very important role in conducting marketing activities, due to its unique characteristics as a market and a medium (EI – Gohary *et al*, 2008, p.64).

The marketing function has arguably seen the greatest change due to the possibilities offered in online communication (Krishnamurthy, 2006, p. 51). Thus, online marketing communication has grown to be an important part of a company's promotional mix (Jensen, 2008, p.502). Brodie *et al*'s, (2007), study of the penetration of e-marketing has shown that there has been growth in the penetration of e-marketing. With over 70 per cent of firms having adopted e-marketing at medium or high levels, it is becoming an important marketing practice in the majority of firms.

This literature review defines e-business and e-marketing and notes the distinctions between the two. The impact of e-business on SMEs is also discussed. E-marketing strategies and e-marketing communication tools are reviewed in detail. In relation to SMEs, this review also examines the opportunities and challenges presented by e-marketing.

## **1.2 Overview of E-business**

### **1.2.1 E-business a contextualisation**

There is no universally accepted definition of e-business (Pavic *et al*, 2007, p. 322). As a result, the term e-business is used interchangeably (Fillis *et al*, 2003) and many researchers are using the terms e-marketing/Internet-marketing/e-commerce/e-business as equivalents or a different wording for the same meaning, which is incorrect because they are different. (Lawson *et al*, 2003: Gilmore *et al*, 2007). Gilmore *et al*, (2007, p.235) states that e-commerce and e-marketing are merely parts of e-business. They refer to e-business as ... ‘the use of digital interactive technologies and information technology in order to conduct a firms business’.

E-marketing has a broader scope than Internet marketing since it refers not only to digital media such as the web, e-mail and wireless media, but also includes the management of E-CRMs (Chaffey *et al*, 2009). In contrast, e-commerce and e-business have a wider and broader scope than e-marketing. E-commerce is doing business electronically across the extended enterprise. It covers any form of business or administrative transaction or information exchange that is executed using information and communication technology. E-business is a wider concept that embraces all aspects of the use of information technology in business. It includes not only buying and selling, but also servicing customers and collaborating with business partners (Rowley, 2001, p. 204).

### **1.2.2 Defining SME**

E-marketing is investigated in this report in the context of SMEs. On 6 May 2003 the Commission adopted a new Recommendation 2003/361/EC regarding the SME definition which replaced Recommendation 96/280/EC as from 1 January 2005. SMEs are defined as follows: ‘The category of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is made up of enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding €50m and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding €43m’ (EU Commission, 2003).

### **1.2.3 Impact of E-business on SMEs.**

E-business technologies are expected to allow SMEs to gain capabilities that were once the preserve of their larger competitors (Xu *et al*, 2007, p.74). E-business trends observed among European companies in 2007/2008 showed more advanced forms of e-business employed by SMEs, as the use of e-business for providing better service to customers with the goal of creating sustained relationships and increasing the efficiency of internal processes (European e-Business Report, 2008).

However, Xu *et al*, (2007, p.88) study of e-business adoption in SMEs identifies the main challenges to e-business adoption as: internal factors such as lack of resources, expertise and strategic vision. In order to help SMEs maximise their competitive advantage, the Irish National eBusiness Strategy was devised by the DETE in 2004. The main objective of the study was to improve the availability of e-business solutions for SMEs (European Commission – eBSN- Ireland: National eBusiness Strategy, 2009). A progress report presented in 2006 demonstrated that although significant progress was being made in terms of support to SMEs a number of key issues have still to be addressed, namely: awareness, training and eProcurement (European Commission – eBSN – National Initiatives, 2009).

### **1.2.4 The future for E-business**

E-business will play a critical role in the future development of SMEs. As the digital world expands SMEs will have to adopt efficient e-business strategies in order to remain competitive and compete in tomorrow's global economy. The European e-Business Report (2008) identified emerging trends for e-business adoption among European businesses as: the revision of business models in line with e-strategy including decisions on value chains, product portfolios and distribution channels. This will be driven by market developments and competitive demands. In addition, e-business will play a critical role in introducing new business processes such as organisational and process innovation in companies.

## **1.3 E-marketing**

### **1.3.1 E-marketing – a contextualisation**

(Brodie *et al*, 2007, p.4) defined e-marketing as ... ‘using the Internet and other interactive technologies to create and mediate dialogue between the firm and identified customers’. E-marketing is the result of information technology applied to traditional marketing. It affects traditional marketing in two ways. Firstly it increases efficiency in traditional marketing functions. Secondly, the technology of e-marketing transforms many marketing strategies (Strauss, *et al*, 2005). Smith and Chaffey (2005) and Gilmore *et al* (2007, p.235), also refer to e-marketing as use of digital interactive technologies and information technology to execute the traditional marketing practices of creating communication and delivering value to customers.

On reviewing relevant literature on e-marketing it is often considered the same as Internet marketing. However Harridge-March (2004, p.298) argues that if mobile telephones and digital television are to be used as tools with which to access the Internet, then perhaps the term “Internet marketing” is not strictly correct, and the term “electronic marketing” is more appropriate. E-marketing is broader than Internet marketing as it refers to digital media such as web, e-mail and wireless media and also includes the management of E-CRM (Chaffey, *et al*, 2009). Although e-marketing is seen by some to include interactive technologies related to CRM’s, sales activity and research analysis (Brady *et al*, 2002 as cited in Brodie, *et al*, 2007), this report will take the view of Barwise and Farley (2005,p.68) that e-marketing is seen as ‘Internet-based advertising and communication’. Therefore, this research is not an attempt to cover the broader scope of e-marketing or marketing communications but an examination of e-marketing communications.



## 1.4 E-marketing strategies

An Internet marketing strategy is needed to provide consistent direction for an organisation's e-marketing activities so that they integrate with its other marketing activities and support its overall business objectives (Chaffey *et al*, 2009). E-marketing flows from the organisation's overall e-business strategies and selected business models. From these, marketers formulate strategies and create e-marketing plans to achieve goals. To do this, e-marketers must select the appropriate tools (Strauss *et al*, 2005).

In their study of B2B Internet marketing, Eid *et al*, (2006, p.210) identified and prioritised Critical Success Factors (CSF) in the adoption and implementation of Internet use and strategies in a B2B context. These CSF's included marketing strategy related factors such as top management commitment to developing an integrated internet marketing strategy and setting strategic goals for Internet use. This strategy will determine external factors like customer and supplier relationships, the nature of the Internet access in terms of affordability and appropriateness. In general, they found that all these factors should be considered at the early and long-term phase of e- marketing implementation.

Sheth and Sharma's (2005) research on the evolution and strategic direction of e-marketing strategies in international environments highlights that organisations need to be aware of the emerging competition from firms practicing e-marketing strategies. They found that organisations need to develop unique e-marketing strategies based on the countries where they operate. Organisations that do not follow e-marketing strategies will be at a cost disadvantage. Whatever the origin of an organisation, they need to be early adopters of e-marketing strategies or they will face competition from entrenched e-marketers (Sheth and Sharma's 2005, p.621).

Kalyanam and Mc Intyre (2002, p.498) developed a single unifying and theoretically based taxonomy for e-marketing techniques: the e-marketing mix. The e-marketing taxonomy enables the development of the e-marketing strategy by enabling the holistic consideration of various e-marketing functions. Mapping the functions into e-marketing tools facilitates implementation. Comparison to the traditional marketing mix indicates that the e-marketing mix provides continuity to the 4P's, (Product, Price, Promotion and Place) with the following new elements: site, personalisation, security, privacy, community and customer support. Reedy and Schullo (2004) state that once the market segment is designated as the target group, the planning process is initiated using the traditional paradigm of the 4P's. These are then supported by a traditional and electronic promotional strategy. Apart from the traditional marketing programme, the strengths of the electronic marketing programme are the speed, accuracy and the interactive capabilities that help create a long term marketing relationship with the customer or prospect. This level of intimacy that can be achieved with electronic marketing tools can grow and produce a mutually beneficial relationship.

Sultan and Rohm's (2004) study of the evolving role of the Internet in marketing strategies found that companies use ...'the Internet for creating value chain efficiencies, reducing costs and enhancing customer and channel relationships'. In addition in order to achieve this 'companies Internet strategy and usage follow a series of stages where they shift current strategy as needed through learning and experimentation'.

Similarly Thrassou and Vrontis (2008) identify a set of 'Terminal Catalysts' that necessitate the application of Internet marketing as a primary facilitator of strategic PSSME marketing. These include: Internet Marketing's (IM) ability to increase competitiveness through the minimisation of size disadvantage, IM ability to increase customer satisfaction and ultimately facilitate growth and/or profit, IM ability to support and improve all strategic marketing process steps and IM's ability to act as a marketing communications tool.

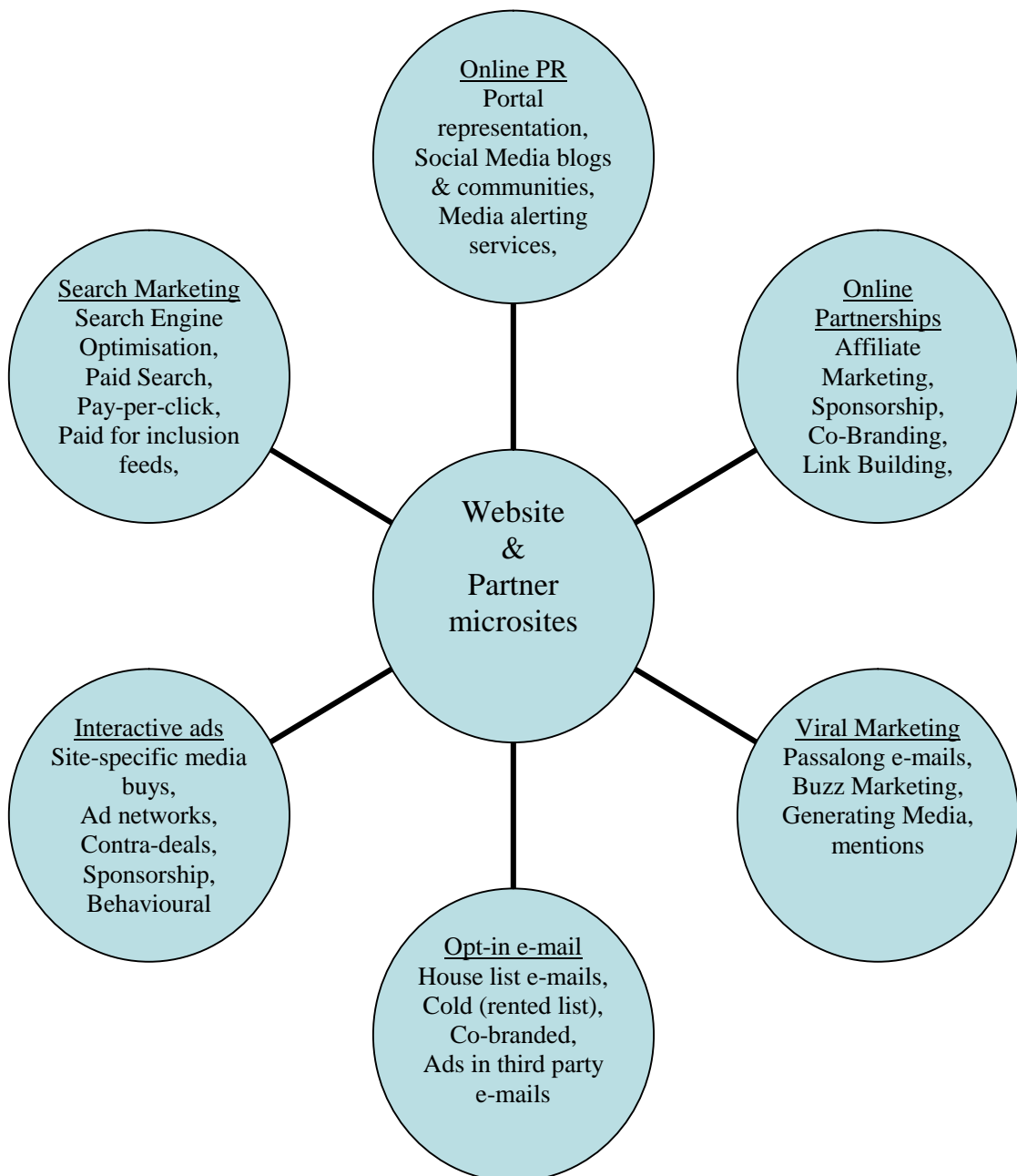
An e-marketing survey carried out by company Media Logic, (2006) to understand how B2B companies implement e-marketing strategies and what challenges they face, found that 88 per cent of respondents use e-marketing. The top four tools were: e-mail marketing (95 per cent) SEO (65 per cent), on-line advertising (60 per cent) and web analytics (50 per cent).

One of the challenges facing companies who implement e-marketing strategies is the exposure of the Internet. The Internet is a global channel of communication however the exposure that this can leave a company and its products or services open to can have drastic consequences. The growing popularity of Internet sites where users may discuss their opinions on company's products or services allows for increased scrutiny. Therefore companies need to consider this when developing strategies. Businesses which examine the ramifications of online exposure are better able to create and maintain a positive Internet strategy which facilitates effective international promotion (Van Doren, *et al*, 2000 as cited in Fletcher *et al*, 2004).

## 1.5 E-marketing tools

When planning an online marketing campaign or as part of a communication strategy there are many tools that can be used to achieve the objectives of an e-marketing strategy. Chaffey and Smith (2008), classify online marketing tools into six main groups shown in Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1 Six categories of e-communication tools and media channels (Chaffey and Smith, 2008).**



Kalyanam and Mc Intyre (2002, p. 489) highlight aspects of e-marketing promotion as online advertising, sponsored links on search engines, outbound e-mail and viral marketing. Struass *et al*, (2005) suggest, online advertising, database marketing, direct e-mail, online sales and viral marketing. Based on research carried out on Online Marketing Communication (OMC) tools, Jensen (2008) divided OMC into five disciplines: online advertising (banner ads, SEO marketing), online relationship communication (direct e-mail, context-based service, e-learning), online interactive communication (online competitions, micorsites), online PR (viral marketing) and mobile communication (mobile marketing via SMS, mobile phone homepages).

Krishnamurthy (2006) presented the E-MARKPLAN, offering a methodology to plan e-marketing activities. E-marketing actions are classified into three broad categories: communication actions (banner ad, pop-up ad), analytics (SEO and traffic analysis) and customer relationship management (focuses on individual customer or group of customers) (Krishnamurthy and Singh, 2005).

A survey based on interactive marketing channel adoption highlights the main e-marketing tools currently being used by companies in the U S as: E-mail marketing (95 per cent), SEO (79 per cent), viral marketing (68 per cent) and social media (64 per cent). (VanBoskirk, 2009). Forecast of interactive market spend in the US expects marketing spend on advertising media, SEO, e-mail, mobile marketing and social media to grow from \$23 billion in 2008 to nearly \$55 billion by 2014. This growth is attributed to marketers seeking lower costs and more accountable channels which are used by their customers. by VanBoskirk (2009) of Forrester's (2009

For the purpose of this research the focus will be on: websites, e-mail marketing, SEO, viral marketing and social networking marketing e-marketing tools and their online capabilities as an e-marketing resource. Each of these tools will be individually reviewed in detail.

## Websites

Chaffey and Smith (2008, p.226) highlight key variables for website design as (1) high quality content (2) ease of use (3) quick to download and (4) updated frequently. They believe that ‘content is king ... easy to use sites means good navigation ... good sites download quickly ... and ... good sites stay fresh’. Eid *et al*, (2006) study to identify Critical Success Factors (CSF) of B2B international Internet marketing found that a well designed site that is effectively marketed, easy to find, up-to-date, clear and accurate are the most important factors of a website. However, attention is also given to ease and speed of use. In other words, although some companies may consider that site appearance is of paramount importance, for new and existing customers, website design should reflect use as much as if not more so than appearance, since some sites may appear attractive but may be difficult to use.

Lace’s (2004) study of the main role and features of Business to Consumer (B2C) websites were found to be to provide information on products and services. The roles of enhancing brand image, creating awareness and providing customer service also ranked highly. Users arriving at a site home page will decide, based on their first impressions, whether to explore the site in more depth or leave it and go instead to a competitor’s site (Aldiri *et al*, 2008). This view is supported by Goode and Harris (2007, p.522) who’s study of online behaviour intentions found that ... ‘the link between appearance and site design and behavioural intentions supports the view that website aesthetics and layout are key factors in determining the attitudes and actions of online consumers’.

Dabholkar and Sheng’s (2008, p.267) base model predicts that ... ‘perceptions of download waiting will have strong negative consequences on consumer attitudes toward using that company’s web site’. To avoid the customer abandoning a slow loading website, they encourage online marketers to ... ‘increase customer involvement with their web site .... through emotional appeal ...and... enhance a customer’s mood through music or colour’.

In Ireland in 2007, 78 percent of businesses with 100+ employees had a website compared to 42 per cent of business with 1-9 employees. Of those companies with a company website, 80 per cent used it for advertising the company and its services, 27 per cent to provide contact information only, 21 per cent to sell products and services and 13 per cent for capturing visitor information for follow up activities (eBusiness Survey, 2007). These results suggest that companies are not yet using their website to its full potential. According to the CSO (2007) broadband usage for enterprises in Ireland was 68 per cent, hence the infrastructure for developing Internet technologies to facilitate e-marketing exists and could be further exploited.

Once a website has been designed, developed and implemented it is then important to promote the website. Promotion is necessary in order to generate traffic to the site. Fletcher *et al*, (2004) highlight online methods of promoting a website as: search tools, advertising banners, discussion groups (blogs, social media), e-mailing and associate sites. One way to measure the traffic to and from your website is through web (Google) analytics. These software tools record “site statistics” such as volume of traffic, its source (referring sites) and which content is popular on site including clickstreams of each visit (Smith and Chaffey, 2005).

### **E-mail Marketing**

The Internet provides companies with many different methods to which they can collect customer information which they can use to target specific target audiences. Through their websites, companies can gather customer information in exchange for free information or services by using sign-up boxes on their company website. This information can subsequently be used by those companies for direct marketing. The online medium for this direct marketing is e-mail (O'Connor *et al*, 2004). Compared with offline direct marketing, online direct marketing allows customisation, personalisation and niche targeting in a much more flexible, easier, quicker and cheaper way (Kitchen 2004). Baggott and Sales (2007, p.24) agree ... ‘that with proper targeting, tracking tools and a carefully built opt in list, e-mail can be highly personalised to the need of the individual customer’. Having the permission of your audience to e-mail them news, promotions and other online messages is also important. E-mailing a newsletter or bulletin to customers that has already given you their permission will be a lot more effective (Murray 2006).

Burke (2008) states that a strong e-mail strategy should focus on encouraging e-mail subscribers in the following ways: e-mail sign – up box on websites. Promote sign-up by offering discounts on purchases, ask customers to opt in, not opt out, and back up with an e-mail verification. Immediately send a welcome message that puts recipients on the path to purchase and use subsequent event-based e-mails as merchandising opportunities.

### **Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)**

SEO can be divided into two categories: (1) organic and (2) paid optimisation. Organic SEO refers to achieving good search rankings for a website without paying for it. Paid SEO or Search Engine Advertising (SEA) may be known in the form of Google Adwords (Jensen, 2008). A recent survey carried out by the National e-learning Laboratory in Ireland found that Irish users of Google’s search engine pay more attention to “organic” search results than to advertisements placed on the page. Users also paid more attention to the highest-ranking result rather than the sponsored links at the top of the page (O’Brien, 2009).

Search engines send out automatic programmes called spiders on the web to go from site to site, page by page, and word by word. These spiders build up a massive database of all the words found, where they were found and how many times they appear on each page. All this information is stored in a database and when users type in a search term, this is the database that is actually queried. E-marketers can ensure their sites to appear high in search engine rankings preferable on the first page by carefully studying the search engines to determine their algorithms for ranking pages. The analysis provides information that can be used to redesign website pages so they will rise in the rankings (Strauss *et al*, 2005).



Brown (2007, p.66 ) states that an organisation must ... 'always be prepared to up-date and change the look, feel and design of your web page to make sure that you are using SEO techniques'. In addition Brown (2007, p. 66) offers a checklist to ensure effective SEO:

- Title tag, this should include keywords and key phrases that are relevant to your product or service.
- META Tags, this includes META description tags and META keywords tags.
- ALT Tags, Add these to all the images that you use on your web pages.
- Web content, use accurate and rich key words throughout the web content of all web site pages.
- Links and affiliates, use these effectively for the website.
- Web design, ensure that the web page is fast to load and easy to navigate to encourage people to stay and read your website therefore increasing traffic.

## **Viral Marketing**

The two main forms of viral marketing are best known as 'word of mouth' and 'word of mouse'. Both rely on networks of people to spread the word and a viral marketing execution needs to create a buzz to be successful. (Smith and Chaffey, 2005). Kirby and Marsden (2005) describe viral marketing as ... 'the promotion of a company or its products and services through a persuasive message designed to spread, typically online, from person to person. Creating branded Internet materials or websites that consumers enjoy sharing with their friends'. Chaffey and Smith (2005) identifies different types of viral marketing as: pass along viral e-mails (an e-mail with a link to a site such as a video or an attachment), web facilitated viral (an e-mail contains a link /graphic to a web page or a web page contains a link to e-mail a friend) and web-link viral (links in discussion group postings or blogs).

To make a viral campaign happen, Kirby (2003) suggest three things: (1) Creative material – the viral agent. This includes the creative message or offer and how it is spread (text, image, video). (2) Seeding, identify web sites, blogs or people to send e-mail to start the virus spreading. (3) Tracking, to monitor the effect and to assess the return from the cost of developing the viral agent and seeding.

In a viral marketing campaign, a company uses the influence of its own customers to promote a product or service to prospective customers (Hanson and Kalyanam, 2006). If implemented properly, Jurvetson (2000) believes that viral marketing models promise hockey stick growth with little or no marketing expenditures. The availability of a large network of users, coupled with a low-cost communication mechanism, drives the realisation of this promise (Kalyanam *et al*, 2007).

Despite this low cost, measuring the Return on Investment (ROI) of viral marketing can be difficult. Ferguson (2008), queries that although there is no doubt that viral marketing builds brand awareness, does it build market share and can the effect of viral marketing campaigns on the bottom line be measured? He found that the desire for measurable results has led marketers away from viral tactics that draw short-term attention to tactics that allow for prospect identification and capture behavioural data.

## **Social Networking**

A social network has been defined as ... 'a site that facilitates peer-to-peer communication within a group or between individuals through providing facilities to develop user-generated content and to exchange messages and comments between different users' (Chaffey *et al*, 2009). For the month of December 2008, the top two social networking sites on the Internet were Myspace.com (75,919 visitors) and Facebook (54,552 visitors) (ComScore 2009, available from [www.clickz.com](http://www.clickz.com)).

Online communities can either be established by a company or by its customers. They are a means by which companies can gain a valuable insight into their customer's opinions about their products or services. Dwyer 's (2007) study of social networking used the Adopted PageRank, metric for measuring the value a community assigns each word of mouth instance and the value a community assigns to the people who create them. He found that content of high value to the community attracts the most attention regardless who originated the content. Therefore that high value content explains 10 per cent of social network growth. Dwyer concludes that since high quality content plays a significant role in building online community, companies who have products with active online communities should consider hosting a blog so they can play an active role in injecting such content into their user

community. However, the company must hold back from trying to control their consumer communities and let emergent forces among the consumers be the guiding influence.

Brown *et al*, (2007) believe that social networking offers the opportunity to connect with audiences drifting away from traditional media. In fact, social networking is one sector of the economy that seems to be booming in the midst of the recession. Businesses spent \$2.2 billion on social-networking in 2008, nearly twice as much as in 2007, primarily through advertising on sites such as MySpace and Facebook (Knowledge @ Wharton, 2009).(no author).

Owyang's (2009) study of the future of social networking found that social networking is increasing rapidly and therefore to expect the space to rapidly innovate to match this trend. He believes companies should prepare by: immediately factoring social networking into their plans, prepare for every webpage and product to be reviewed by your customer and viewed by future customers and evolve your CRM's to connect to the social web as a valuable source of customer information and lead generation. This customer information can then be used when implementing direct marketing. Stone and Jacobs (2008, p.346 ) agree that ... 'social networking tools work for direct marketing when they combine engaging content with a focus on something of interest to groups that can be identified by demographics such as age and personal or business interests'.

## 1.6 E-marketing: opportunities and challenges for SMEs

Despite the fact that many small businesses in Ireland are connected to the Internet, research indicates that the use of the Internet by SMEs is still relatively underdeveloped. As mentioned earlier in this research documentation, only 42 per cent of businesses with 1-9 employees have a website (eBusiness Survey, 2007). So why are SMEs not taking more advantage of the Internet as a means to improve business competitiveness?

Recent studies suggest that effective adoption of e-marketing among SMEs may rely on individual factors such as organisational size, structure, mix of available human and financial resources and capabilities. Although SMEs are more flexible and more adaptable to change, they lack the human and financial resources and capabilities of large firms (Pavic *et al*, 2007). This study supports results from a Media logic survey carried out in 2006, this cited the main e-marketing adoption obstacles as: time and resources (63 per cent), cost concerns (35 per cent), ability to track results (28 per cent) and management buy-in (27 per cent) (Media logic, 2006).

Gilmore *et al*, (2007) states that whilst the traditional strengths of SMEs are their ability to serve niche markets and develop strong relationships with customers, these are diluted by Internet enabled businesses of any size. The threat of entry from larger companies is greater because of the lower transaction costs involved in entering markets dominated by SMEs. This poses the dilemma of either jumping on the bandwagon of Internet marketing adoption, and perhaps not fully understanding all the implications, or waiting and being left behind by competing businesses that are already using the Internet and e-marketing (Herbig and Hale, 1997).

In contrast to this, Pavic *et al*, (2007) states that traditionally, large organisations set up business in geographical locations close to their customers. Thus large organisations had a competitive advantage over SMEs as they could reach their customers more effectively. The introduction of the Internet and e-marketing is now closing the gap between large organisations and SMEs and the pattern of winning in the market space is changing. Competitive advantage, which once belonged exclusively to large organisations, is now becoming available to SMEs through geographically open boundaries created by the Internet.

The Gilmore *et al.*, (2007) study of SMEs in Northern Ireland found that SMEs perceived value of e-marketing is to enrich company promotion by advertising in more markets with less expense, using e-mail as a marketing tool and decreasing the costs of printing materials such as catalogues and glossy brochures. Overall these SMEs did not use e-marketing to its full scope and potential, especially in relation to developing corporate image or competitive advantage. In addition, the SMEs believed that e-marketing's role in generating revenue still remains to be seen. However, they still retained a collective belief that the Internet and e-marketing is essential in today's business environment and that it will be important in the future.

This sentiment is backed by Sheth and Sharma (2005) who state that the Internet has been presented as an opportunity for smaller firms because it helps reduce transaction costs and level the playing field. Benefits include: improving competitiveness, the availability of better and faster communication and access to global markets. The web is providing a less costly and more effective channel for advertising, marketing and distributing goods (Hoffman and Novak, 1996 as cited in Sheth and Sharma, 2005). Moreover, Bernroider's, (2008) study of e-marketing adoption among SMEs and Medium Enterprises (ME) found that that compared to ME's, SME e-marketing adoption was much higher. SMEs were found to exploit e-marketing as an additional marketing channel, allowing for global reach.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has given a detailed outline and examination of the current literature concerning the areas of e-business and in more detail, e-marketing. This literature review has revealed and as pointed out by Gilmore *et al*, (2008, p234) that there is a lack of research on such issues as successful e-marketing techniques, the role of the Internet in relation to organisations' marketing activities and the viability of e-marketing for SMEs. Brown *et al* (2007), agrees that research in marketing is currently in an embryonic state regarding the electronic marketplace, both in terms of how consumers interact with each other online and how firms utilise the Internet to drive value creation activities. With this in mind, this research will use the current literature to form the basis for the development of this new study into the e-marketing activities of an Irish SME.

## Chapter 2 Research Methodology

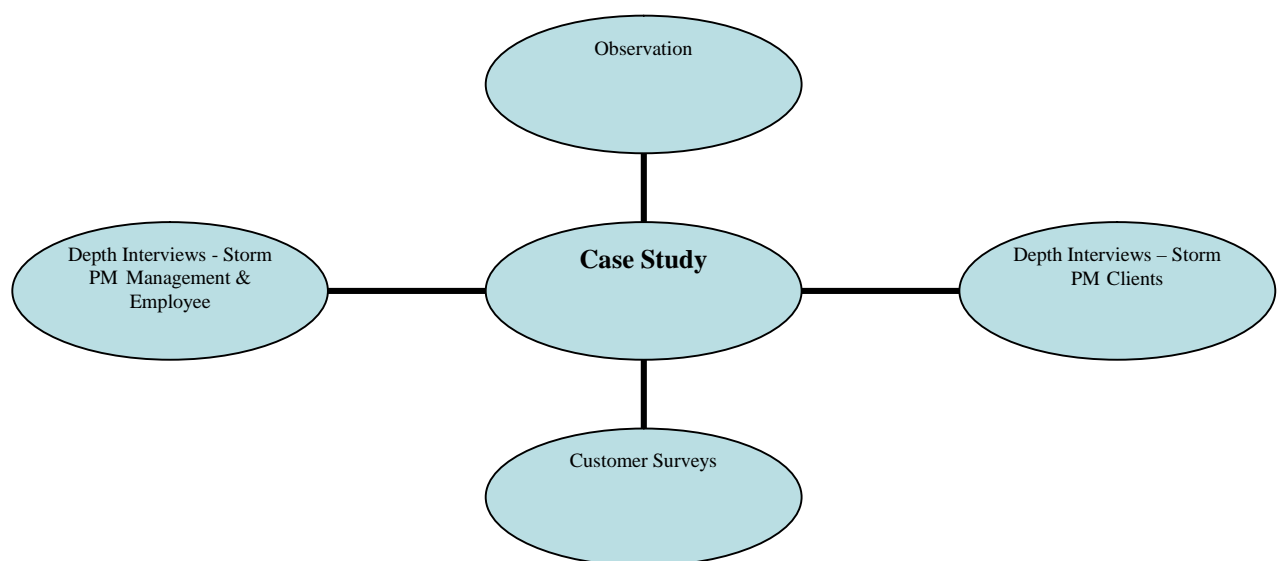
### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies the research methods adopted in order to obtain the appropriate information to meet the research aim and objectives.

To investigate the e-marketing activities of Storm PM Ltd, the case study method was applied. The case study was the method of choice as the researcher was dealing with a relatively new area of study (e-marketing) and one where the research aimed to produce a first-hand understanding of events and people (Yin, 2004). Therefore, the researcher adopted an exploratory research approach with the purpose of providing a level of understanding of Storm PM's e-marketing activities.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of research were utilised. To ensure reliability and validity of qualitative research (Hair *et al*, 2003), triangulation was applied within the case study. Multiple sources of evidence were used, namely: observation, depth interviews and customer surveys. Data triangulation within the case study was used to compare the different perspectives presented by the depth interviews and customer surveys and subsequently used to compare with and validate the researcher's observations

**Figure 2.1** Research methods used in the case study



## **2.2 Research Philosophy**

Case study research has been used in the past within both the positivist and interpretivist philosophical traditions (Cavaye, 1996: Doolin, 1996). The positivist epistemology relies on a host of scientific methods that produce numerical and alphanumeric data and is often referred to as quantitative data. Interpretivist research sometimes referred to as qualitative data does not focus on numbers but rather on words, observations and images or pictures to reveal an understanding of issues or situations (Remenyi, 2008).

Yin (2002, p.33) states that “Case study research can be either quantitative or qualitative. The characteristics of each are not attributes of two competing types of research. Instead they are attributes of types of data”. For this research, a mainly qualitative research approach was used and quantitative to a lesser extent.



### 2.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to examine the level of adoption and implementation of e-marketing communications by an SME based in Co. Donegal, Ireland.

The research objectives as outlined in Table 2.1 include: identifying the e-marketing communication tools currently used by the company in terms of the main e-marketing tools identified in the literature. Observation and reviewing internal documentation will assist in achieving this objective. Depth interviews with the Owner/Manager and an employee will provide an insight into the evolution of the company’s e-marketing and measure the impact of on the company’s marketing communication strategy. The last objective is concerned with conducting a customer survey and depth interviews with clients in order to gain and understanding of their perceptions of the company’s e-marketing tools.

**Table 2.1 Research objectives and method of research**

Objectives	Method
Identify the e-marketing communication tools the company is currently using in terms of: Website E-mail Marketing Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) Viral Marketing Social Network Marketing	Observe internal operations.  Review internal documentation
To measure the impact of e-marketing on the company’s marketing communication strategy.	Depth interview - Owner & Manager  Depth interview - employee
Identify customers/clients perceptions of e-marketing communication activities.	Depth interviews with a selection of Storm PM’s clients.
Identify customers/end-users perceptions of e-marketing communication activities.	Customer Survey with a selection of Storm PM’s customers.

## **2.4 Case Study Method**

This research adopted the case study method to examine the e-marketing activities of Storm PM Ltd. The case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings (Eisenhardt, 1989). Compared to other methods, the strength of the case study method is its ability to examine in-depth a “case” within its “real-life” context (Yin, 2004). Case studies can involve either single or multiple cases. There are different views on how many case studies should be used for a Masters thesis. Perry (1998) cited Hedges, (1985, pp 76-77) states that ‘in practice four to six groups probably form a reasonable minimum for a serious project’. However, Patton (1990, p.185) states that ‘the validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the case selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size’.

Therefore, for this research, a single case study approach was deemed the most appropriate as the researcher had the opportunity to spend 16 weeks work placement within the company. During this time, the researcher was able to directly examine, in detail, the company’s e-marketing activities through compiling a marketing audit, PR and brand strategy and a marketing plan. Therefore, by applying the case study method, the research area was analysed fully and complexities explored.

### **2.4.1 Selecting the case**

In this research the selected case is Storm PM Ltd. The logic of a case study is that in order to obtain a complete picture of the entire situation one must examine a real life example (Hair *et al*, 2003). As the researcher was working within the company for 16 weeks one was able to identify interactions between all the variables in a real life setting. The bounded case strategy was adopted for this research. This was deemed a suitable strategy as the research focuses on a single item, namely: e-marketing.

### **2.4.2 Case Analysis**

In order to analyse the case an issue by issue method was adopted. The issues as highlighted in the literature consisted of: website, e-mail marketing, SEO, viral marketing and social networking marketing. Each issue relates back to the research aim and objectives and was examined in detail through observation, depth interviews and a customer survey. The impact of each of these issues on the company's marketing communication strategy was also analysed.

### **2.4.3 Sources of Evidence**

Eisenhardt, (1989), states that case studies typically combine data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires and observation. The evidence may be quantitative, qualitative or both. Yin (2004) agrees that in collecting case study data, the main idea is to "triangulate" or establish converging lines of evidence to make your findings as robust as possible. On this guidance, this research combined qualitative data from interviews and observations and quantitative data from a customer survey.

### **2.4.4 Depth Interviews**

Interviews are a method of collecting data in which selected participants are asked questions in order to find out what they think or feel (Collis and Hussey, 2003). The type of interviews used was semi-structured in nature. These are often used in case study research and involve the interviewer arranging meetings with key people who pose relevant information on the case issues and follows a particular structure (open questions) in order to collect information (Blumberg *et al*, 2005).

Depth interviews were undertaken with the Owner/ Manager (Appendix A) and an employee (Appendix B) of Storm PM. The choice of respondents was chosen on the principle that information is best elicited from people who have knowledge of the phenomenon (Salo *et al*, 2006).

The interviews took place over the last two weeks of April 2009 in the Storm PM offices. This interview-based qualitative approach was adopted in order to capture a profile of the e-marketing approaches of each of the respondents. Depth interviews also offered the opportunity to listen to the interviewees and engage in dialogue (Moriarty *et al*, 2008). In addition, depth interview participants are usually more comfortable discussing sensitive topics (Hair *et al* 2003). Therefore they were especially deemed appropriate for interviewing the employee of the company as they are more likely to be candid when discussing issues about their employer or company.

Depth interviews were also conducted over the telephone with two of Storm PM's clients over a 2 week period in July 2009 (Appendix C). A census of four clients was initially selected, as this was the total number of client customers Storm PM has had since it established in 2008. However, two of the clients were deemed unsuitable due to their lack of e-marketing activity with Storm PM.

The purpose of these interviews was to identify the client's perceptions of Storm PM's e-marketing activities. The researcher used depth interviews in this instance as interviews of a limited number of individuals are a valuable way of drawing out basic motivations and hidden meanings that may be kept hidden from other researchers in group situations (Andreasen 2002). In comparing depth interviews with focus groups, Sokolow (1985) suggests the main advantage is that because of the intense involvement of the interviewer, the respondent is highly focused and therefore yields richer data that are more clearly to the point of the study.

It was decided to carry out the interviews over the telephone as this method allowed the researcher to make contact with participants with whom it would otherwise be impractical to conduct an interview on a face-to-face basis with, because of the distance and prohibitive costs involved and time required (Saunders *et al*, 2009).

A theme sheet was used as a topic guide (Malhotra 2007) to facilitate discussion and ensure that specific areas of interest were discussed with the respondents. The areas highlighted in the literature formed the basis for the theme sheets (Appendix D). With the permission of the interviewees all interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone.

The responses from the interviews were qualitatively analysed in terms of the themes explored during the interviews. The information gathered was reduced, summarised and analysed accordingly.

#### **2.4.5 Observation**

Observational qualitative data collection was deemed appropriate as the case study method helps to make direct observations and collect data in a natural setting, compared to relying on “derived” data (Bromley, 1986, p.23). In this instance, an ethnographic approach to observation was adopted as the researcher spent 16 weeks as an “employee” in the company in an effort to understand the organisation and the behaviour. The chief technique associated with ethnography is participant observation (Jankowicz, 2005). The major advantage of participant observation is that it often offers access to information that is not available to other researchers. However, the researcher was aware that although this deep involvement in the company is an advantage, one must remain objective at all times (Blumberg *et al*, 2005).

An observation theme sheet (Appendix D) was used to measure the level of e-marketing activity within Storm PM. The central themes on the observation sheet related to the first research objective: identifying the e-marketing tools the company use in terms of their website, e-mail marketing, SEO, viral marketing and social networking marketing.

Storm PM was used as the sample for this method of research during the researchers 16 week placement with the company. All aspects of the company were observed including: the employee and managers and the e-marketing activities they undertook on behalf of the company. Internal documentation relating to e-marketing was also reviewed.

The observation approach resulted in analysis of the narrative data collected. In order to remain consistent with other data collected, the information was analysed in accordance with the first research questions mentioned above in an issue by issue format.

#### **2.4.6 Customer Surveys**

The data collection method utilised was a survey. A survey is a means of gathering information about the characteristics, actions or opinions of a large group of people, referred to as a population (Pinsonneault and Kraemer, 1993). Surveys provide quick, inexpensive, efficient and accurate means of assessing information about the population (Zikmund, 2003). Due to the fact that the respondents of the survey were geographically dispersed, the researcher opted to use self-completion postal surveys. Postal questionnaire surveys have the advantage that the cost per respondent is low for large samples compared with any method that requires face-to-face contact with individuals, especially when the sample members are widely dispersed (Easterby - Smith *et al*, 2008).

A cover letter (Appendix E) accompanied the survey and made respondents aware of the importance of their response and the reason for the research. In order to increase the response rate an incentive was used. All respondents who returned a completed questionnaire in the prepaid envelopes were entered into a competition to win family passes to the Storm PM Christmas on Ice event. This event will be run by Storm PM in Letterkenny from November 2009 until January 2010.

A customer survey questionnaire (Appendix F) was designed to incorporate the key themes of the research and used to measure customers' perceptions of Storm PM's e-marketing tools. In addition, at the request of Storm PM's Owner/ Manager, questions in relation to the customers experience at the 7UP Christmas on Ice event in 2008 were also included for the company's own research. The questionnaire was piloted with 6 individuals and points were clarified after receiving the replies. Revisions were then made to the questionnaire design and the formal survey was conducted over a 2 week period in June 2009.

The task of writing a list of questions and designing the exact format of a written questionnaire is an essential aspect of the development of a survey research design. (Zikmund, 2003). The questionnaire consisted of three separate sections; 7UP Christmas on Ice Birthday Party experience, marketing (incorporated e-marketing) and classification questions.

A screening question began the questionnaire to determine the respondent's eligibility for the study. Following this a combination of The Fishbein model of consumer behaviour and The Likert scale formed the main theme of the questionnaire.

The Fishbein model is a means of measuring three components of attitude: salient beliefs people have about a specific product/service, objective-attribute linkages or the probability that a particular object has an important attribute and evaluation of each of the important attributes (Solomon, 2007). Using the Fishbein approach respondents were asked their level of agreement with statements in relation to their general opinion of different E-marketing tools. Respondents were then asked for their level of agreement to statements in relation to E-marketing tools adopted by Storm PM. The Likert scale was used to ask respondents to choose between five degrees of relative agreement from negative (disagree) through neutral (not sure) to positive (agree), (Easterbey-Smith *et al*, 2008).

A number of ranking questions were used to identify the importance of certain variables to the respondents. Closed-ended questions were used where the respondents were asked to tick one or more of the alternative responses given. Closed –ended questions help to generate precise answers (Riley *et al*, 2003). The questionnaire ended with one open-ended question and classification questions..

The suitable sampling frame was identified from Storm PM's internal database records. The population was defined as all end-user customers who booked a Birthday party at Storm PM's 7UP Christmas on Ice event from November 2008 to January 2009. A census of 60 people was used to gather the relevant information. A census approach was chosen as they provide very good coverage of the population surveyed (Saunders *et al*, 2009). A total of 26 valid returns were received representing a 43 per cent response rate. This response was high due to the careful preparation of the questionnaire and follow up phone calls to encourage respondents to complete the forms. Information collected from all valid questionnaires was analysed using Microsoft Excel. Frequency distributions and cross-tabulations were used to analyse the findings.

## **2.5 Research limitations**

A limitation of this study was the single case study approach. The research presented findings from a small sample which was representative of only one specific industry. A frequent criticism of case study methodology is that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing a generalizing conclusion (Tellis, 1997). However Yin (1994) argues that the relative size of the sample whether 2, 10, or 100 cases are used, does not transform a multiple case into a macroscopic study. The goal of the study should establish the parameters, and then should be applied to all research. In this way, even a single case could be considered acceptable, provided it met the established objective.



## **3. Findings and Analysis**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The key to these findings is to establish how Storm PM's e-marketing has evolved since their establishment, what factors drove this evolution and what e-marketing tools they utilise. The analysis also identifies challenges and opportunities for Storm PM in relation to e-marketing. The main findings are described in relation to the five key issues of this study as identified from the literature review: company website, e-mail marketing, SEO, viral marketing and social networking marketing.

Storm PM Ltd is an event management and PR company based in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. The company is an SME established in April 2008, by Tricia Gallagher. It is a company in the early stages of growth, but since its launch it has been involved in bringing a number of large family and adult entertainment themed events to Co. Donegal as well as managing small and medium sized corporate events. The company also offer services in PR, product launches, wedding planning, concert promotion, exhibitions and award ceremonies.

### **3.2 The evolution of Storm PM's e-marketing strategy**

Storm PM does not have a formal marketing strategy in place to promote Storm PM the company. Their marketing activity both traditional and e-marketing, has evolved organically. The majority of the company's marketing activity focuses on marketing an event rather than Storm PM the company. This is a deliberate move by the Owner/Manager, who remarks that ... 'I don't continually market Storm PM the company, using traditional methods such as newspaper and radio, because the direction the company is taking is that we settle on a few major events throughout the year instead of constantly trying to get smaller contracts ... We have taken advantage of the events we have run to compliment the marketing of Storm PM'. Traditional methods such as newspaper and radio advertisements are currently the main methods of marketing employed when promoting events. In addition to these promotional methods, Storm PM has now begun to use e-marketing tools to promote events. These include: a company website, e-mail marketing, social networking sites and viral marketing.

This e-marketing activity has been mainly reactive and only partially proactive to date. Reactive forces include the threat of competition and fear of competitive disadvantage. Proactive forces are to promote the company and attaining new customers. However, going forward, e-marketing is a particular area of interest for the company. The Owner /Manager states that ... 'We are definitely interested in developing what e-marketing we are currently doing and introducing new tools ... I would be interested in developing our social networking channel and viral marketing, because of the events we do, for example, concerts and the Christmas on Ice event appeal to a wide target market so they would be very useful ... Also these tools would be useful to gather information to build customer databases'. Storm PM's Event Manager agrees that the e-marketing tools that the company has introduced to date have been reactive. The Event Manager highlights that '... E-marketing is cost effective, it doesn't cost anything, for example, to set-up social networking sites'.

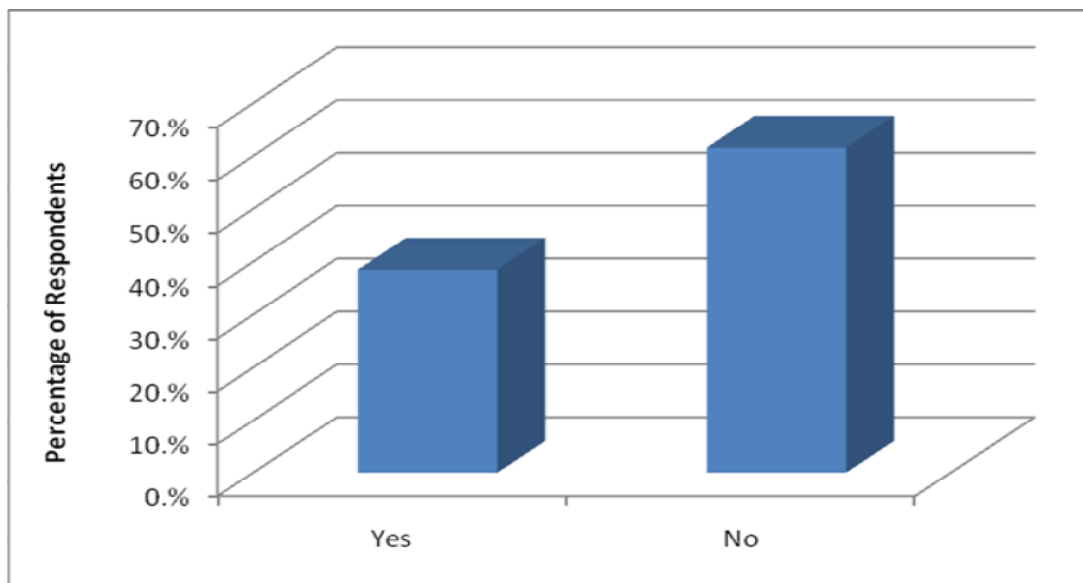
From the depth interviews and internal observation it is apparent to the author that Storm PM has begun to realise the benefits of e-marketing. However, they do not have a clear strategy on how they plan to develop their e-marketing activity in the future both for the company and events. It is apparent that more training in the area of e-marketing would help the company to realise the its full scope and potential. Only then will the company be in a position to fully develop clear objectives and a strategy to develop their e-marketing in the future. The company needs to be more aware that reactive forces such as the threat of competition that are currently driving e-marketing adoption will escalate as the Internet offers a global reach for companies. This is highlighted by Sheth and Sharma's (2005) research which found that organisations need to be aware of the emerging competition from organisations practicing e-marketing strategies and whatever the origin of an organisation, they need to be early adopters of e-marketing strategies or they will face competition from entrenched e-marketers.

### 3.3 Key Issue 1. Web-site

The company's website was established on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2008. A consultant web developer was appointed to create a website to promote and display the company's services as well as to present information about the company's past, present and future events. The website can be viewed by clicking on the following link: [www.stormpm.com](http://www.stormpm.com). Storm PM does not have a company brochure therefore the company website is the main tool utilised to promote the company and its services. The company's aim was to develop a professional website with a semi-corporate design and to reflect the Storm PM brand identity.

Despite having a professional website, the company does little to drive traffic to the site. When asked how often customers are referred to the site, the Event Manager said 'sometimes'. Although on the website there is an option to contact the company by e-mail, very few queries come via the website. This is reflected by results from the customer questionnaire. Figure 3.1 shows that 61 per cent of respondents had not visited the Storm PM website as opposed to only 38 per cent who had visited the site.

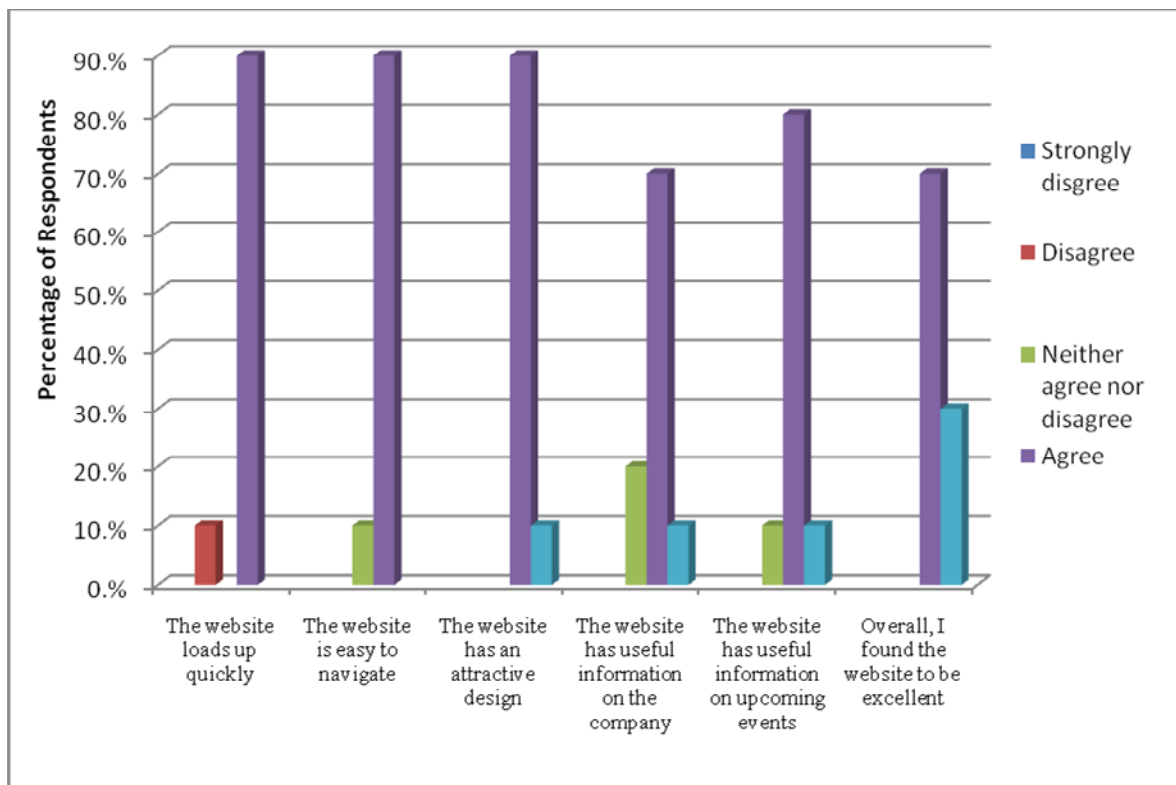
**Figure 3.1 Percentage of customers who have visited the Storm PM website**



The Owner/Manager points out that at present ... ‘all promotional and marketing material that we distribute reverts’ people to the website’. These results in figure 3.1 indicate that promoting the website on marketing material alone is not generating traffic to the site. Considering that the Owner/Manager states that ... ‘The primary role of the website is to showcase the company’, it would be beneficial to have as many new and existing customers visiting the website as possible. The customer questionnaires suggest that, currently, this is not the case.

Regarding the website itself, the Owner/Manager notes that ‘I am very happy with the layout of the site, it is very easy to navigate ... and ... we have had many compliments about the site’. Results from the customer questionnaires (Figure 3.2) show that 70 per cent of respondents who visited the website found it to be excellent compared to 30 per cent who strongly disagree with this statement. These overall results are encouraging.

**Figure 3.2 Customers Perceptions of the Storm PM Website**



Ninety per cent of respondents agreed that the Storm PM website loads up quickly, is easy to navigate and has an attractive design. However, a lower percentage of respondents agreed with the statements: 'the website has useful information on the company' (70 per cent) and 'the website has useful information on upcoming events' (80 per cent). If we compare these results to the key variables for website design identified by Chaffey and Smith (p.226, 2008), which ranked 'high quality content' as the number one variable, the feedback from Storm PM customers shows that their perception of the website content (useful information on the company and upcoming events) was less positive than the ease of use, graphic design and navigation of the website. As the website is the company's main method of promoting its services, this is an area of concern and one which Storm PM must address.

The lack of time spent on up-dating the information on the website, with some information on the website being out of date may be a contributing factor to a less favourable response to the website content. The Owner/Manager states that the website is not updated '... too often, that's mostly my fault as I haven't had the time to pass the information on new events to the web site developer .The past events and upcoming events are the only sections on the website that need to be constantly updated as our services and contact details don't change. However, I would like to refresh the information on the home page more often so that it not the same all the time'. It is interesting to note that although the Owner/Manager recognises that it is important to regularly refresh and update the website there is the view that this only needs to be done to certain sections of the website. In contrast to this view Smith and Chaffey (p.173, 2005), believe that website on the whole should 'stay fresh ... and ... put up new information which is useful, relevant and timely for their audience'. Eid *et al*, (2006) also agrees with the importance of having a well designed site that is up-to-date, clear and accurate.

Feedback from depth interviews with Storm PM's clients in relation to the website layout and ease of use was positive overall. Although one client '...was disappointed there were not more photos of their [*clients*] events or a gallery section on the website...I think photos...speak larger volumes than words...I would look at a gallery much quicker than read all the text...' Although there are photos of past events, Storm PM did not have photos of the event that they organised for this particular client. Therefore, the client was disappointed and believed that more photos and images of this event '...would be good advertising for them (*Storm PM*)'. These comments bring in to question aspects of the website design, namely the portfolio section.

The portfolio section on the website displays images of past events with images depicting all aspects of the company's past services included together. The author observed that this section of the website will need to be totally restructured. As the company profile grows, this page will become quite lengthy as more images of events and functions are added. This section of the website could benefit from being redesigned to form a more user-friendly and visually enhanced design. Consideration should be given to dividing this section in to the various services provided e.g. corporate events, conferences, exhibitions, etc, with the relevant images added in each section. This section of the website highlights how important, yet difficult, it is to get the balance right between design and ease of use. These findings are similar to those highlighted by the literature. Chaffey and Smith (p.253, 2008) believed that the biggest error with visual design is getting the balance wrong. They state that ' designers need to create a balanced visual design which is visually appealing, but also works for accessibility, usability, persuasion and branding'. When revisiting this section of the website, Storm PM must give this consideration.

### **3.4 Key Issue 2. E-mail Marketing**

Ninety per cent of Storm PM's e-mailing activity is as an operational communication tool and 10 per cent of e-mails are promotions related. As a communication tool with existing clients it is very effective. One client commented that 'Storm PM's communication by e-mail was excellent and very effective'. E-mail is used to send information to customers and clients who directly request it either in person or by telephone.

The company also use e-mail as a direct marketing tool when promoting events. The Event Manager believes that for specific events, direct marketing e-mails have proved very effective and led to a large amount of enquires and bookings. The author observed that while the majority of promotional e-mails sent out are sent directly to specific people, a small amount of Storm PM's e-mails which are sent out are not personalised or specifically targeted at any one person. However, the Owner/Manager insists that ... 'We are not bombarding people with junk e-mails ... the people on our contact lists are contacts that we have made through working in the industry'. But concluded that ... 'Ideally we would like to have individual databases for specific events, but this would take months of work and we don't have the resources to do that'.

In addition, for the majority of e-mails sent out, Storm PM has not sought to obtain the permission of the recipients of these e-mails. Murray (2006) believes that having the permission of your audience to e-mail them news, promotions and online messages is a lot more effective. As mentioned previously, although Storm PM has a link option on their website to send an e-mail directly to Storm PM, little or no queries come through the website. This is an area that requires more attention. Although the company is part of the way there to encouraging customers to contact them, Burke (2008), believes that a strong e-mail strategy should focus on encouraging e-mail subscribers to "opt in" not "opt out". One way the company is considering doing this in the future is through e-newsletters. This would be an incentive for customer to "opt in" and receive information on past and future events.

Although the Owner/Manager believes that when sending out their direct marketing e-mails they are not ‘bombarding people with junk e-mails’ the recipients of these e-mails have not been selected in a customised way resulting in mass marketing rather than niche marketing. As Kitchen (2004), suggests, the main advantage of e-mail as an online direct marketing tool is that it allows customisation, personalisation and niche targeting. More personalised e-mail ‘has the ability to build relationships ... and with proper targeting, tracking tools and a carefully built opt in list, e-mail can be highly personalised to the need of the individual customer’ Baggott and Sales (p.24, 2007). Storm PM could benefit greatly from taking such an approach to e-mail marketing.

### **3.5 Key Issue 3. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)**

Storm PM currently use organic Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). They use the online web analytic tool, Google Analytics to enhance their presence on the Google search engine. Google analytics is a free service and is an organic means of combining a description of the company and keywords to describe the services in order to bring Storm PM organically to the top or middle of the search engines first page.

Storm PM’s Owner/Manager believes that there is more value from organic SEO than paid SEO, such as Google Ads and Google Ad sense, stating ‘...I have no interest in these, I think although they may get you in the top results from a search, most people select the non-sponsored results as they don’t trust the results on the right hand side (*sponsored links*)’. This view is in line with a recent survey carried out by the National e-learning Laboratory (O’Brien, 2009) in Ireland, as discussed in the literature review which found that Irish users of Google pay more attention to organic search results than advertisements or sponsored links at the top of the page. The Events Manager supports this argument further stating ‘... I do know of other businesses who pay substantial amounts of money to enhance their SEO ... I am not sure I would agree with this as it would be difficult to measure your return on investment’.



As part of the investigation for the research findings, the author carried out a number of tests in the search engine Google (www.google.ie) to establish Storm PM’s presence within the search engine (Table 3.1). Results show that if ‘Donegal’ is included when searching for the majority of Storm PM’s services for example “corporate events in Donegal’ then Storm PM appears on the first page of the search engine. However inserting “corporate events” on its own, does not produce any results. Searching for “Storm PM” or “Storm PM in Donegal” results in a direct link to the company website appearing at the top of the first page of Google.

**Table 3.1 Results from a Google search using Storm PM keywords on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2009**

<b>Key Words</b>	<b>Results of Ranking</b>
Event management in Donegal	Middle of 1 <sup>st</sup> Page
Event Management in Ireland	No result
Corporate Event Management in Donegal	2 <sup>nd</sup> on list
Concert Promotions in Donegal	Middle of 1 <sup>st</sup> Page
PR launches in Donegal	Middle of 1 <sup>st</sup> Page
Exhibition management in Donegal	2 <sup>nd</sup> on list
Wedding planning in Donegal	No result
Award ceremony management in Donegal	No result

*Note: Key Word Content on Website: Donegal Event Management, Event Management in Donegal, Ireland Events Managers, Corporate Events, Entertainment Events, Weddings, Concerts, Launches, Exhibitions, PR and Awards.*

There are a number of factors which should be considered when aiming to enhance the company’s search engine ranking. Although Storm PM has signed up to Google Analytics, from the internal observations it is evident that this is not regularly monitored. This is in contrast to Brown’s (p.66, 2007 ) belief that a company must ... ‘always be prepared to update and change the look, feel and design of their web page to make sure that you are using SEO techniques wherever and whenever possible’. Attention must also be paid to: keyword selection, relevant web page content, and establish links with reputable websites, signing up

to relevant directories and refreshing web site design and content to encourage people to visit and stay on the web site. As these findings have shown, Storm PM do not regularly update the website content and design. And as the literature suggests, this will ultimately affect their SEO ranking and will do little to increase traffic to the website. To properly manage SEO you have to monitor and measure it.

### **3.6 Key Issue 4. Viral Marketing**

During the depth interviews with the Owner/Manager and the Event Manager they were asked if the company participates in viral marketing techniques such as, passing multi-media files through e-mail or websites such as You Tube, or participating in blogging. The Owner/Manager revealed that 'We act as agents for a number of music bands, so I have sent multi-media files through e-mail to potential music venues'. The company indicates they are keen to upload clips of their events on to their website, yet have not done so. However when considering sites such as You Tube they have to be very selective as there are legal implications with this action.

To date Storm PM has not used blogs and it is a tool that the company are not 100 per cent convinced of their effectiveness. The fact that the company could not have control over what was written on blogs about Storm PM is something that concerns the Owner/Manager stating '...The only thing that puts me off using blogs is the negative comments that may appear on them. I am not against negative feedback on events... It's just that quite often this feedback can be mostly negative petty comments which can create bad Public Relations (PR)'.

However, as Hanson and Kalyanam (2006) points out, implemented properly, a viral marketing campaign allows a company to use its influence of its customers to promote a product or service to prospective customers. Blogs would be an effective tool for Storm PM for creating a "buzz" for upcoming events, such as music concerts. Viral marketing models promise growth with little or no marketing expenditures (Jurvetson 2000) due to the availability of a large network of users, coupled with a low-cost communication mechanisms (Kalyanam *et al*,2007). Storm PM's caution and concern over potential negative feedback is hindering the development of viral marketing.

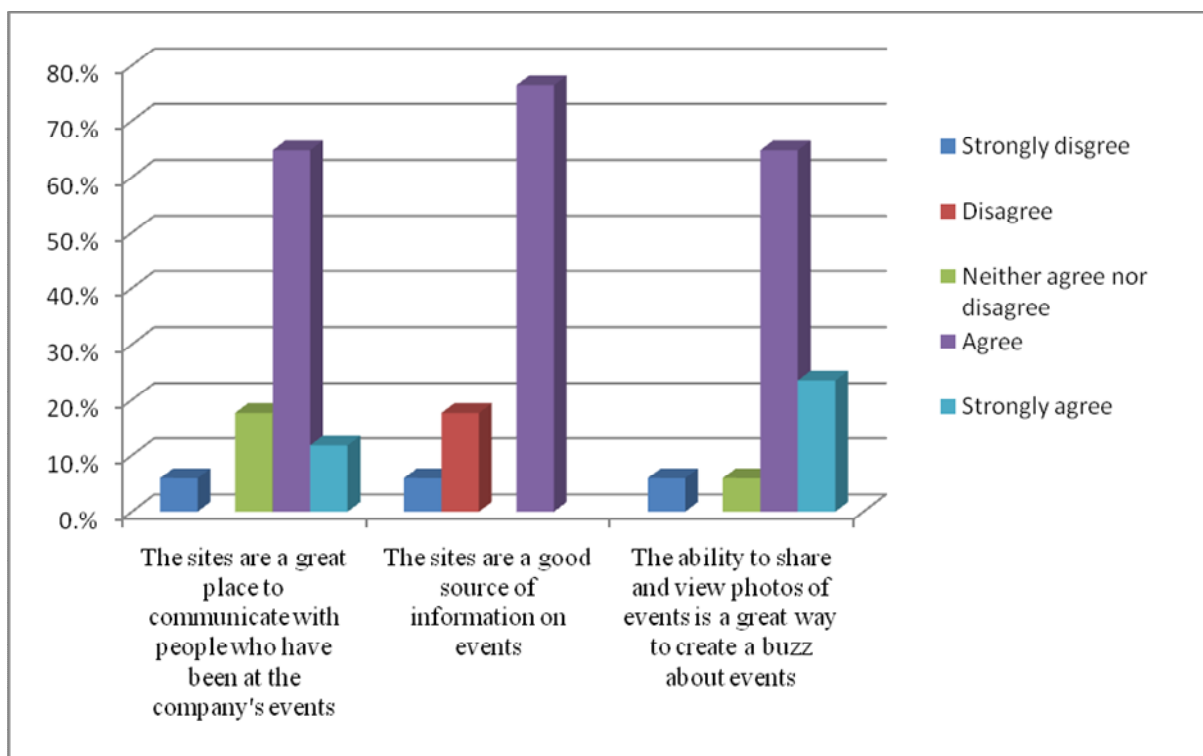
### **3.7 Key Issue 5. Social Networking**

Storm PM currently use social networking sites such as Bebo and Facebook to promote events. A separate Bebo or Facebook page is created for each event. The company recognises the primary role of these sites as an important tool to spread information about events and create PR. For example, a Facebook page was developed for the Ulster heats of the Rose of Tralee Festival. This enabled those participating in the contest, and their supporters, to log on to the social networking page in order to discuss the event, find out information and create a buzz for the event. In addition, a 7UP Christmas on Ice Bebo page was created for the event in December 2008. In order to use these social networking sites more effectively, the company, in the future, is planning to setup a company (group) page on Facebook. The Owner/Manager explained that at present ... 'We cannot promote two brands on the one site. To get around this, we will setup a separate site for the company and link it to our sites for specific events'. The company's innovative approach to their social networking strategy highlights the relevance they put on the future of social networking. This sentiment is in line with Owyang's (2009) study of the future of social networking. This found that social networking is increasing rapidly and, therefore, to expect the space to rapidly innovate to match this trend. He believes that companies should prepare by immediately factoring social networking into their marketing plans.

The Owner/Manager states that in relation to their 2008 7Up Christmas on Ice Bebo site '... what we should have done in the past was to offer special promotions for Bebo friends of the event and that would have been a way of gathering a database for future events'. Again this supports Owyang's (2009) view that social networking is a valuable source of customer information and lead generation. In addition this would have given company the opportunity to connect with audiences drifting away from traditional media (Brown *et al*, 2007).

Results from the customer questionnaire indicate a positive perception of Storm PM’s current social networking sites. Figure 3.3 shows that 64 per cent agree that the sites are a great way to communicate with people who have been at the company’s events. Seventy six per cent agree that the sites are a good source of information, while 17 per cent disagree. Twenty three per cent strongly agree that the ability to share and view photos of events is a great way to create a “buzz” about events.

**Figure 3.3 Customers Perception of Storm PM’s Social Networking Sites**



These positive results coupled with feedback from clients which were interviewed who said that if asked by Storm PM to be a “friend” of the company’s Facebook page, they would gladly agree, offers Storm PM the encouragement to drive forward with their social networking development.

### **3.8 E-marketing - challenges and opportunities**

The main challenges the company face is time constraints and adequate human resources to enhance their knowledge of e-marketing and gain the skills to implement e-marketing tools effectively. These challenges are similar to those identified in the 2006 B2B E-marketing Survey (Media Logic, 2006). This survey cited the main E-marketing adoption obstacles as: time and resources (63 per cent), cost concerns (35 per cent), ability to track results (28 per cent), management buy-in (27 per cent) and technical limitations (24 per cent).

Despite the challenges, Storm PM is aware of the opportunities offered by e-marketing, in particular, the development of the company's social networking channels. In order to reap the benefits and opportunities that e-marketing presents, the Owner/Manager realises that '...our E-marketing needs to be more focused in order to get new business'.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the finding from qualitative and quantitative research carried out in order to provide conclusions to the aim and objectives stated in chapter two. The findings show that Storm PM has adopted several e-marketing tools. However, the company does not have a formal strategy in place to develop these tools therefore the development of their e-marketing is disappointing. The main factors attributed to the lack of development are time, human resources and lack of skills and knowledge of the area. Although Storm PM believe they are being innovative in adopting the different tools, their lack of skills and knowledge means that each tool is used to varying levels, but not used to their full potential. As a result traditional marketing methods such as newspaper and radio advertisement are still the main communication methods utilised.

## Chapter 4 Conclusion and Recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusions

The findings from this study indicate that the adoption of e-marketing by Storm PM was driven mainly by reactive forces and only partially by proactive forces. The company does not have a formal strategic approach to e-marketing and therefore there is a lack of clear objectives and a strategic plan for the current or future development of their e-marketing activities. This supports the literature which states that an internet marketing strategy is needed to provide consistent direction for organisations e-marketing activities so that they integrate with its other marketing activities and support its overall business objectives (Chaffey *et al*, 2009).

The level of E-marketing adoption in Storm PM is disappointing in comparison to traditional methods. Newspaper and radio advertisements still form the main part of their marketing campaigns. When promoting an event, newspaper and radio advertisement are the main methods employed. These are complimented by advertising on the company website, e-mail marketing campaign, social networking marketing and to a much lesser extent viral marketing. Storm PM the company, is not actively marketed as the Owner/Manager is of the opinion that the marketing of events provides adequate exposure for the company. Storm PM do not have a company brochure, therefore the company website is the main tool used to showcase the company and its services. SEO and advertising the web address on print material are used to drive traffic to the website.

While it appears that e-marketing has been adopted and is part of Storm PM's communication strategy, it is still very much underdeveloped. Despite e-marketing being adopted to varying levels of sophistication and implemented with different degrees of success, it appears that Storm PM does not have a full understanding or is fully aware of its scope and potential. However, there is the enthusiasm within Storm PM to gain a better understanding of e-marketing in order to develop and implement a more structured and formal E-marketing strategy. These findings are similar to the Gilmore *et al* (2007) study which also identified that SMEs in Northern Ireland did not use e-marketing to its full scope and potential, especially in relation to developing corporate image or competitive advantage.

In relation to Storm PM's current e-marketing communication tools responses from a customer questionnaire yielded varying results. Only 38 per cent of customer had actually visited the website. However, of those who did visit, their perceptions of the website were positive, with 70 per cent of respondents agreeing that the website is excellent. Ninety nine per cent also agreed that the website loads up quickly, is easy to navigate and has an attractive design. However, only 38 per cent of respondents had actually visited the website. This highlights the need for Storm PM to invest time in increasing traffic to the website in order to actively promote the company and the services it has to offer.

E-mail marketing is utilised as a direct marketing tool when promoting events. Although the company believes that this is an effective promotional tool, the literature shows that a more structured, customised and personalised approach to this activity would enhance its effectiveness further. The company's website is the main promotional tool for showcasing the company's services. SEO and web analytical tool, Google Analytics, are used to generate traffic to the site by enhancing their presence on the Google search engine. This is managed by a consultant web developer. The findings show however, that there is minimal traffic to the site which indicates that SEO is not being utilised to its full potential.

Out of all the e-marketing tools currently used by Storm PM, viral marketing is used the least. Limited use involves sending multimedia files through e-mail or websites such as You Tube. There is scepticism within the company towards using blogs as a promotional tool. This is mainly due to the lack of control over the content of the blogs, which could include negative comments towards the company, resulting in unconstructive PR. However, the literature highlights, that when implemented and managed properly, a viral marketing campaign can prove very rewarding for companies. Therefore, Storm PM's lack of knowledge of viral marketing could be contributing to their unenthusiastic approach to this tool. Encouragingly social networking is a tool which Storm PM currently employ effectively and one which Storm PM are keen to develop in the future to promote the company and its events over the Internet.

The findings revealed that the main challenges for e-marketing development and sophistication within Storm PM are problems that are generic to SMEs. These mainly involve time constraints and human resource constraints. These findings support the literature where Pavic *et al*, (2007, p.323) believes that although SMEs are more flexible and more adaptable to change, they lack the human and financial resources and capabilities of large firms. In addition, a 2006 B2B E-marketing Survey (Media Logic, 2006) cited the top E-marketing adoption obstacles as time and resources (63 per cent). This study has confirmed that e-marketing is still a relatively new and underdeveloped practice among Irish SMEs. However, as the literature suggests, despite the challenges, 'SMEs still retain a collective belief that the internet and e-marketing is essential in today's business environment and that it will be important in the future' (Gilmore, *et al*, 2007, p. 244). Therefore, for the Owner/Managers of SMEs knowledge and understanding of e-marketing and its practices are essential.

This research highlighted that as an innovative and forward thinking Irish SME, Storm PM has the enthusiasm to make e-marketing a significant part of their overall communication strategy. However, although they have implemented initial efforts to achieve this, they have not given e-marketing the resources necessary to fully benefit from it. Storm PM must invest more time and resources in order to make the development of e-marketing a necessity rather than an aspiration.



## 4.2 Recommendations

With further development and a strategic approach, e-marketing can offer Storm PM cost effective promotional tools to reach their target audience more effectively with the possibility of increasing their target market and developing the company brand. With investment in training and the development of e-marketing skills, Storm PM can enhance its knowledge base and also realise the full potential of e-marketing. This will enable the company to introduce new e-marketing communication tools as well as make changes to existing tools, ensuring optimum use of each.

For the majority of SMEs, E-marketing adoption is not a problem, but developing it is. An essential part of any e-marketing adoption and development plan is to have an e-marketing communication strategy. Storm PM have no such strategy and is something that requires attention. This strategy should flow from the company's overall company strategy and identify the appropriate tools to achieve the communication objectives.

One of the most common e-marketing communication tools is a company website. In Ireland in 2007, only 42 per cent of business with 1-9 employees had a website. Of those companies with a company website, 80 per cent used it for advertising the company and its services, 27 per cent to provide contact information only, 21 per cent to sell products and services and 13 per cent for capturing visitor information for follow up activities (eBusiness Survey, 2007). These results suggest that companies are not yet using their website to its full potential. Companies need to weigh up the value of investing time and resources to go beyond the generalist approach of merely having a web site presence. It is not enough to have a website, it needs to be regularly updated, maintained and have a constant flow of traffic. Employing web analytical tools will increase traffic to a website thus promoting the company and its services. Also, having an "opt-in" option on a website encourages customers to sign up to perhaps receiving regular information through e-newsletters. This will enable a company to combine their website e-marketing tool with an e-mail marketing campaign. In addition, a company is gaining customer information, enabling them to build databases and customer profiles. This customer information will enable a company to segment their target markets more effectively, thus allowing for a more focused and customised strategy.

While businesses have the principal responsibility of developing and investing in their e-marketing strategies, the appropriate support from government is also essential to support innovation and investment. SME's should seek to take full advantage of support offered by their local authorities and government support agencies. Overall, greater time, attention and resources will be necessary for SMEs to remain competitive in a growing electronic business world.

### **4.3 Research Reflections**

Once an area of interest has been identified, the researcher believes that prior to deciding on research objectives, time should be spent reading literature on the chosen area. This will help to gain a good understanding of the area and help identify gaps in existing research which may be investigated and form the basis and focus for the proposed research dissertation. From this, key research objectives can then be identified.

From conducting primary research, the researcher found depth interviews to be very constructive. Once a rapport has been established with an interviewee and an informal structure is in place, an interview can offer the most informative method of gaining an insight into the research area. In comparison to this, the postal questionnaire was a more challenging method of data collection. Low response rates meant time had to be spent telephoning respondents to request a response. Also, blank responses and half answers are also a problem. Therefore for future research, the researcher would consider carrying out a questionnaire face-to-face, or a telephone questionnaire, as these methods could provide richer results.

However the most enlightening experience for gathering primary research was having the opportunity to spend 16 weeks work placement within the company which the case study was based on. This enabled the researcher to directly examine the research variables in a real life setting.

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Internet Sites

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## **Appendices**



## Appendix A

**Interviewer:** Fiona Friel  
**Interviewee:** Tricia Gallagher, Owner/Manager of Storm PM Ltd  
**Date:** April 2009.  
**Duration of Interview:** 45 minutes

### **Q. How has your marketing communication strategy evolved since the establishment of the business?**

The marketing activity to promote Storm PM the company has involved: the company launch and newspaper advertising. However, most of our marketing activity now focuses on marketing an event we are organising rather than Storm PM the company. We do not have a formal marketing strategy. For marketing an event we use newspaper, radio, road signage and e-marketing tools. The reason I don't continually market Storm PM [the company] using traditional methods such as newspapers and radio because the direction that the company is taking is that we settle on a few major events throughout the year instead of constantly trying to get in new smaller contracts. Therefore we take advantage of the events that we run to compliment the marketing of Storm PM.

### **Q. How has your e-marketing strategy evolved?**

Our e-marketing activity is evolving as we need it. We are reactive rather than proactive. I am definitely interested in e-marketing. Much of our business has come through word of mouth and recommendations from other clients therefore I wouldn't anticipate much advantage from advertising Storm PM [the company] in a newspaper. In the past any newspaper advertising that we have done has resulted in people contacting us to for advice on running events rather than to hire our services. I would be interested in developing our social networking channel and viral marketing because the events we do, for example, concerts and the Christmas on Ice event appeal to a wide target market so they would be very useful. Also, these tools would be useful to gather information to build databases.

**Q. In the future do you think you might become more proactive or are you happy to reactive when necessary?**

I suppose we will change as we need too. At the minute we do place a big emphasis on branding at our events. Our marketing tools depends on who we are targeting, if we were to target an audience outside Donegal we may consider using less traditional methods and choose more Internet based techniques. We are definitely interested in developing what e-marketing we are currently doing and introducing new tools.

### **Website**

**Q When was it established and how did you decided on the design and layout?**

I wanted a professional looking website with a semi-corporate design. Although we are in the entertainment business I wanted to avoid something too tacky. I also wanted the design to tie in with the Storm PM's band identity. I am very happy with the layout of the site, it is very easy to navigate we have had many compliments about the site. In comparison to other event management companies, our site is a lot more professional looking for a small company. I got a web designer to develop the site when we setup the company. Also, the web developer set up Google analytics to enhance the SEO of the site.

**Q. How often do you monitor the Google analytics?**

The web develop has sent me the password to access the analytics but it has been awhile since I have looked at it. I haven't had time, but it is something I should be looking at more often.

**Q. How often do you up-date the information on the web-site?**

Not too often, that's my mostly my fault as I haven't had the time to pass information on new events etc to the web site developer. The past events and upcoming events are the only sections on the website that need to be constantly updated as our services and contact details don't change. However, I would like to refresh the information on the home page more often so that it not the same all the time. But if you want to do your optimisation you have to stick with the similar words so it's just a matter of getting them rephrased. The primary role of the website is to showcase the company. It is also important as all promotional and marketing material that we distribute reverts' people to the website.

**Q. You have an option on your website to contact Storm PM Ltd by e-mail, do you have a system to track how many e-mails come via the website?**

Yes, any e-mails that come via the website are identified by "web enquiry" on the e-mail.

**E-Mail Marketing**

**Q You use e-mail every day, what percentage of your e-mails are operational and what percentage are promotional related?**

I would say that 90 per cent are operational and 10 per cent are marketing or promotional related. Just this morning I sent you 30 e-mails promoting the upcoming Mary from Dungloe festival.

**Q. So are you using e-mail as a direct marketing tool?**

Yes, using my own contact lists that I have built up over time. We always use e-mail for direct marketing purposes. When we have events coming up we would put together an e-mail inviting people along using our own contact lists.

**Q. Have the people on your contact lists “opted in” to receive e-mails from you?**

The people on our contact list and who received our e-mails are contacts that we have made through working in the industry. We are not bombarding these people with junk e-mails. For example, we are a member of The Letterkenny Chamber of Commerce, so they will promote our events through their own e-mail contacts too, therefore if we are offering say a promotional offer for one of our events, for example, 10 per cent off ice skating at the Christmas on Ice event, then the Chamber will forward this e-mail to contacts on their e-mailing lists. Ideally we would like to have individual databases for specific events, but this would take months of work and we don't have the time or resources to do that.

**Q. Would you consider sending out e-newsletters through e-mail?**

We would like to do that but I don't think we have enough events going on to fill a newsletter. However, it is something we would consider in the future.

**Q. Do you have any opt-out clause at the bottom of promotional e-mails that you send out?**

No, but we are careful who we send direct marketing e-mails too and we do consider the target audience before we send the e-mails out so as to not bombard people with information about events that would not necessary appeal to them.

**Social Networking**

**Q. Which social networking sites are you currently using?**

We use these for events, but not for the company. We currently have a facebook page for the Ulster heats of The Rose of Tralee International Festival. For the 7UP Christmas on Ice event last Christmas we setup a Bebo page. I would like to set up our own pages for the company, for example, a group page (company) in Facebook and bebo.

**Q. In your opinion, what is the primary role of the social networking sites you are currently using?**

For our Ulster heats of the Rose of Tralee facebook the primary role is to spread the word, PR for the winning girls and encouraging other people to enter the competition.

**Q. What are the benefits to the company (Storm PM Ltd)?**

We cannot promote two brands on the one site. To get around that, we will set up a separate site for the company and link it to our sites for specific events. It is important that the information on the sites is constantly updated as people don't want to see old information.

**Q. Could you describe the demographics of those visiting your social networking sites, for example, the 7UP Christmas on Ice bebo site?**

The majority of people visiting that site were teenagers. They joined up to be friends. Realistically what we should have done was to offer special promotions for bebo friends of the event and that would have been a way of gathering a database of customers for future events. If we had just one Storm PM bebo site then we wouldn't need these individual event sites. There is also another site which we would be interested in using in the future, it is called bing.com which is linked up to your Google analytics and you can measure how many people visiting your website are coming from your social networking sites.

### **Viral Marketing**

**Do you use any of the following viral marketing techniques; signatures at the end of e-mails, passing mutli-media files through e-mail or websites such as YouTube or blogs?**

We act as agents for a number of music bands, so I have sent multi-media files through e-mail to potential music venues. The only thing that puts me off using blogs is the negative comments that may appear on them. I am not against negative feedback on events it's just

that quite often this feedback can be mostly negative petty comments which can create bad PR. You also have no control over the content of the blogs. So, for that reason, I am not too interested in blogs. We do not have any clips of music events on You Tube because of the legal implications and copyright. However, we can upload clips of events such as the 7Up Christmas on Ice event on our website. But we would have to consider whether or not to put these clips on You Tube, again we need to be aware of legal implications.

**Q. At the minute you have links on your website to the websites of events you are organising, are you aware of website where there is a link to the Storm PM website?**

There are not too many at the minute. So this is something that we need to develop in the future.

### **Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)**

**Q. You are currently using Google Analytics and your web site developer tracks your websites keywords and descriptions, but are you enlisted in any other web directories?**

I get a lot of e-mails from different directories asking me to sign up. But I find a lot of these directories use the standard Google search words, for example, “event management in Donegal”, “event management in Letterkenny”, so I am undecided about how useful other directories are to the Company.

**Q. Do you subscribe to Google Adwords or Google Adsense?**

I have no interest in these I think although they may get you in the top results from a search, most people select the non-sponsored results as they don't seem to trust the results on the right hand side. So I would be more in favour of organic SEO.

**Q. Does your website developer monitor your presence on search engines?**

He does monitor our hits on the website and where they are coming from. Because he has created the website, he is keen to monitor its performance and where the people visiting the site have come from.

### **E-marketing General**

**Q. Are you aware of the benefits to the company of the e-marketing tools you have implemented to date?**

No we do not measure our e-marketing activities, but it is something we should be doing. Because we are a relatively new company we are more focused on getting more business. However, I do realise that our marketing needs to be more focused in order to get new business.

**Q. What are the main challenges you face when implementing e-marketing?**

I would say time is a factor and also having the skills and the knowledge for developing our e-marketing techniques. Also, having the staff with the time to focus on e-marketing can be an obstacle.

**Interview ends**

## **Appendix B**

**Interviewer:** Fiona Friel

**Interviewee:** Aisling Mc Gonigle, Storm PM employee.

**Date:** April 2009

**Duration:** 30 minutes

**Q. How have the company's marketing activities evolved since it was established last year?**

Since the establishment of the company and up to now we have used print advertising, radio advertising, and radio interviews to promote events. But now we are introducing e-marketing tools such as social networking sites facebook to promote events and e-mail marketing to promoting events using the databases that I have built up since we setup.

**Q. Have the e-marketing tools that you have introduced been reactionary or did you proactively introduce them.**

Mainly reactive, e-marketing, is cost effective, it doesn't cost anything for example, to set-up social networking sites.

**Q. Do your marketing activities focus on marketing Storm PM the company or more towards promoting events?**

Generally our marketing focuses on promoting events. However, just this week I have arranged a monthly advertising through a North West newspaper, which will advertise Storm PM the company. I think we need to spend more time promoting Storm PM [the company] in the future.

### **Website**

**Q. Did you have much involvement with the development of the website?**

No, it was mainly Tricia [Owner/Manager] and our website developer who worked on the site. However, I did insert some content on the website.



**Q. Do you refer many people to the website?**

Yes, sometimes.

**Q. Do you place the website address on all your advertising?**

Yes, our web address is advertised in press releases, newspaper advertising, posters and promotional leaflets.

**Q. How often do you up-date the information on the website?**

As and when is necessary, mainly when we have a new event coming up. I send the information to the website developer and he uploads it on to the site.

**Q. The e-mail queries from the website come through you, do you receive many of these?**

No, a very small amount of queries come from the website.

**E-mail Marketing**

**Q. What are the main functions of your e-mail?**

I use e-mail for general communication and also as a direct mailing tool. I have built up quite a few databases since I started. I use these databases when sending e-mails to promote events.

**Q. Do you think e-mail is an effective direct mailing tool?**

Yes, definitely. For example, when we did the 7UP Christmas on Ice event I sent a promotional e-mail to local business and general public and from this we received a lot of enquires and bookings.

**Q. Do you think you will develop your use of e-mail in the future?**

Yes, I think we could use it for sending e-newsletters. But before we do that we need to develop our databases of contacts.

## **Social Networking**

**Q. What is your involvement in the social networking sites the company has setup.**

I setup the facebook and bebo pages and it is my job to up-date the sites regularly with relevant information.

**Q. What type of information do you add to the sites?**

Information on the relevant event, add friends to the site, images or photos and comments.

**Q. Could you describe the demographics of those visiting your social networking sites, for example, the 7UP Christmas on Ice Bebo site?**

It is mainly teenagers and 20-30 year olds that visit the sites.

**Q. Do you think having a social networking site for an event is beneficial to Storm PM – the company?**

Definitely, because we are able to put the Storm PM name and contact details on the social networking site. This links the event to Storm PM and therefore offers a means of promoting the company.

**Q. How do you think the company could develop its social networking presence in the future?**

I think we definitely need to set-up a social networking site for Storm PM, the company, such as a group page on Facebook. Also, there is a feature on facebook that allows you to “invite” people to an event. We could use this to promote and advertise an event among our facebook friends.

## **Viral Marketing**

**Q. Do you use any of the following viral marketing techniques; signatures at the end of e-mails, passing mutli-media files through e-mail or websites such as YouTube or blogs?**

Yes, I put my signature at the end of all my e-mails. I have also put footage of live bands playing at one of the festivals we organised on to You Tube. We do not use blogs, but it is something that I think might be useful for promoting events.

**Q. At the minute you have links on your website to the websites of events you are organising, are you aware of other website where there is a link to the Storm PM website?**

No, I am not aware of any website which has a link to the Storm PM website. I do know that on the Rose of Tralee website there is an e-mail link, but no link to our website.

## **Search Engine Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)**

**Q. You are currently using Google Analytics, but are you listed in any other web directories?**

No, I am not aware of any directories that we are on. My knowledge of SEO is not great, but I do know of other businesses that pay substantial amounts of money to enhance their SEO. I am not sure if I would agree with this as it would be difficult to measure your return on investment.

## **E-marketing General**

**Q. Since introducing different e-marketing tools are you aware of the benefits of them to the company?**

I think e-marketing can be cost effective. Using social networking sites and issuing promotional e-mails are less expensive means of promoting events.

**Interview Ends**

## Appendix C

### **Transcript of telephone interview with Storm PM's Client**

**Interviewer:** Fiona Friel

**Interviewee:** Sinead Mc Gowan, Solis Lough Eske Hotel, Co. Donegal

**Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> July 2009

**Duration:** 15 minutes

In the first instance the interviewer thanked the interviewee for agreeing to take part in the interview. The interviewer then explained the purpose of the interview and gave a brief description of e-marketing.

#### **Theme1: General Information**

##### **Q. What was the nature of the work Storm PM undertook for your company?**

Storm PM organised team building events for a company that we had staying in the hotel.

##### **Q. Why did you choose Storm PM and how did you hear about the company?**

I originally heard about Storm PM through a friend. I then found their website to get more information on what kind of work they do and what companies they have worked with. I also realised I knew Tricia Gallagher's father. So following this, I contacted them and asked them to organise the team building event.

#### **Theme 2: E-marketing**

##### **Website**

##### **Q. Have you visited the Storm PM website?**

Yes I have been on the website a number of times.

##### **Q. How did you obtain the website address?**

I did a search in Google for the address.

**Q. What is your opinion of the website in terms of: ease of use and speed, graphic design and site content?**

The layout is very good and it is easy to use. I was disappointed there wasn't more photos of their events or a gallery section on the website. For instance it would have been good to see photos on the website of the team building events they did have at the hotel this would be good advertising for Storm PM. I think photos or pictures speak larger volumes than words. I would look at a gallery much quicker on a website than read all the text especially when you don't have much time. But overall I think the website is very good, its matter of fact, to the point.

**Q. Have you visited any of Storm PM micro websites e.g. 7UP Christmas on Ice, Mary from Dungloe International Festival? If so, what was your opinion of these websites?**

Yes, I was on the 7UP Christmas on Ice website. I found this website very good and easy to use. I used the website to get information about the event.

**E-mail Marketing**

**Q. What level of e-mail communication with Storm PM and what was the content and nature of e-mails?**

Storm PM's communication with me by e-mail was excellent and very efficient. From the minute they took on the job they kept me informed regularly on the progress of the event by e-mail.

**Q. Do you receive promotional e-mails from Storm PM, for example, information on upcoming events?**

Yes, I have. I received one to do with the Ulster heats of The Rose of Tralee Festival.

**Q. Did you give Storm PM permission to send you promotional e-mails?**

No, but I don't mind at all receiving them.

**Q. In your opinion, what improvements could be made to the way in which e-mail communication could be conducted in the future?**

No, I was happy with the way in which the e-mail communication was conducted.

### **Social Networking**

**Q. Storm PM have set up social media pages for the 7UP Christmas on Ice event (bebo) and The Ulster heats of The Rose of Tralee Festival, have you been on any of these sites?**

No, I haven't been on any of these sites.

**Q. What is your opinion of social networking sites in general, do you use them yourself?**

Yes, I do use them. But at the minute, I don't have the time as I am very busy with work. But if Storm PM requested me as a friend of their social media sites, I would be all means join.

### **Theme 3: E-marketing General**

**Q. Do you think there are any new e-marketing techniques Storm PM could introduce in the future?**

No, I think what they are doing at the minute is very effective. I know exactly what Storm PM can do for me and they keep me informed all the time if there is anything new. Just if there were more visual displays on their website, especially for me selling their site on to other clients. But, apart from that I think they are doing a good job.

Interview ends

## Appendix C

### **Transcript of telephone interview with Storm PM's Client**

**Interviewer:** Fiona Friel  
**Interviewee:** Ann Maire Crosse, Health Promotion Officer, Community Development / Environment, Health Promotion Department HSE West.  
**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2009

In the first instance the interviewer thanked the interviewee for agreeing to take part in the interview. The interviewer then explained the purpose of the interview and gave a brief description of e-marketing.

#### **Theme 1: General Information**

**Q. What was the nature of the work Storm PM undertook for your company?**

Storm PM organised a conference on Environment, Health and Bio Diversity in Co. Donegal.

**Q. Why did you choose Storm PM and how did you hear about the company?**

We choose Storm PM as they had previously organised events for us and we worked well with them.

#### **Theme 2: E-marketing**

##### Website

**Q. Have you visited the Storm PM website?**

No I have not had the opportunity to visit the company's website.

**Q. Reason, for not visiting the site?**

The reason I haven't visited the site is mainly due to lack of time. Also because we had worked with Storm PM before and know a lot about them, I don't feel the need to visit their website.

**Q. Have you visited any of Storm PM micro websites e.g. 7UP Christmas on Ice, Mary from Dungloe International Festival? If so, what was your opinion of these websites?**

Yes, I was on the 7UP Christmas on Ice website. I found this website very good and easy to use. I used the website to get information about the event.

**E-mail Marketing**

**Q. What level of e-mail communication with Storm PM and what was the content and nature of e-mails?**

Storm PM's communication with me by e-mail was excellent and very efficient. All e-mails were very detailed with relevant information on our event.

**Q. Do you receive promotional e-mails from Storm PM, for example, information on upcoming events?**

No I have not received any promotional e-mail to date.

**Q. Would you be happy to receive promotional e-mails from Storm PM?**

Yes, as long as they are relevant to me or the Health Promotions Department.

**Q. In your opinion, what improvements could be made to the way in which e-mail communication could be conducted in the future?**

Overall I was very happy with the e-mail communication with Storm PM and don't feel there are any improvements needed.



## **Social Networking**

**Q. Storm PM have set up social networking pages for the 7UP Christmas on Ice event (bebo) and The Ulster heats of The Rose of Tralee Festival (Facebook) have you been on any of these sites?**

No, I haven't visited any of these sites.

**Q. What is your opinion of social networking sites in general, do you use them yourself?**

No, I do not use these sites often I just don't have the time.

**Q. Would you consider joining a Storm PM social networking site as a friend?**

Yes, I would be happy to join. This way I could get more information on their events.

### **Theme 3: E-marketing General**

**Q. In your opinion, how do you think Storm PM could have delivered your event more effectively through e - marketing?**

I have very little experience of e-marketing but I am aware of the benefits of e-marketing as a promotional tool. Therefore when I work with Storm PM in the future I would like them to use e-marketing communication channels and tools more to promote our event,

Interview ends

## Appendix D

### **Theme Sheet for Depth Interview with Owner/Manager of Storm PM**

#### **Theme 1: E-Marketing Communication Strategy**

- Evolution of marketing communication strategy.
- Formal / informal strategy.
- Current Marketing Communication tools for example: Advertising, PR, Sales Promotion, direct marketing (traditional and e-marketing).
- Evolution of e-marketing communication strategy/tools.
- Adoption and implementation of e-marketing tools: reactive/proactive.

#### **Theme 2: E-marketing Tools**

- **Website**
  - Factors considered when designing and implementing the company website.
  - Primary role of the company web-site.
  - How often the website is updated.
  - Tools adopted to monitor traffic to the website and how often this information is analysed.
- **E-mail marketing**
  - Main function of e-mail, percentage of e-mails which are operational and percentage which are promotional.
  - Details of how e-mail is used as a promotional tool.
  - Consideration for developing e-mail marketing in the future.
- **Social networking sites**
  - Social networking sites utilised by the company.
  - Primary role of social networking sites utilised.
  - Benefits of these social networking sites as a promotional tool.

- **Viral marketing**
  - Types of viral marketing techniques utilised by the company such as:
    - Signature of company at the end of e-mail.
    - Passing multimedia files (video clips of events) through e-mail and other web-sites such as Youtube?
    - “Refer a link” function in company website for other websites.
    - Blogs or event management forums to promote the company and its events.
  - Number of websites that have links to Storm PM’s website.
  - Future development of viral marketing tools.
  
- **Search Engine Optimisations (SEO).**
  - Level of SEO activity in terms of organic techniques such as optimising keywords and descriptions, enlisting in directories and regularly updating the website.
  - Level of paid SEO activity such as Google Adwords or Google Adsense.

### **Theme 3: E-marketing General**

- Benefits and value to the company of the e-marketing tools implemented to date.
- Challenges to developing e-marketing.

## **Theme Sheet for Depth Interview with Employee of Storm PM**

### **Theme 1: E-Marketing Communication Strategy**

- Evolution of marketing communication strategy.
- Formal / informal strategy.
- Current Marketing Communication tools for example: Advertising, PR, Sales Promotion, direct marketing (traditional and e-marketing).
- Evolution of e-marketing communication strategy/tools.
- Adoption and implementation of e-marketing tools: reactive/proactive.

### **Theme 2: E-marketing Tools**

- **Website**
  - Involvement with the development of the website.
  - How often the website is updated.
  - Promotional tools adopted to drive traffic to the website.
- **E-mail marketing**
  - Main function of e-mail, percentage of e-mails which are operational and percentage which are promotional.
  - Details of how e-mail is used as a promotional tool.
  - Consideration for developing e-mail marketing in the future.
- **Social networking sites**
  - Involvement with the company's social networking sites.
  - Benefits of these social networking sites as a promotional tool.
  - How the company's social networking marketing be developed in the future.

- **Viral marketing**
  - Types of viral marketing techniques utilised by the company such as:
    - Signature of company at the end of e-mail.
    - Passing multimedia files (video clips of events) through e-mail and other web-sites such as Youtube?
    - “Refer a link” function in company website for other websites.
    - Blogs or event management forums to promote the company and its events.
  - Number of websites that have links to Storm PM’s website.
  - Future development of viral marketing tools.
  
- **Search Engine Optimisations (SEO).**
  - Level of SEO activity in terms of organic techniques such as optimising keywords and descriptions, enlisting in directories and regularly updating the website.

**Theme 3: E-marketing General**

- Benefits and value to the company of the e-marketing tools implemented to date.
- How current e-marketing tools can be developed.

## **Theme Sheet for interview with Storm PM Clients**

### **Theme 1: General Information**

- Nature of the work Storm PM undertook for the client.
- Reason for choosing Storm PM.
- How the client heard about Storm PM.

### **Theme 2: E-marketing**

#### **Website**

- Has the client visited the Storm PM website?
  - If no, reasons for not visiting the website.
  - If yes, how did the client obtain the website address?
- Clients opinion of the website in terms of:
  - Ease of use and speed
  - Graphic design (layout, colour, images)
  - Site content (relevance of information text easy to read)
- Client's recommendations for improvements to the website.

#### **E-mail Marketing**

- Content and nature (operational/promotional) of e-mail communication with Storm PM.
- Client's opinion of Storm PM's e-mail marketing activity.
- Suggestions for improvements to e-mail communication.

### **Social Networking**

- Client's familiarity with Storm PM's social networking sites facebook and bebo.
- Clients opinion of these sites in terms of:
  - Source of information on Storm PM events
  - Communicate with people who have been to Storm PM's events.
  - Ability to share and view photos of Storm PM'S events.

### **E-marketing General**

- Clients opinion on how Storm PM could have delivered their event more effectively through e-marketing.

In 100/200 words please summarise your experience of working with Storm PM. With your permission this will be displayed on the website.

## **Observation Theme Sheet – Storm PM Ltd**

### **Theme 1: Storm PM's Communication Strategy**

- Current traditional and e-marketing methods of marketing communication employed to promote the company and events.
- Formal or informal approach to traditional and e-marketing communication methods.
- Level of e-marketing tools adopted in comparison to traditional methods.

### **Theme 2: E-marketing tools**

- Level of adoption and implementation of:
  - Company website
  - E-mail marketing
  - SEO
  - Viral marketing
  - Social networking

### **Theme 3: E-marketing development**

- Factors that affect the level of adoption and development of the above e-marketing tools.
- Storm PM's vision for the development of e-marketing.



## Appendix E



5<sup>th</sup> June 2009

Dear

My name is Fiona Friel and I am a Masters (MSc) in Marketing Practice student at Letterkenny Institute of Technology. I am writing to you to invite you to participate in my research in the form of a questionnaire.

My research project is focusing on internet marketing in conjunction with Storm PM. The aim of this survey is to gather information on your Birthday party experience at 7UP Christmas on Ice and your perceptions of Storm PM's internet marketing. The feedback from the survey will assist me in completing my research project and also help Storm PM to offer their customers an improved service.

The questionnaire should take about 5 minutes to complete. Enclosed is a pre-paid envelope for return of the questionnaire. If you were able to complete and return the questionnaire by 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2009, it would be greatly appreciated. Please be assured that all information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

As a thank you for returning the completed questionnaire Storm PM have 5 family passes to this years Christmas on Ice to giveaway. Your name will be entered into a prize draw were you will have the chance to win a **Free Family Skating Pass to the value of €50** to this year Christmas on Ice. The draw is limited to just 85 people therefore increasing your chances of winning.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Kind Regards,

Fiona Friel

## Appendix F

### Section A – 7UP Christmas on Ice Birthday Party

**1. Have you or any member of your family had a Birthday Party at 7UP Christmas on ice?**

Y  N  *If no, please skip to Section B.*

**2. What was the age of the person having their Birthday?**

0-5  6-10  11-15  16+

**3. How many people attended the Birthday Party?**

0-9  10-19  20-29  30-39  40-49  50+

**4. Please rank the following factors in order of importance to you when booking a Birthday Party from 1- 6, with 1 being the most important and 6 the least important**

Price	
Party Food	
Party Host	
Safe environment	
Party Decorations	
Facilities for parents/guardians	

**5. In relation to your Birthday Party at 7UP Christmas on Ice, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with each of the statements below.**

- The Birthday party was good value for money.
- The food was excellent.
- The venue was a safe environment to have a Birthday Party.
- The staff at the Birthday party where very helpful.
- I would recommend it as a venue for a Birthday Party.
- I will book a Birthday Party again this year.
- Overall a Birthday Party at 7UP Christmas on Ice is a very enjoyable experience.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

**6. Would any of the following be of interest to you as part of the Christmas on Ice event?**

Christmas Market  Santa's Grotto  Other (please specify) .....

*If none of the above, please skip to Section B.*

**7. How much would you expect to pay per child to visit Santa in his Grotto? €**

**Section B. Marketing**

**1. Have you visited the Storm PM website? ([www.stormpm.com](http://www.stormpm.com))**

Yes  No  *If no, please skip to question 5*

**2. Where did you find the Storm PM website address? (tick all that apply)**

Newspaper advertisements  Radio advertisements

Search Engine (e.g. google, yahoo)  Link from another website (please specify).....

Other (please specify).....

**3. Please rank the following factors in order of importance when using a website from 1- 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 the least important**

Quick to load

Easy to navigate

Graphic design (layout, colour, images)

Site content

Text is easy to read


**4. In relation to the Storm PM website, please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with each of the statements below.**

The website loads up quickly

The website is easy to navigate.

The website has an attractive design.

The website has useful information on the company.

The website has useful information on upcoming events.

Overall, I found the website to be excellent.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The website loads up quickly					
The website is easy to navigate.					
The website has an attractive design.					
The website has useful information on the company.					
The website has useful information on upcoming events.					
Overall, I found the website to be excellent.					

**5. Do you or any of the following use social media sites? (e.g. bebo, facebook)**

Me	<input type="checkbox"/>
My partner	<input type="checkbox"/>
Birthday Child/Children	<input type="checkbox"/>

*If no, please skip to question 8.*

**6. Please indicate whether you, your partner or your children use any of the following social media sites (e.g. Bebo, Facebook), please tick all that apply.**

Social Media Site	Me	My Partner	Birthday Child /Children
Bebo ( 7UP Christmas on Ice bebo page)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Facebook ( Ulster heats of The Rose of Tralee Facebook page)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youtube	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Linkedin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Myspace	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Twitter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*If none of the above, please skip to question 8*

**7. In relation to the Storm PM social media sites (Bebo, Facebook), please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with each of the statements below.**

The sites are a great place to communicate with people who have been at the company's events.

The sites are a good source of information on events.

The ability to share and view photos of events is a great way to create a buzz about of events.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**8. How would you prefer to hear about Storm PM events? Please tick all that apply.**

Newspaper Advertisements  By E-mail  Radio Advertisements   
Road Signage  Flyers  Other (please specify).....

**9. What type of events would you like to see Storm PM bringing to Donegal in the future?**

**Section C: Classification questions**

**Gender:** F  M:

**Your age in years:** 18-24  25-34  35-44  45-54  55-64  65+

**Name**.....

**Address**.....

*(Name and address details are optional, but should be completed if you wish to enter the prize draw)*

**Thank You**





































