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Year-2012/13
School of Business, Leadership and Enterprise

Student I.D. Number: *S159393*

Module title: *Research Methods*

Assignment title: *Developing a research proposal*

Assignment number: One   Assignment weighting: 100%

Hand out date: 02 November 2012

Hand in date: 04 February 2013

In submitting this whole assignment, I confirm that it is all my own work and that all sources are duly acknowledged using the Harvard referencing system.

The Learning outcome(s) assessed by this assignment are:

   All – see module specification

Remember that at postgraduate level you are expected to:

- Have a high standard of presentation, structure, layout and design;
- Demonstrate appropriate coverage, critical appreciation and evaluation of relevant literature;
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of key concepts and the application of theory to practical solutions;
- Show evidence of originality of thought and approach and of creative problem solving ability.

General comments

Mark	Lecturer's signature	Date

The grade awarded for this piece of work remains provisional until ratified by the assessment board.

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This assessment is divided into two parts:

Part One (2000 words)*

Identify a research topic and explain your motivation to investigate it further.

Define a research question arising from this topic.

Conduct a critical literature review of your chosen subject ensuring that you include at least 10 peer-reviewed articles and/or manuscripts. All sources of data must be referenced.

Part Two (2000 words)*

This part should be informed by your Literature Review from *Part One*.

Please translate your research question into an aim and a suitable set of objectives which employs quantitative or qualitative methods, or a mixture of both.

Please justify your choice of methods by discussing its advantages and limitations.

Using quantitative and/or qualitative information relevant to your topic of research, please provide an example of secondary data analysis. Where appropriate, use illustrative figures and tables.

Excluding references

End

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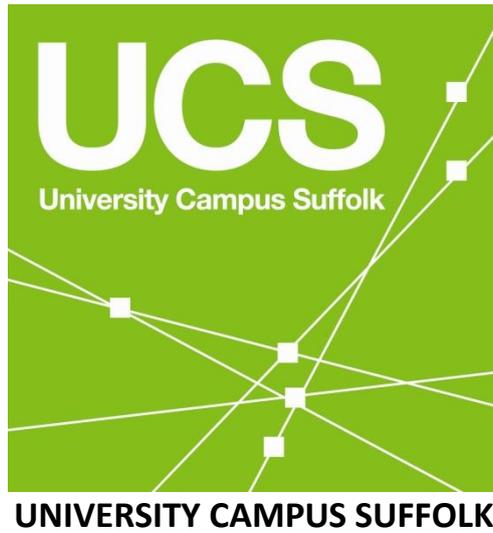
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AND ENTERPRISE

MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)
2012-2013

Module   : Research Methods

Module Lecturers   : Dr Vadim Grinevich, Dr Daba Chowdhury, Dr Tom Vine

Assignment   : Developing a Research Proposal

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Hand in Date   : 04/02/2013

Marketing Strategies To Increase Sales In The IT Industry

Information technology (IT) industry is the most dynamic and fastest moving sector in the world, driven by innovation, both in terms of new products and services and trends in buyer behaviour. It is both a huge industry in itself and the source of dramatic changes in business practices in all other sectors. In the ranking of the world's most valuable companies 2012, 5 out of the top 10 companies are IT companies(Financial Times, 2012). Undoubtedly, their marketing strategies play a major role in their success. One company can have the most innovative idea in the world, but if it can't get people excited about it, it doesn't matter.

In this essay I will explain why I have chosen "Marketing Strategies to increase Sales in the IT Industry" topic and define a research question emerging from this topic. By researching a range of peer-reviewed articles and manuscripts, I will conduct a critical literature review of chosen subject. Then I will translate the research question into an aim and a suitable set of objectives which employs quantitative and qualitative methods. After I justify my choice of methods by discussing its advantages and limitations, finally I will provide an example of secondary data analysis by using quantitative or qualitative information relevant to my topic of research.

Effective marketing is a key to the survival and growth of any sales based business companies. That is why marketing strategies have become a significant function of success in today's competitive business environment. The meaning of marketing is not only selling the products, it also encompasses company's orientation on customer needs. Quite often companies forget their competitors while they focus on satisfaction of the customers, however good marketing strategies require close attention to both customer and competitors; therefore companies should build up their marketing strategies based on customer' fulfillment and competitor' maneuvers.

IT industry is the fastest growing and progressing sector. While Apple Inc. was on the verge of bankruptcy only 15 years ago the greatest corporate comeback story of all time realized in just a decade(Shontell, 2010). As measured by the value of its stock, in May 2010, Apple has been the world's most valuable technology company(The New York Times, 2012), in 2011 world's most valuable brand (Indvik, 2011), and in 2012 the most valuable company of all time(BBC, 2012). With true marketing strategies and innovative ideas, the balance can be upset in as a short time as just 10 years in IT industry and hit the top from bottom. Undoubtedly, IT industry is the most profitable sector(CNN,2009) in the world and even it can be said the most important one because it effects the other industries and changes their business models.

Therefore, when it is considered the importance of the marketing strategies and IT sector, it is critical to find out the key marketing strategies in the IT industry. Because the greatest need of companies to find ways to sell their products or services. Nowadays a lot of IT companies are in a rush to grab the best marketers and sellers to be able to survive in competitive business world or by putting in job advertisements, they look for professionals to train their sales and marketing staff to get higher efficiency.

It is seen that obviously there is a deficiency in this area. With this research topic, I aim to fill this gap by researching and finding out marketing strategies applied by the most successful companies under different conditions IT industry. After I determine them, I will collect under a resource. Furthermore, I am quite interested in the Marketing area and like to give trainings. By this research, I aim to give trainings and illuminate IT companies' sales and marketing staff.

An important question emerging from this topic is: "What marketing strategies are vital importance to be successful in the IT industry?"

Title: Marketing activities of companies in the educational software sector.
Author: Jones, R. and Rowley, J.
Methodology: Semi-structured in-depth interviews
Jones and Rowley (2009, pp. 337-354) suggest a profile of the educational software marketplace and indicates that a number of marketing issues similarly have an effect on all businesses. Differences in behaviour and attitudes are associated with company size and respondent professional/work expertise. In particular, smaller businesses tend to be customer oriented, but often not market oriented. This paper is important for that it sheds light on the marketing environment and investigates whether there are differences in experiences, attitudes and approaches between different sizes of firms.

Title: New Strategies for Marketing Information Technology
Author: Bryan, A.L.
Methodology: Observation
Bryan (1999, pp. 380-381) criticizes and comments about what kind of marketing book the IT professional needs. This article is important because it gains different point of views about whether what is a necessity or not in marketing in the industry but it has not enough information. Nevertheless, its references would be quite beneficial.

Title: An exploration of marketing tactics for turbulent environments
Author: Mason, R.B. and Staude, G.
Methodology: A marketing mix model
Mason and Staude (2009, pp. 173-190) illustrate the marketing tactics for a complex, turbulent environment, when marketing and the environment are viewed through a complexity lens. This article would contribute to current chosen research topic by emphasizing a new way to consider future marketing activities of the companies. The model can assist marketers to identify the tactics to use, dependent on the nature of their environment.

Title: Marketing logics for competitive advantage?
Author: Tollin, K. and Jones, R.
Methodology: Grounded theory technique and 15 personal semi-structured in-depth interviews with top managers in marketing (CMEs).
Tollin and Jones (2009, pp. 523-550) explain ways in which marketing managers approach similar marketing problems. They give important managerial insights into the ways in which managers' logics both limit and provide opportunities for managerial action. Tollin and Jones use a quantitative study in their research as distinct from the other authors' researches in this literature research. In addition, they differently represent a new and different way of addressing marketing management.

Title: Integrated Business Strategy For Internationalization Process: Case Study On Korean Companies Enter China Consumer Electronic Market.
Author: Lee, J.W. and Arokiasamy, L.
Methodology: Case Study
Lee and Arokiasamy (2011, pp. 1695-1706) suggest a model to integrate international marketing, business and operation strategy from some literatures on internationalization process models and a case study on two Korean companies(LG and Samsung) for enter into foreign market. This article is rather beneficial that they incorporate both theoretical and practical business strategies into a firm's international expansion.

Title: The strategic orientation of marketing information systems – an empirical study.
Author: Xu, X.M.
Methodology: Questionnaire(Survey)

Xu (1999, pp. 262 - 272) presents the current practice of the strategic function of marketing, and the application of information systems in supporting the strategic function. The marketing strategic function that has been perceived important by marketing managers, and many companies perform some of the strategic functions, such as market segmentation/targeting, competition and market analysis.He suggests that a knowledge-enriched, strategic oriented marketing information systems with an emphasis on environmental scanning, competition mapping, market positioning, and SWOT analysis needs to be developed through advanced computing technology.
 	
    This research is important to show the strategic role and the importance of marketing. He reveals that the strategic function of marketing.
 	
    The limitations of this study need to be noted: This study does not specify what environment factors are of strategic importance to the computer industry. How to articulate and convert marketing managers' vision and knowledge in noticing and interpreting marketing information is beyond the scope of this paper.

Title: Marketing for survival: a comparative case study of SME software firms
Author: Parry, S. , Jones, R. , Rowley, J. , and Kupiec-Teahan, B.
Methodology: A two-case. Participant-observation in both firms and 22 semi-structured interviews with owner-managers, employees and customers.
According to Parry et al. (2012, pp. 712 - 728), there is a need for small software firms to strike a balance between customer orientation and innovativeness in order to survive. They present the success and failure of two similar small software technology firms from a marketing perspective.   This article differs from the other articles because it makes a compare and contrast focusing on only two companies. It demonstrates the stark contrast between successful and unsuccessful behaviour, can act as a useful guide for small to medium-sized enterprise (SME) managers in IT industry who often have technical but less managerial competencies.

Title: Exploitation of Marketing Practices by High and Low Technology Firms in IT Industry
Author: Rajput, A. , Abdul Hamid, A.B. and Muhammad, A.R.
Methodology: A survey method
Rajput and et al. (2011, pp. 1040-1045.) examines the use of marketing practices and the promotional tools by high and low technology firms in information technology industry. They report a significant difference between the marketing practices of high and low technology firms. They collect data with a questionnaire pertinent to use of marketing practices and promotional tools.   This study carries importance because it compared and contrasted the exploitation of marketing practices and promotional tools among high technology and low technology firms. Consequently, it can be said from this study that high technology firms heavily imply the marketing practices; while, low technology firms profoundly exploit promotional tools.

Title: The internet, consumer empowerment and marketing strategies
Author: Pires, G.D., Stanton, J. and Rita, P.
Methodology: Quality gap analysis
Pires and et al. (2006, pp. 936-949) argue that increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is shifting market power from suppliers to consumers, the ensuing consumer empowerment is presented as an unintended consequence of marketing. Marketing implications arising from this consumer empowerment are examined in terms of a process where control and management by suppliers over consumer access and enablement are increasingly difficult.

This article is important because it proves that there is a need to regain control over the marketing process, that is, to either manage the technological empowerment of consumers, or to devise new strategies cognisant of the possibility that such technological empowerment cannot be managed. The valuation of consumer loyalty in this environment rises significantly.

Title: Globalizing internationals: product strategies of ICT manufacturers
Author: Gabrielsson, P., Gabrielsson, M., Darling, J. and Luostarinen, R.
Methodology: A theoretical framework and propositions are constructed, which are then examined in a multiple case study of ICT manufacturers.
Gabrielsson and et al. (2006, pp. 650-671) shed some light on how international information and communication technology (ICT) manufacturers can meet the huge globalization challenge of developing products and managing them during global expansion. In particular, they look for an answer to this question: How do product strategies change when these companies move from international to global and why? The article would be beneficial for the research topic because this study provides a deeper understanding of the impact of the explanatory factors on global product strategies. This study also describes in detail the product strategy dimensions and standardization alternatives for globalizing international ICT companies and impacting factors for managers to consider when planning their global expansion and product strategies. This research is different from this aspect that it is among the first studies studying globalizing internationals and their products strategies. An understanding of the evolution of products strategies and the reasons for this development will contribute to the international marketing field.

This research topic which employs the qualitative methods, aims for realizing the following items.

Objectives:

- To Explore the Information Technologies (IT) Industry
- To Explore Vital Marketing Strategies for IT Companies
- To Explore Differences in Marketing Experiences and Approaches between Different Sizes of Firms
- To Remedy the IT companies' Marketing and Sales troubles
- To Guide Marketing and Sales Staff
- To Give Them Trainings and Consultancy Services
- To Have a Significant Impact on the Field
- To Fill a Gap in Market
- To Be an Important Reference Guide

After reading about ten articles, I have decided to use Qualitative(Interview and Case Study) Methods in my research due to the those advantages.

- The attention to detail, the ability to embrace both verbal and non-verbal behaviour, to penetrate fronts, discover meanings, and reveal the subtlety and complexity of cases or issues.

- Portraying perspectives and conveying feelings and experiences.

- Encompassing processes and natural environments.

- Actions are contextualised within situations and time.

- Theory is generated from the empirical data, and consequently there is 'closeness of fit' between theory and data.

- Although this kind of research is sometimes criticised for not being generalisable, there are two ways in which it is, namely a) through the theory that is generated. Such theory then becomes available to others to test and apply - see the example above on differentiation-polarisation; and b) though it might be only a single case study, it might contribute to an archive of studies on a particular issue which then become reinterpreted. Hargreaves (1988), for example, working from a number of existing qualitative studies that had researched the social circumstances of teaching, developed a different explanation of teaching quality from 'official' ones which placed emphasis on the personal qualities of teachers. Ball (1987) similarly drew on a number of qualitative studies to generate a theory of school organisation.

- Other strengths:
  a) the way her own self (experience, disposition, interests) related to the research and gave her opportunities to advance the work;
  b) how the quality of her data 'challenged' her to search for interconnections, and how she found 'unexpected reefs' under her feet;
  c) the benefits of time to think;
  d) the nature of qualitative data as a seed-bed for ideas, and chaos as a prelude to creativity; e) the recognition of weaknesses in the study, but
  f) seeing the main strength as the insights the research generated and how they will be used by others. As a matter of interest, the insights of Nias' (1989) research have been extensively used by others throughout the world.

Even though the Qualitative Methods have a lot of advantages as mentioned above, it has some disadvantages as follows:

- It has been argued that single qualitative studies cannot provide grounds for generalising across cases - though see above.

- Immersion in the depths of a qualitative study can lead to either or both 'going native' (see above) and 'macro blindness', that is to say the researcher might offer explanations in terms of the situation under observation, oblivious to more powerful forces operating on the situation from outside.

- Qualitative research can be a high-risk, low-yield enterprise. It can take time to negotiate access, assemble a sample, develop trust and rapport, find out what is 'going on' or what people are thinking. 'Hanging around' and 'muddling through' can bring worries. Maybe one will not find 'reefs beneath one's feet' and drown in the maelstrom as a result!

- Qualitative studies are often accused of being impressionistic, subjective, biased, idiosyncratic and lacking in precision. Some of the bias comes through, typically, in the rhetorical presentation of accounts (Atkinson, 1990). Researchers might use a number of rhetorical devices, such as metaphor, jargon, 'loaded' terminology, selected and variable use of transcript, quotations, selective use of examples, to subtly persuade the reader to the author's line of argument. However, although this is a charge that might be made of particular studies, it is not an essential one of the approach. As we have seen above, there are procedures available to establish validity and rigour, and these should be demonstrated in the presentation(Woods, 2006).

The Example of Secondary Data Analysis:

1. Firstly, a research topic has been identified. **"Marketing strategies to increase sales in the IT Industr**y.**"**
2. Secondly, a research question has been defined arising from this topic. **"What marketing strategies are vital importance to be successful in the IT industry?"**

3. Then a critical literature review of chosen research topic, including choice of data sources and their reliability has been conducted to validate research question.

The following data has been used as an example for secondary data analysis in the context of this literature review and some information is chosen from this data as it is seen for current research topic.

Comparative case study, Findings (cross-case comparisons) and Discussion parts are received from this example data, because it would be a good sample to demonstrate the stark contrast between successful and unsuccessful behaviour, can act as a useful guide for small to medium-sized enterprise (SME) managers in IT industry. The other parts are discarded because they mention about known general things about marketing.

4. Finally the research question has been refined. **"What marketing strategies are vital importance to be successful in the IT Software industry?"**

"Marketing for survival: a comparative case study of SME software firms."

Abstract

1. Introduction

2. Marketing in SMEs

3. Marketing in the software industry

4. Methodology

Comparative case study

A two-case comparative case study approach was selected as the primary method of investigation. Two software SMEs were investigated during the course of the research; Company B was investigated for a period of three months during 2006 but went into liquidation after six years of operation, whilst Company A was investigated over a period of two-and-a-half years (until 2008). Both cases were based on the same technology park in the North Wales region. Indeed they were both operating in the same technology incubator building. Therefore, this study provided a unique opportunity to analyse two companies that were of similar size and subject to similar conditions, but whose fates were at opposite poles. Further information on both SMEs are provided in Table I.

Semi-structured interviews

In order to investigate the dyadic relationships between the firms and their customers, and to obtain a holistic view of the marketing in both SMEs, 17 face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents from 15 of the firm's customers in order to uncover their attitudes and opinions of the firms.

Therefore a list of topics generally discussed in most interviews included the following:
- background to the relationship;
- perceived benefits and problems which may have arisen during the relationship;
- satisfaction with the product and service;
- communication with the software company;
- behaviour of the staff and their approach to customer service;
- likelihood of recommendations and consideration of further purchases;
- responsiveness of the company to customer needs;
- relationships with other software companies-thoughts and comparisons with
- current company; and
- overall expectations of a software company.

Additional semi-structured interviews, five in total, were also conducted with Company B's employees after it had gone into liquidation, in order to gather their perceptions regarding why the company failed. Extended participant observation with Company A throughout the study allowed informal conversations to take place with employees and the owner-manager and a recording of conversations and observations was made in a diary covering two-and-a-half years.

Table I.
A summary of both cases

Company ID	Company A	Company B
Products/services	Bespoke software solutions company, providing a range of customised database solutions, IT services and standard software products	1 product, a project management software tool based on new technologies
Firm Age	9 (in 2008)	6 (liquidated in 2006)
Employees	12 full-time, 1 part-time	10 full-time, 4 part-time
Annual turnover in 2008	£375,000	n/a
Number of customers	20	2
Qualified marketing employee	Sales person	Sales person
Management	1 x Owner-manager	2 x Owner-managers (Partners)

Customer	Industry	n	Number of interviews and role of respondent	Private/public sector
1.	Financial Services	20	1 – Managing director	Private
2.	Chemical	560	1 – IT Manager	Private
3.	Information services	10	2 – Managing director and head of systems (separately)	Not-for-profit
4.	Government	9,000	1 – IT manager	Public
5.	Government	20,000	1 – Programme manager	Public
6.	Public services	50	1 – IT Manager	Public
7.	Agriculture	1	1 – Managing director	Private
8.	Sustainable development	5	1 – Managing director and web site officer (combined)	Public
9.	Utilities	15	1 – Finance assistant	Private
10.	Manufacturing	350	1 –IT Manager	Private
11.	Government	3,000	1 – IT Manager	Public
12.	Emergency services	1,700	1 – ICT Software engineer	Public
13.	Government/economic development	1,000	2 – IT Manager and project manager (separate	Public
14.	Government	50	1 – Research and grants manager	Public
15.	Medical	2,000	1 – Project manager	Private

Cross-case analysis

The analysis of both cases draws upon the following sources of data: semi-structured interviews, public documentation, archival records and the researcher's participant observation diary. Construct validity was established by using these multiple sources of evidence and having key respondents check their interview transcripts. The data analysis consisted of an iterative analysis of the various methods. The data was firstly analysed separately by conducting content analysis of documents and transcripts, then an overall cross-case analysis was conducted whereby a list of common themes were identified and cross case comparisons were made by using a pattern-matching technique.

5. Findings: cross-case comparisons

The findings below are reported under the main themes surfaced in the cross-case analysis and include selected quotations from interview respondents.

Communication

Communication was a recurring theme within both SMEs, both internally and externally. Company A proactively and frequently communicated with customers throughout the buying process and following delivery of the software solution. A dialogue between the SME and its customers was deemed necessary in order to develop a match between customer need and software solution.

"there was very little collaboration between the team as a whole . . . all team members had separate modules. We didn't work as a team (Company B Employee)."

Management style

The management styles of both SMEs differed quite significantly. Company A's owner-manager had a fairly democratic and hands-on style, but all major decisions would be taken by him. Moreover

he was highly motivated and driven, with an ethical style with regards to the treatment of his employees. The employees clearly respected and admired their owner manager.

Both partners of Company B exhibited a laissez-faire management style with the aim of encouraging innovation and did not share the same values, and had conflicting visions for the organisation.

"There was constant infighting, internal conflict which led to one director having one set of contacts/relationships and the other having another set of contacts/relationships. Problems between (both managers) affected client relationships (Company B Employee)."

Delivering on the promise

One of Company A's promises to prospective customers was timely and effective delivery of the software solution.

"They deliver everything they say they're going to deliver on time and if they can't meet that timescale, they phone us well in advance and we come up with an alternative (Customer 14)."

Company B struggled to deliver on their promise because they struggled to complete their product. *"No single application was ever finished and taken to the market, no sales, no customers(Company B Employee)."*

Planning

Company A's owner-manager was keen to formulate a plan in order to set objectives, list tasks, and to consider the budget and resources required to accomplish objectives. A short-term plan and longer-term plan proved an effective way of organising and managing work, following work schedules and achieving deadlines. This helped the company to visualise opportunities for improvement and learn from past mistakes. Company B had formulated plans to attract government funding and to satisfy lending from the bank, but they didn't have a strategic plan.

Market research and promotion

Market research was generally weak in both cases, largely due to limited resources. In Company A, market information was collated via networking, talking to customers and other stakeholders, internet research and attending events. Similarly, Company B did not conduct market research and instead collated ad hoc information through contacts and networks. Unlike Company A, Company B did not have a database with prospective customers and contacts. As a result, each partner and the sales manager had their own list of contacts.

Customer orientation

Company A recognised the importance of customer orientation, which they considered to involve listening to customer needs and tailoring solutions and services to customer requirements:

"They understand what we are trying to achieve, they understand the way that we work and they bend over backwards to accommodate our wishes (Customer 12)."

They also believed that a balance was necessary between the level of innovation and customer needs, and that a comprehensive understanding of their business was vital in developing an optimal software solution for their needs. As for Company B, their focus was not first and foremost on the consumer, but on creating its own visualised innovative software solution. Nevertheless, the product was sold to the customers, but they struggled to adapt the software to the consumer's particular needs, resorting to amending the product the way it wanted to as opposed to the way the customer wanted:

"[The SME] listened to our needs but went outside the scope, exploring further in the way of improvements, ideas, innovation (Customer 15)."

Company B's focus was on the product itself, innovation and re-developing the product. They believed that this is what a customer would want: the most innovative product on the market.

Culture

Company A's organisational culture was one of hard work, ambition and teamwork where employees were dedicated to getting the job done. The owner-manager encouraged the sharing of knowledge in order to stimulate growth, customer and employee satisfaction. The lack of customer orientation in Company B can be ascribed to the intrinsic research culture of the organisation. The culture ensured that ideas, innovation and research took priority over customer needs.

6. Discussion

The issues raised in the literature on marketing in SMEs were certainly evident in both case studies. The difficulties encountered included a lack of resources, limited finance and lack of marketing expertise. Although Company A's owner-manager consulted with his employees, the power and decision making was concentrated solely in the manager and decisions were sometimes made based on instinct and personal preferences, as opposed to a strategic and logical assessment of the environment. In Company B, decisions were made without adequate consideration of opportunities and the environment. Moreover, different decisions were made by both partners, and their reluctance to communicate with each other caused conflict among the partners.

They also conducted trial and error marketing as they endeavoured to try different marketing approaches. Company A recognised that marketing was important, but sometimes struggled to decide which activities to focus on. As for Company B, their marketing was haphazard, reactive and very basic.

The literature highlights the difficulties often encountered between Marketing and R&D within technology companies. However, no major difficulties were identified in Company A, and no function was considered superior. At Company B, problems were evident as the SME's culture valued technical knowledge more than marketing knowledge, which concurs with the literature proposing that spending on R&D in the technology sector is regarded as more important than spending on marketing. The suggestion that software companies tend to run a business based on projects was true in both case studies, but neither case had developed into a "productised" company, which is arguably key to sustained growth.

The comparative case study has demonstrated two different approaches of marketing by two similar SMEs in the software industry. Company B is a pivotal case in this study, and can be used to illustrate bad practice when marketing for survival. Therefore, Table IV summarises learning from both success and failure cases in order to generate a list of good practice to be adopted, and bad practice to be avoided.

Table IV. Learning from success and failure: good and bad practice in marketing for survival	Good practice	Bad practice (to be avoided)
	Frequent and open communication with customers	Avoiding complaints
	Delivering on the promise	Not completing a software product before delivery
	Being realistic about what can be achieved/delivered	Using technical terms and jargon in promotional material
	Effective internal communication	Lack of internal communication and teamwork
	Working from a business plan	Power struggles and arguments between owners/managers
	Developing solutions based on known customer requirements	No business/marketing plan
	Conducting market research (including customer feedback)	No market research
	Promoting the SME via networking, local and regional events, developing promotional material which address solutions to customer problems	Over-emphasis on innovation and research at the cost of providing customer satisfaction
	Achieving a balance between customer/market orientation and innovation	

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