The Application of Integrated Marketing Communications

by micro businesses

in The Republic of Ireland.

Ruaidhri O Broin

16/08/2013

A dissertation submitted to Dublin Business School in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters in Business Administration

16/08/2013
Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I submit as the dissertation on the program of study leading to an award of a Masters in Business Administration, is entirely my own work, unless referenced in the text as a specific source and included in the bibliography, and has not been submitted in whole or in part for assessment for my academic purpose other than in partial fulfilment of the award stated above.

Signed: Ruaidhri O Broin       Date: 16/08/2013

Ruaidhri O Broin
Abstract

This study has been carried out to analyse the application of integrated marketing communication campaigns within micro businesses. This research has addressed the impact that IMC can have on micro business and the practical solutions that work best in practice.

The practice of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), its application by micro enterprises and the challenges that are faced by micro enterprises when implementing IMC are discussed and analysed throughout this study.

Both secondary and primary research methods were adopted to carry out the research. The secondary data was collected using journal articles, trade journals, online and above all academic books laid the foundation of the research. The primary research involved qualitative research methods. For this qualitative research, the owners and managers of micro businesses were chosen and interviewed face to face.

The dissertation begins with an introduction to the context of the study, The Republic of Ireland. Then follows a comprehensive review of the literature in relation to micro enterprises, ME owners and then moves on to IMC.

The chosen research methodologies are presented along with the rationale for choosing such methods. Findings gathered from qualitative interviews are presented and discussed.

The key contribution of this research is to understand how ME’s are applying IMC, which practices are most successful and the challenges they face in promoting their business.

Finally, research limitations and recommendations for future research are outlined.

The research has provided useful recommendations that may be helpful to micro business owners in The Republic of Ireland.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank all of the MBA lectures in Dublin Business School for all of their help throughout the course, and in particular my research supervisor, Chantal Ladias, for her help, valuable guidance, support and constructive feedback during the development of this dissertation.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the participation of CGrogan & Co Solicitors, SkidProof Ltd and NetTech Ltd. I would like to thank the owners of these micro firms for their time and for participating in the interviews that were carried out.

I would like to thank my family for their support, and lastly, I would like to thank Elaine Kennedy, for her proof reading and constant encouragement throughout the two years of this MBA course.

16th August 2013

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

This research examines how micro enterprises in The Republic of Ireland apply Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) within their business. The purpose of the study is to ascertain how the owners / managers of micro enterprises apply IMC, the challenges that they face with regard to IMC and how they measure the success of IMC. The researcher also investigates the knowledge that these business owners / managers have in this field of marketing and IMC, how they plan their business promotions and if there are any innovative marketing practices that they use to gain a competitive advantage.

The chapter begins by outlining the rationale for undertaking this current research. Following on from this, the study’s research questions and objectives are summarised. Next, a summary of the dissertation layout is presented and finally the researcher gives an outline of the limitations arising from the current research, concluding with highlighting the benefits and main contributions of this study.

1.2 Rationale and Purpose for the Study

The Republic of Ireland has seen an increasing amount of job losses in the years leading up to 2013. There was a total of 14.6% of the Irish workforce unemployed in November 2012 (Independent.ie). As a result of a lack of employment within the Irish market, many individuals are seeking self-employment and instigating small business start-ups. It has been noted that over 2,200 people are starting a new business in Ireland every month (Merrion Street – The Irish Government News Service). Whilst this may portray an encouraging figure, there is also a high failure rate within this sector.

The aim of the research is to study the knowledge, understanding and application of IMC within micro enterprises in The Republic of Ireland and how the application of such concepts can help a micro business survive in today’s marketplace.

Between the years 1995 and 2008, Ireland enjoyed sustained growth with increased employment levels, living standards and global trade. However, post 2008, Ireland fell into recession which has seen unemployment figure rise to 13.7% (CSO, 2013).
As a result of this high level of unemployment, many people have turned to starting their own micro businesses in an attempt to generate their own income.

It is important to note that the performance of ME’s is of great significance to Ireland given the contribution of small enterprises to economic growth and job creation. Enterprises with less than 10 employees account for 89.11% of the country’s businesses (European Commission, 2012).

The question needs to be posed, therefore, with micro enterprises generating so much employment in the country, are ME owners / managers sufficiently equipped to promote their businesses effectively. For micro business to be successful, they must increase their application of IMC to remain competitive.

The need for this research is to also establish the challenges that ME’s are facing with the application of IMC within their business. The Irish government has recognised that more time and effort needs to be spent on developing the marketing skills of MEs so as to enable them to be more competitive.

However, the main problem that arises is that many people that start ME’s do not have the knowledge or proper training to apply such marketing practices. Therefore, it is important to understand the education levels that ME owners have in regards to marketing, how they are applying IMC within their business and what success, if any, they are having.

By reading relevant literature, it has become clear to the researcher of this current study that there has been little research done in Ireland as to how micro enterprises apply IMC and the struggles that they face with promoting their business on a daily basis.

This research is unique in that it investigates the challenges that ME’s overcome to survive in Ireland and the perceived opinion that they have of such marketing practices. This study is also unique as it does not concentrate on any one sector. ME’s from across many industry sectors have been used for this research.

The author of this study is involved within the ME sector of business and has plans to expand various business opportunities within the area of micro firms in the coming
years, so this field of study is of great interest to them.

The author’s personal/professional experience and relationships with micro businesses owners within in this sector has assisted them in understanding the research problem in a more thorough manner. As the promotion of a ME has always been a challenge for business owners, the author has, therefore, tried to identify the reasons behind the issues that micro business owners face in today’s business climate. The researcher would like to answer the research questions and in coming to a final outcome, would like to provide the findings to micro businesses. This will be done in the hope that it will be a direct benefit to micro enterprises in The Republic of Ireland.

1.3  Research Questions and Objectives (Interest in the subject)

The research question arises from the research problem. According to Chisnell (1997), it is important that the research problem is effectively defined as it is “critical” that it describes the “nature and direction” of the complete research process. As a result of the author’s findings in both literature and through observation of the Irish micro enterprise marketplace, this study’s research questions include:

1.  How is IMC applied within micro business?

2.  What impact does IMC have on micro businesses?

3.  What IMC solutions work for micro business in practice?

The objectives to the research question are:

- To profile ME owners and to find out if their personal education / training in marketing is a factor in the ME’s effort to effectively promote their business.
- To determine if ME’s plan the marketing activities and if they use a promotion strategy.
- To identify ME’s strategy of investment with regard to marketing.
- To identify what promotion tools and concepts are most successful for ME’s.
- To establish what ME’s are doing differently to their competitors to help promote their business.
- To determine if ME’s are using a consistent marketing message.
- To determine if ME’s are engaging their customers.
- To establish a ME owner’s view on the importance of marketing and promotions in their business.
- To examine what MEs are doing with their marketing endeavors to develop trust levels with their customers.
- To determine the challenges that ME owners face with regard to IMC.
- To determine how MEs measure the success of their marketing campaigns.

The purpose of these objectives is to give the researcher sufficient information to answer the research questions and to formulate opinions on how the ME’s investigated are applying IMC within their business.

An interview guide was carefully prepared to extract the required information from the respondents of three companies that were selected for this study. The same interview guide was used for all interviews.

The research methodology used for this investigation is laid out in more detail in Chapter 4.

1.4 Structure of the Dissertation (Approach and Organisation)

Initially, a set of research objectives were formulated based on the problem area. These research objectives were then supported in the secondary research using relevant sources such as books and journals to understand the research problem in more depth. After the secondary research was completed, the next step was to carry out the primary research. This was done through the practice of face - to - face interviews with micro business owners. The qualitative data collected was then analysed and based on the findings, a suitable conclusion and recommendations were drawn.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows:

Chapter 1 This chapter gives an outlook of the research problem. The chapter also gives a brief detail about the background of the context. This chapter is split into 8 sections that highlight the aims of the research, the objectives, major contributions and limitations of the research. Lastly, all the important abbreviations are listed.
**Chapter 2** The literature review is split between Chapters 2 and 3. In order to put the research into context, chapter 2 investigates micro enterprises and marketing.

It defines the ME and examines the ME’s characteristics and methods of marketing their products / services.

**Chapter 3** examines the ME and Integrated Marketing Communications. The chapter outlines the challenges that ME’s face in regards to IMC. This chapter overviews the secondary research undertaken by the researcher. This chapter has been designed using relevant books, journals and articles related to the topic.

**Chapter 4** of this dissertation details the research methodology employed in the primary research. This chapter details the statement of the research question, the objectives, the choice of research philosophy and the eventual selection of the data collection method employed by the researcher. This chapter attempts to reflect the assumptions that are made about the research by discussing the research methods used. The chapter is divided into the following sections: Research Approach, Data Collection and Research criteria. Each section has been reviewed in context to micro enterprises in Ireland on which the research is done.

**Chapter 5** contains the data analysis and findings of the research. Discussions about the findings are also included here. The data is examined under the major findings from the study.

**Chapter 6** contains the conclusions drawn from the discussion and the study as a whole. The limitations and benefits of this research are also discussed. This chapter draws the final results from the findings attained earlier. This chapter provides recommendations that can be made to micro enterprises within Ireland.

**Chapter 7** This chapter reflects the researchers learning styles and evaluates their development of skills during the coursework.
1.5 Limitations

As with any research there are a number of limitations. Selecting just one region in Ireland to study may be considered a limiting factor, however, it was a more manageable sample than looking at all four of the provinces. All of the ME’s chosen for interviews were from the East of Ireland.

There are a number of practical efforts that are required throughout the course of this research. Time management may be identified as a limitation that may affect research. The researcher was required to effectively balance a professional job with personal activities while carrying out research. The additional requirement of transcribing interviews with micro enterprise owners may also affect time management.

The researcher must take into account that micro business owners are very often completely responsibly for every aspect of their business. This renders their time incredibly precious and means that access to them was limited. The researcher must ensure that they make effective use of whatever time is afforded to them. In addition, the researcher must also consider that business owners may want to protect their company and their company’s marketing secrets that may result in a business owner being reluctant in providing information.

Forsyth (2007) stated, “Planning is the prerequisite to all action. Many tasks are involved: research, investigation, analysis and testing amongst others”.

In following this, sufficient time was spent to plan all aspects of time to lighten the impact of such limitations on the research and ensure that a truly thorough analysis of the data occurred. Adopting this logic will assisted the researcher in progressing through the data analysis in timely and well-organised manner.

1.6 Major Contributions of the study

This research contributes to the growing body of literature into ME’s and IMC, a topic which has been researched extensively around the world. However, it is still a topic of research in its infancy in Ireland. This research is of benefit to a variety of individuals such as academics, educators, policy makers and the business community
alike. This research also has implications for policy makers, providers of entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurs.

1.7 Abbreviations

ME – Micro Enterprise

IMC – Integrated Marketing Communication

SME – Small to Medium Enterprise

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the reader to the research topic of ME’s and IMC. It outlined the rationale behind the research including the research question and the set of research objectives attributed to the study. A summary of the presentation of the dissertation was provided and finally the limitations and benefits of this current research were examined. The next chapter introduces the relevant literature that will inform this current study.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Micro Enterprise / Micro Enterprise Owner / Irish Marketplace

2.1 Overview

This chapter will undertake a revision of the relevant literature to provide an insight into the secondary data required for the development of this research.

The literature reviewed for this research was obtained from leading industry academic journals, the Emerald Database, EBSCOhost databases, Mintel Reports, WARC, books, trade journals, the press and other online sources.

This literature review is separated into two chapters. The first chapter starts by examining micro enterprises, micro enterprise owners and the context of the study the Irish marketplace. It is important to initially study micro enterprise owners as they are ordinarily the person dealing with the promotion of their business. The characteristics of the owners will be examined as this person shapes the way in which the micro enterprise actively promotes and markets the business.

It also is also important to discuss the characteristics of the micro enterprise, along with the nature of the micro business. The concept of promoting and marketing a micro enterprise will also be examined in the section.

As the research question is an investigation into the application of IMC within ME’s, it is essential to understand the ways in which ME’s actively promote themselves. It has been described as haphazard and irrational (Hisrich, 1992). Therefore, it is essential that the process is understood and whether it affects the ME’s IMC effort.

Chapter 3 discusses IMC and the application of IMC within ME’s.

2.2 Micro Enterprises

Micro enterprises and small firms have many different definitions depending on size, turnover, employee count and other characteristics. However, definitions are ordinarily based on employment (Lange et al, 2000), particularly in the European context. A number of these definitions are discussed below.
2.2.1 Definition of the Micro firm

The European Union identifies a micro enterprise as one “which employs fewer than ten persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed Eur 2 million” (European Union (2007). See Figure 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company category</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Turnover</th>
<th>or</th>
<th>Balance sheet total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medium-sized</td>
<td>&lt; 250</td>
<td>≤ € 50 m</td>
<td></td>
<td>≤ € 43 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>&lt; 50</td>
<td>≤ € 10 m</td>
<td></td>
<td>≤ € 10 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>&lt; 10</td>
<td>≤ € 2 m</td>
<td></td>
<td>≤ € 2 m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EU Commission, 2012

The European Commission (2003) also defines an enterprise as “an entity engaged in economic activity which includes self-employed people, a family business engaged in crafts and other activities and partnerships or associations regularly engaged in economic activity”.

Relevant Irish government agencies, including Enterprise Ireland, uphold the EU definition in the Irish context. For the purpose of this research, the author will also adopt the above definition of the micro-firm which is defined as a firm that employs less than ten full time employees.

Small and medium enterprises account for approximately 99.8 % of all companies in Europe. Small firms are Europe’s backbone and their importance is crucial for today’s society. These firms face a number of problems for survival within their given market. It is estimated that 70% of small firms face bankruptcy in five years after their business start. This large percentage is partially due to the poor communication marketing strategy that these firms apply. According to Brown et. al (1999), bankruptcy in these small firms mainly occurs as a result of the lack of communication marketing. Brown et al reveals that 40% of all problems that small firms encounter are based on deficiencies in marketing. Thus, the main emphasis of this research concerns the promotion of micro enterprises.
2.2.2 Characteristics of Micro Enterprises

‘Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the engine of the European economy. They are an essential source of jobs, create entrepreneurial spirit and innovation in the EU and are thus crucial for fostering competitiveness and employment (Gunter Verheugen, Member of the European Commission, 2005)

The European Network (2010) identifies the following:

- A micro enterprise is an entity engaged in economic activity, irrespective of its legal form.
- Micro enterprises have fewer than 10 employees.
- They have a relatively small share of the marketplace.
- They are managed by owners in a personal way.
- They are independent, in the sense of not forming part of a larger enterprise (The Bolton Committee, 1971).

Although micro enterprises are an entity of their own, they do have characteristics that are similar to small / medium enterprise so for the purpose of this study these characteristics will be used in part.

According to Carson et al (1995), SMEs by definition are small in size. Due to their size the internal environment of an ME can be crippled with a lack of resources that in turn can affect the growth potential as they cannot afford to hire specialists to perform tasks for them.

Micro enterprises are typically very flexible and are able to respond quicker, than that of a larger organization, to changes within a marketplace. Such flexibility affords the small enterprise a unique competitive advantage (Heathfield, 1997). Externally, the ME’s small size means that it does not have any or very little control over its environment and certainly has little impact on this environment. Its owner or entrepreneur also defines the ME. The owner/manager (entrepreneur) will likely dominate the decision making within the business. The owner’s culture and background will have a strong influence on his/her decision making process.

It is these characteristics that define the SME and, therefore, it is important to explain
the process in which the SME conducts the marketing aspect of their business. These characteristics also shape the nature of SMEs and the rate at which they grow.

It is well documented that SMEs have unique characteristics that differentiate them from the conventional marketing style used by the larger organisation (Carson, 1990). These characteristics are often determined by the inherent characteristics and behaviours of the entrepreneur running the business. By choosing to adopt their own marketing style SMEs are gaining an advantage over the larger organisation, which can be difficult if not impossible for the larger enterprise to replicate, such as the ability to meet customer demands faster and the flexibility of the SME.

Listed below are a number of characteristics that define a micro enterprise. Such characteristics may afford a micro enterprise a competitive advantage in their marketplace.

- Loyalty
- Flexibility
- Response speed
- Opportunity focused
- Easy access to market information

**Loyalty** - According to Hill (2001), the smaller the enterprise, the closer it is to customers thereby gaining loyalty from them. By remaining in close contact with their customers and contacts, small businesses will receive loyalty in return.

**Flexibility** - Micro enterprises typically are flexible and can respond more quickly to the changing market compared to larger enterprises thereby giving them a vital competitive strength (Heathfield, 1997).

**Speed of response** - The reaction to market changes is also a marketing advantage for MEs. Their flexibility also helps them in this area. Their closeness to the market allows them identify changes in marketing trends, customer demand and a variety of other areas that the larger organisation may not be able to identify.

**Opportunity-focused** - Due to the fact that SMEs are entrepreneurial in nature they tend to be more opportunity focused than larger companies. The SME’s ability to seek
out new opportunities is an advantage over the larger organisation.

**Easy access to market information** - Due to the fact that the owner is close to his/her employees and customers and can exploit opportunities revealed to them, the small enterprise owner can access vital and inexpensive market information. Berry (1987) suggested that it is this ability to access local information that is a unique asset to the small business.

### 2.2.3 Structure of ME’s

It is evident that the organisational structure chart of a micro enterprise is noticeably [limited] looking. Many micro enterprises are generally run by just the one person. The owner is basically the head of all departments. Figure 2.2 shows a conceptual structure for a micro enterprise, along with the owner’s responsibilities.

![Conceptual ME Structure Fig 2.2](image)

As a result of the small structure of a micro enterprise, there are limited resources, thus often making it necessary that the owner / manager is the employee that must perform any marketing endeavours. Therefore, such marketing endeavours may often be implemented with limited knowledge.
2.2.4 Micro Enterprise Marketing

First, we begin by defining marketing in the context of small firms as, “Small business marketing consists of those business activities that direct the creation, development, and delivery of a bundle of satisfaction from the creator to the target user and that satisfy the targeted user” (Logenecker et. al, 2010).

Huang et al (1991) suggests that of the several problems that small firms are confronted with, problems with sales and marketing are of the greatest concern. This indicates that marketing is the most pressing problem confronting small firms. The same course of reasoning is applicable in the context of micro firms which are influenced by owner-manager and resource scarcity (Karolina et al, 2007).

In practice, the approach that SMEs have to marketing, including marketing communications programs, is likely to become more haphazard, informal, unstructured, spontaneous and reactive and conform to the industry environment than in a large business context (Gilmore et al. 2001). Due to the size of ME’s, they often formulate their own marketing plans and therefore, do not follow the traditional methods of marketing.

Typically, micro enterprises face major obstacles in developing growth and success. Although many business owners possess adequate experience in their respective fields, they tend to work in the business instead of working on the business, which can lead to problematic issues. A major contributing factor that may lead to the failure of small enterprises, within the current business environment, is evident through the lack of knowledge and implementation of integrated marketing communication campaigns.

It has been noted through numerous studies of micro enterprises i.e. Carson et al (1995), that a significant factor in their lack of success is their inability to market their product effectively. A micro enterprise often has limited resources and expertise to effectively deal with the constant demands placed on them to market themselves in the competitive marketplace. Therefore it seems wrong to ask the small enterprise to adopt the traditional marketing concept as their formal market planning process as it is their haphazard method of marketing that makes them unique (Hisrich, 1992).
2.2.4.1 Traditional Marketing

“Marketing strategy is generally written or aimed at larger organisations so when small business try to adapt these processes for themselves they are usually unsuitable. (Carson, 1990).

As Kotler (1997) stated the marketing concept is the cornerstone of the marketing discipline. It can be disputed however, that marketing is mostly concerned with running existing businesses and is therefore less concerned with the entrepreneurial challenge of creating new ventures. Traditional methods of marketing see innovation as a minor part of the marketing practice. However it is this innovation that characterises the small enterprise as the entrepreneur runs his/her business on their innovative ideas (Duus, 1997).

Hill (2001) observed that small businesses run their businesses through day-to-day survival rather than utilising a well thought out marketing plan. Thus when periods of uncertainty are thrust upon SMEs they tend to “focus on doing” rather than following a series of strategic planning measures.

2.2.4.2 A new model of marketing

Due to increased competition in the micro firm marketplace and because of the small size of a micro firm, ME’s must adapt to the changing time. According to Pritchard (2010):

“There is a need to move out of the business of just selling products into the business of improving life… it’s a shift from marketing to customers to targeting them as people”.

In today’s business environment, micro enterprises must change and develop the approach taken in applying marketing communications. Micro enterprises must consistently develop innovative solutions to engage with their audience. It is vital for enterprises to achieve everything in their power to gain a competitive advantage. IMC can be an incredibly effective way to accomplish said competitive advantage.
Ibrahim has specifically recognised that in order for an enterprise to further establish itself, it must possess a number of marketing capabilities. This is evident where Ibrahim (2011) stated that:

“Integrated marketing communication is required and is not a mere choice for clients and agencies around the world. The changing environment of markets and marketing is a driving force for integrated marketing communication implementation. Further, with the development of information and communication technology, marketing communications must transform towards new information – driven interactive consumer focused” (Ibrahim, 2011).

Micro businesses must differentiate their position, reinforce their message and create awareness while persuading their target audience. Micro businesses must understand how their potential customers think. Marketing communication is an audience centred activity and, is thus vitally important to understand the way in which audiences process information prior to, during and after making product/service decisions (Fill, 2009).

2.2.4.3 Integrated Marketing Communication Mix

Wibur Schramm (1995) defines communication as, “the process of establishing a commonsense or oneness of thought between a sender and a receiver”. According to Boone and Kurtz (2007), integrated marketing communications try to organize and direct the elements of marketing mix (advertising, personal selling, sales promotions, public relations and direct marketing) to create a customized message for target audience to attain organizational objectives. Longenecker et al, (2010) proclaims that small firms use promotions in different extents; a small business rarely would use the entire promotional strategies available.

2.3 Micro Business owner (Entrepreneur)

In order to understand the micro enterprise, the owner / manager of the ME needs to be understood. The ME owner is usually head of the enterprise therefore they have many characteristics that define the way that their business is run (Carson and McCartan – Quinn, 1995).
2.4 Characteristics of a micro business owner

The role of personality traits in the decision to start a business and to maintain it successfully is discussed controversially in entrepreneurship research.

The key characteristics of the entrepreneur that emerged are that the entrepreneur is a risk taker, an innovator, a change agent and a person who is a “goal getter and a goal setter” (Carson, 2000). Carson continued by saying that although entrepreneurs may be domineering in their management style they are also inspirational in terms of their influence on their workers. Carson (2000) listed the characteristics of the entrepreneur as that of a risk taker, an innovator, networker and as possessing a need for achievement.

2.5 Irish Marketplace

According to The Advisory Group of Small businesses (2011), there are over 200,000 small firms in the Republic of Ireland. Aitchison suggests that western economies will remain fragile and consumer confidence low well into the 2010’s (Aitchison, 2011). In recognition of this, micro businesses must develop new and innovative marketing concepts to grow and sustain their business.

The Irish SME sector is still struggling with the effects of the crisis. Employment stabilised in 2010/2011 and value added is now on a very modest growth path, but still well below pre-crisis levels (European Commission, 2012).

Although the failure rate for micro business within Ireland is considerably high, there are several options that will assist said business in possessing a real competitive advantage. IMC is one such option. Porter (1996) proposed that “real” competitive strategy can only concern being different and deliberately choosing a different way to deliver a mix of values and activities. Enterprises must be willing to change the way in which they operate to their marketing communication to add real value to their business. By differentiating themselves from their competitors they will possess the flexibility to survive in any economic environment.

Devins et al. (2005) emphasise the importance of a strong small business sector to the economy. Central Statistics Office (CSO) data from 2005 reflect the dominance of the
micro-firm sector revealing that 216,000 micro-businesses are operating in Ireland accounting for the vast majority (92.7 per cent) of all Irish businesses. This percentage is comparable to that of the European micro-enterprise rate.

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion it is clear to see that MEs’ marketing functions are quite different to that of the larger organisation. They rely more on personal networks and fixing problems as they occur rather than following a traditional marketing concept. It has been established that the small enterprise does not use the traditional methods of marketing as they find it difficult to raise the funds for marketing campaigns. However, the focus of this research is to ascertain how ME’s apply IMC and what challenges they face in doing this.

The following chapter assesses IMC in detail and specifically IMC within ME’s. The chapter also describes the challenges faced with IMC in general and how these challenges can be overcome.

Micro enterprises must be able to implement a new strategy and an IMC campaign that aligns their goals, messages and activities. This will assist the enterprise in meeting its’ challenges. As evident through Johnson et al (2011):

“An organisation must have the ability to renew and recreate its strategic capabilities to meet the changing and challenging needs of the environment”.
Chapter 3 – IMC and IMC in ME’s

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), its application by micro enterprises and the challenges that are faced by micro enterprises when implementing IMC.

As noted in previous chapters, micro businesses must endeavour to implement new strategies and integrate new ways of promoting their business. If successfully applied, the method of using IMC will distinguish these firms from their competition and assist them in succeeding in the constantly changing marketplace. For the purpose of this research, the following section defines IMC.

3.2 Definition of Integrated Marketing Communications

There are multiple definitions of the term Integrated Marketing Communications. Such definitions are often based on concepts, strategies and marketing tools. However, the more preferred definitions are usually based on planning and integration. Ouwersloot et al (2008) defines IMC as synergy, creativity, integration and communication. It is a concept that dictates a successful process for planning, executing and monitoring of brand messages that create brand – customer relationships. The American Association of Advertising Agencies (2005) defines IMC as follows: Integrated Marketing Communications is a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value in a program that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines, e.g. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communications impact.

The primary function of IMC is to inform, persuade, and remind the target customers about the unique benefits of products and services existing in the market. It involves a number of processes that include planning, executing, evaluating, and controlling the use of the various promotional-mix elements to effectively communicate with the target audience. It also involves building long term relationships with customer.
With the ever increasing of amount of micro firms and lack of resources for ME’s, IMC is a step forward for them that can aid in their survival during this difficult economic climate.

3.3 IMC and the ME

Micro businesses are faced with considerable competition, however, with successful implementation of IMC to their business, their ability to effectively compete against other SME’s and, possibly, even larger corporations will increase. Ibrahim (2011) believes that IMC can emerge as a powerful tool that will guide practitioners in developing and implementing marketing communications more consistently and effectively. Despite this, the development of marketing theories in MEs is somewhat limited and can often replicate the application of a more traditional marketing model historically adopted by large companies (Chaston and Mangles, 2002).

A business of this size, and as a result of increased competition within all industries, must adapt to the changing times. According to Pritchard (2010):

“There is a need to move out of the business of just selling products into the business of improving live… it’s a shift from marketing to customers to targeting them as people”.

In practice, the approach that SMEs have toward marketing (including marketing communications programs) is more likely to become haphazard, informal, unstructured, spontaneous and reactive and conform to the industry environment than that of a large business context (Gilmore et al., 2001).

Micro enterprises must be able to implement a new strategy with an IMC campaign that aligns with their goals, messages and activities which will assist the enterprise in meeting its’ challenges. As evident through Johnson et al (2011):

“An organisation must have the ability to renew and recreate its strategic capabilities to meet the changing and challenging needs of the environment”.

In today’s business environment, micro enterprises must change the way in which they approach their marketing communications. Micro enterprises should increasingly search for innovative solutions to engage with their audience. It is vital for enterprises
to achieve everything in their power to gain a competitive advantage. IMC is an effective way to accomplish said competitive advantage.

Ibrahim has specifically recognised that in order for an enterprise to further establish itself, it must possess a number of marketing capabilities. This is evident where Ibrahim (2011) stated that:

“Integrated marketing communication is required and is not a mere choice for clients and agencies around the world. The changing environment of markets and marketing is a driving force for integrated marketing communication implementation. Further, with the development of information and communication technology, marketing communications must transform towards new information – driven interactive consumer focused” (Ibrahim, 2011).

Micro businesses must differentiate their position, reinforce their message and create awareness while persuading their target audience. They need to understand the way in which their potential customers think. Marketing communication is an audience-centred activity and is thus vitally important to understand the way in which audiences process information prior to, during and after making product/service decisions (Fill, 2009).

A forward thinking approach to the operation of a successful business in today’s economic climate will largely depend on its’ marketing capabilities. This is supported by (Abrhiem, 2012):

“Marketing theory suggests that organizing marketing activities in ways that fit the business’s strategic type is an important driver of marketing performance outcomes. Furthermore, resource-based view theory indicates that fit between marketing organization characteristics and strategic type may also exhibit the inimitability and non-substitutability characteristics identified as essential for sustaining competitive advantage ( Abrhiem, 2012 ).”

Not only must a business manage their business strategy effectively, they must also manage their information communications effectively. In essence, IMC represents a strategic approach to effective marketing communications.
The successful use of an Integrated Marketing Communication campaign awards an enterprise the ability to differentiate themselves from other enterprises. According to Johnson et al. 2011, differentiating your business from your competitors business can lead to a gain in long–term competitive advantage.

“Competitive strategy is about being different. It means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value” (Johnson et al., 2011).

As the vision of IMC is to effectively combine all elements of a business (advertising, sales, customer service, public relations, direct marketing, sales support, etc.) rather than having all these different areas all working independently and separately of each other, the IMC process must be understood and implemented effectively. The process of this, within any business, requires change.

“The development of IMC requires change, a change in thinking, a change in actions and change in expectations” (Fill, 2009).

IMC involves the implementation of communication programmes over time to influence the target audience. All forms of communications must be considered to assist the audience in engaging at levels that reflect their cognitive processing abilities, their motivation and their overall desire for maintaining various types of relationships.

The ultimate goal of a successful IMC campaign is to create effective strategies, generate excellent concepts or ideas that will lead to the development of an effective campaign. A successful IMC campaign will ensure that a business can communicate one single important message through various marketing mediums in ways that traditional marketing tools were restricted in achieving. For example, the addition of digital media to a marketing campaign allows for personalisation, mobility, speed, efficiency and an enhanced customer relationship. The benefit of such a medium will increase ‘word of mouth promotion’ which will result in an additional benefit to any communications campaign.

Arndt (1967) declared that:
“Word of mouth communication: is an oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product, or service” (Arndt, 1967).

3.4 Drivers of IMC

According to The Advisory Group of Small Businesses (2011), there are over 200,000 small firms in the Republic of Ireland. Aitchison (2011) suggests that western economies will remain fragile with consumer confidence low well beyond 2010 (Aitchison, 2011). In recognition of this, micro businesses must develop new and innovative marketing concepts to grow and sustain their business.

It has been noted that there are numerous drivers for the use of IMC. According to Heidi et al (2004), three shifts occurred in the mid – 1980’s that were key drivers in the development of IMC.

1 - “The development and diffusion of digital technology across the entire spectrum of business operations”. This refers to the development of computer technologies developed throughout the 1990s. This afforded companies’ a better understanding and easier access to their consumer.

2 - “The increasing emphasis on brands and branding as the major competitive differentiating tool”.

3 – “Increasing need for consistent and integrated brand strategy”

Although the failure rate for micro business within Ireland is considerably high, there are several options that will assist said businesses to possess real competitive advantage. IMC is one such option. Porter (1996) proposed that “real” competitive strategy must endeavor to be different and, thus, deliberately adapt a different delivery of values and activities. Enterprises must be willing to change the way in which they operate their marketing communication in order to create real value to their business. By differentiating themselves from their competitors, micro businesses will possess the flexibility to survive in any economic environment.

The implementation of integrated marketing communication campaigns within Irish enterprises will allow the enterprise to negotiate a suitable balance between the need
for rational information to meet intellectual needs and expressive types of communication to meet emotional needs (Fill, 2009). Many micro enterprises do not look deep enough into the thought process and the way that potential customers perceive messages. As there is now a diverse array of new marketing tools that are available, Irish enterprises now have the ability to develop endless new opportunities with the successful integration of IMC.

3.5 IMC Strategies and Objectives

IMC can be used by ME’s by following The Four Elements of IM Strategy as part of their marketing endeavours - General advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion and public relations. Some IMC campaigns feature aspects of all four elements, while others may eliminate one or more elements for strategic reasons. The IMC strategy involves deciding the mix and level of different IMC elements. Fig 3.1 shows the different elements that ME’s must be aware of.

The introduction and application of IMC campaign facilitate how micro firms chart their marketing and promotional activities to achieve specific objectives. Many ME’s
market without any specific goals or objectives. This lack of direction may lead to problematic issues.

Some common objectives of IMC are:

- Generate awareness
- Communicate differentiation
- Persuasion
- Reminder

3.6 ME owners and IMC

There are a number of factors that contribute to how successful IMC can be within an ME. These may relate to any of education, the ME owner’s attitude towards new marketing methods and even social networking. These factors are discussed below.

3.6.1 Education / Training / Experience

Micro business owners often have limited knowledge with regard to marketing and promoting their business. They often possess even less knowledge in Internet marketing. As a result of this, one would presume that a lack of education or training in marketing may influence the potential success of a micro enterprise. Forfas (2004) suggested that education was a major downfall for Irish ME’s.

Due to the fast paced world of marketing and business promotion, it is extremely important that ME’s continue to research and develop new marketing and learning techniques. Beach (1980) defines learning as a human process that embraces skills and knowledge and is only achieved when it results in a change of behaviour or the intention to change behaviour. Many authors agree that, in order to succeed in today’s competitive business environment, businesses require the ability to learn effectively. However, in an Irish context, the majority of micro-firms have been described as merely surviving. This highlights the gap in applied learning in this environment (O’Dwyer and Ryan, 2000).

Learning and the ability to change are among the most important capabilities that firms can possess (Barney et al., 2001). The resource - based view is grounded in the belief that firms achieve sustainable competitive advantage by continuously
developing existing and creating new resources and capabilities in response to rapidly changing market conditions (Wernerfelt, 1984).

A working knowledge of how to promote a micro business can be the difference between the success and failure of a micro business.

### 3.6.2 Attitudes of ME’s owners

The implementation of Integrated Marketing communication campaigns within Irish enterprises allow them to negotiate a suitable balance between the need for rational information to meet intellectual needs and expressive types of communication to meet emotional needs (Fill, 2009). Many micro enterprises do not look deep enough into the thought process and the way in which potential customers perceive messages. With the vast array of new marketing tools that are available, Irish enterprises now have the ability to open up many new opportunities through the use of IMC.

### 3.6.3 Social Networking

Small business owners typically rely on traditional means to advertise their businesses and services. Such means typically include direct mail, local newspapers, flyers, radio, signage, and trade shows. With the age of the Internet, it is evident that the addition of websites and email marketing add to the weapons the small business owner may use.

Currently if a small business owner wanted to develop business relationships he or she could go to a networking session or business card exchange conducted by a local business trade association such as a Chamber of Commerce. A new way of networking has arrived. Social media or network services such as Facebook, Twitter, and other websites have impacted how millions of Americans especially those under 35 interact or network with one another, shop and view brands (Swartz, 2009).

### 3.7 Challenges of IMC in Micro Enterprises

Micro businesses are faced with a considerable amount of competition, however, a successful implementation of IMC to their business will increase their ability to effectively compete against other SME’s and, possibly, even larger corporations. Ibrahim (2011) believes that integrated marketing communication emerges as a
powerful tool that can guide practitioners to develop and implement marketing communications more consistently and effectively. Despite this, development of marketing theories in SMEs is somewhat limited and, instead, often replicates the application of classical marketing models used by large companies (Chaston and Mangles, 2002).

A business of this size and as a result of increased competition within all industries, micro businesses must adapt to the changing times. According to Pritchard (2010):

“There is a need to move out of the business of just selling products into the business of improving live … it’s a shift from marketing to customers to targeting them as people”

With regard to marketing and the promotion of their business, micro enterprises face numerous challenges such as limited marketing budget, limited time, lack of marketing knowledge and a general lack of marketing experience.

3.8 Conclusion

It is evident from the literature that a ME owner’s knowledge and experience of IMC has a direct influence on the ME’s survival. However, despite the advantages that may be gained with the implementation of IMC, it is noted that there is reluctance by business owners to progress toward this modern way of marketing. Micro enterprises may be fearful of the unknown, preferring to rely on traditional methods to promote their business by using marketing tools that they feel safest with. The research will investigate precisely how IMC should be successfully employed with a ME, along with the barriers that a ME may face as a result of the introduction of this promotion method.

Chapter 3 outlined the main factors that are potential inhibitors in the implementation of IMC by micro firms. Education is deemed as a factor. Maslach (2005) said that the level of educational attainment of the decision maker in the small enterprise is a very good indication in the decision to introduce new ways of marketing.
Also studied in the literature was the entrepreneur’s attitude, and more specifically, whether it is open minded or not willing to try new ways of promoting their business. The entrepreneurs’ characteristics are an important factor in IMC implementation.

While it can be seen from the literature presented that there have been numerous research articles and journals published on MEs and IMC, it has been mainly researched on a scale that is directed at larger firms and on an international level. There has not been adequate research presented from an Irish perspective as to the challenges faced by ME owners with implementing IMC. It is, therefore the intention of this study to ascertain the factors that hinder Irish ME’s from engaging in IMC and the application methods which are most successful for firms that have already applied IMC.

Having completed an examination of all the significant literature it is now necessary to advance to the next stage in this current research, which is the preparation for the primary research. The next chapter presents the research problem, question and objectives, and details the research methodology used to answer the research question.

The research methodology chapter concludes with the selection of data collection tools, which will be used to carry out the primary research.
Chapter 4.0 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the factors that influenced the research design. Discussion of the rationale for the chosen research methodology will follow. The chapter will also identify the research methods available to the author for the research being performed. It details the research problem and informs the reader of the research question, the investigation of the research options available and the choice of data collection methods.

In this chapter the author also uses the research process onion identified by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003). This model explains the research process, and the different layers attributed to it. Once the process onion has been explored, the areas of quantitative and qualitative research are examined and an argument will then be made as to the best method to be used by the author in this current research.

According to the ‘Research Onion’ model, each of the layers is vital in the process in what data is collected and how the researcher goes about answering the research questions. Research philosophy is where this process starts. The importance of the chosen research philosophy cannot be overlooked. According to Saunders et al (2007):

“The research philosophy you adopt contains important assumptions about the way in which you view the world”.

The importance of the research tools employed is also discussed in the chapter. The researcher discusses the tools available to the study and the tool deemed to be the most efficient and effective for the research.

Within this chapter on research methodology, an attempt is made to reflect on the assumptions that are made about the research by means of reviewing the methodology and methods undertaken.

The need for applying an appropriate research method and the way it needs to be undertaken is defined by Saunders et al (2007) as “Methods as the techniques and procedures used to obtain and analyse data. It therefore includes questionnaires,
observations and interviews as well as both qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques”.

Methodology is a framework that refers to the theory of how the research should be undertaken whereas methods are more specific and relates to the techniques involved in data collection and analysis.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section includes research approach by means of philosophy and strategy used to undertake the research. The second section attempts to understand the method used for data collection and finally the third section provides the research criteria.

This chapter begins with the explanation of how the research for the research topic was be carried out and concludes with an insight into the ethical stance that the researcher will take in conducting this research.

4.2 Research Problem

The focus of this current research is to investigate how Micro Enterprises in The Republic of Ireland apply IMC to their marketing endeavors and the challenges that they may face. Although the topic of SME’s and marketing has been explored in much research over the last decade it has not been the focal point of research in Ireland. Specifically ME’s and IMC have not been discussed in the context of Ireland.

4.3 Research Questions

The research question evolves directly from the analysis of the research problem, which is to ascertain the how ME’s in Ireland apply IMC within their business and the challenges that they face in doing this. This is very important to the research study being undertaken.

Aaker, Kumar and Day (2002) are of the opinion that research problems will seldom come as neatly cut packages with obvious information requirements or clear-cut margins. They are more likely to be poorly defined, only partially understood and maybe missing possible decision alternatives that should be analyzed. In addressing this current study’s research problem the researcher investigates how Irish ME’s apply IMC into their business. Therefore the research questions for the current
research are:

1. **How is IMC applied within micro business?**

2. **What impact does IMC have on micro businesses?**

3. **What IMC solutions work for micro business in practice?**

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) were of the opinion that the research question was just one of a number of questions arising from the research process. They declared that the statement of the research question would, more often than not, be originated from the research objectives. The objectives for the current research are as follows:

- Profile micro enterprise owners and determine whether these owners’ education and/or training in marketing is a factor in the micro enterprise’s effective promotion of their business.
- Determine whether micro enterprises plan marketing activities and whether they apply a promotional strategy.
- Identify a micro enterprise’s strategy [if investment] with regard to marketing.
- Identify what promotional tools and concepts are the most successful and beneficial for micro enterprises.
- Establish what micro enterprises are doing differently to their competitors when promoting their business.
- Determine whether a consistent marketing message is being used.
- Determine whether micro enterprises are engaging with their customers.
- Establish the micro enterprise’s owner’s view on the importance of marketing and promotion of their business.
- Examine what micro enterprises are doing with their marketing endeavors to build trust levels with their customers.
- Identify the challenges faced by micro enterprise owners with regard to IMC.
- Determine how micro enterprises measure the success of their marketing campaigns.

This study will address both the research question and the objectives that arose from the research problem. Furthermore, the research process and research methods will be
examined in order to investigate the research problem and the objectives associated with this study.

Research can be referred to as the process of seeking knowledge. Funnel (2010), referred to research “as the scientific or systematic search for information on a particular issue or subject.” This research aims to gather information about how Integrated Marketing Communication campaigns are applied within micro enterprises, specifically within the Republic of Ireland.

4.4 Methodology

For the research, an interpretivism approach was applied along with the application of an inductive approach. Qualitative data was collated through the use of interviews and a multi-method research choice was also applied. The ‘Research Onion’ will be used to explain each option that the researcher has made.
4.5 Research Philosophy

According to the ‘Research Onion’ model, each of the layers is vital in processing both how data is collected and how the researcher goes about answering the research questions. Research philosophy is the initial stage of this process. The importance of the chosen research philosophy cannot be overlooked. According to Saunders et al (2007):

“The research philosophy you adopt contains important assumptions about the way in which you view the world”.

According to Saunders et al (2007), Research philosophy relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge. The research philosophy underpins the research strategy and the methods to choose as part of that strategy. Saunders et al (2007) stated that the business management research is a mixture of positivism, interpretivism and reflects a stance of realism. The research philosophy contains important assumptions about the way in which a researcher views the world. Depending upon the type of research question, the research philosophy approach is selected.

The researcher adopted an Interpretivism approach. The interpretivism approach occurs through the consolidation of information through the meanings and behaviours observed and through the situations analysed in order to gain an understanding of the person or topic researched. Saunders et al (2003) state that:

“it is the role of the Interpretivist to seek to understand the subjective reality of those that they study in order to make sense of and understand their motives, actions, intentions in a way that is meaningful to the research participant”

(Saunders, Lewis, Thorhill, 2003)

In keeping with the above, this philosophy is suited to the research that was conducted and in turn helped to provide an understanding of how micro firms within Ireland use integrated marketing communications.

Riley et al (2006) lists three main characteristics of interpretive research. These are:
The interpretive research tradition has, as one of its central tenets, a deep-seated scepticism of a positivist view of the real world of phenomena as external and objective.

The second element of interpretive research is unavoidable involvement of the researcher in the observation process.

The third characteristic of the interpretive research is to focus on meanings rather than on fact alone.

The research focus on micro business owners and the knowledge and perception of IMC involves researching people. Therefore, the research has a strong social component. Thus, the concept of realism was undertaken for this research. Moreover, the research took into account the views of people involved in the study. The micro business owners formed their views based on their own experiences of marketing their business.

Saunders et al (2007) proposed that interpretivism is an epistemology that advocates that it is necessary for the researcher to understand the differences between humans in our role as social actors. This emphasises the difference between conducting research among people rather than objects such as trucks or computers.

The research focused on one group of people, i.e. owners and manager of micro enterprises. Face – to – face interviews were completed between the researcher and the business owners.

4.6 The Research Approach

This layer of the ‘research onion’ refers to the research approach. For the purpose of the research, an inductive method was used. Saunders et al (2007) suggest that there are two types of research approaches that are a deductive approach and an inductive approach. The inductive method is preferred to a deductive approach as it is more flexible and fits quite well with the research objective. With regard to this approach, Thomas (2003) states that:

“The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw
data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies. Key themes are often obscured, reframed or left invisible because of the preconceptions in the data collection and data analysis procedures imposed by deductive data analysis such as those used in experimental and hypothesis testing research.”

An additional reason to implement this approach is evident in the ability of the inductive method to allow the researcher to provide subjective reasoning with the assistance of real life examples.

Induction is the process whereby the exploration and analysis of related observations leads to the construction of a theory that’s systematically links observations in a meaningful way.

4.7 Research Strategy

A ‘case study’ strategy will be applied in this research. According to Baxter et al (2008):

“The qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood.”

Three micro enterprises within the Republic of Ireland were used for this case study approach. This chosen strategy will be useful in this research, as information will be obtained from interviews (analysis of data) about how IMC is applied within micro enterprises within The Republic of Ireland. “The interview is an important data gathering technique involving verbal communication between the researcher and the subject. Interviews are commonly used in survey designs and in exploratory and descriptive studies (Mathew et al, 2005)”.

Advantages of interviews

The main advantages of interviews are:

- They are useful to obtain detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions
and opinions
- They allow more detailed questions to be asked
- Respondents' own words are recorded
- Precise wording can be tailored to respondent and precise meaning of questions clarified
- Interviewees are not influenced by others in the group
- Some interviewees may be less self-conscious in a one-to-one situation. (Evalued, 2006)

As stated, the advantages to performing interviews for the purpose of research was the most ideal option.

4.8 Research Choice

The researcher has chosen to implement a multi method approach for this study, as this will provide more useful information to analyse. In order to answer the research questions, in-depth interviews were performed with three micro-business owners. Qualitative information was gathered through the use of interview questions. Such questions which ranged from owner’s opinions through to the observation of interviewee’s reactions throughout the interview process.

The interview format was semi–structured with a number of predetermined questions. The researcher used interview guide that was prepared for all interviews that took place. According to Bowen (2005):

“The use of the interview guide indicated that there was some structure to the interviews, even though they were treated as conversations during which the interviewer drew out detailed information and comments from the respondents. “One way to provide more structure than in the completely unstructured, informal conversational interview, while maintaining a relatively high degree of flexibility, is to use the interview guide strategy” (Patton as cited in Rubin & Babbie, 2001). More structure eases the researcher’s task of organizing and analyzing interview data. It also helps readers of the research report judge the quality of the interviewing methods and instruments used”
This approach led to detailed answers and also meant that the interviews were open to additional questions depending on the participant’s response. The researcher recorded all of the interviews so that they could be transcribed. This transcription helped in the analysis of the data collected.


“The key to in-depth interviews is that it is intended to combine structure with flexibility. The structure is sufficiently flexible to permit topics to be covered in the order most suited to the interviewee, to allow responses to be probed, and explored and to allow the researcher to be responsive to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the interviewee”

An archival research approach was also performed as part of the research choice. Business marketing material such as websites, social media pages, brochures, print media, was analysed with regard to the companies’ marketing campaigns.

4.9 Time Horizon

According to Saunders et al (2003);

“Cross – sectional study is of a particular phenomenon at a particular time. It recognised that most research projects undertaken for academic purposes are necessarily time restrained”.

Therefore, as a result of time constraints, a cross sectional approach was applied to this research. It was a short – term study of micro enterprises in Ireland. Therefore, the study of IMC within these enterprises was not studied over a long period of time as with a longitudinal approach.

According to Cooper and Schindler (2001), cross sectional studies are carried out once and represent a snapshot of one point in time.

4.10 Quantitative v Qualitative

Qualitative research was used as the method of data analysis. This enabled investigations into IMC. This method of research provided the researcher with quality data to be analysed. According to Bartos (2003), “whether we talk about qualitative
analysis or qualitative interviewing, the essential element common to both facets of qualitative research is quality”.

In order to answer the research questions, primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with micro enterprises in the Republic of Ireland. The aim of this research is to explore the application of Integrated Marketing Communications within these micro enterprises in today’s marketplace. This involved the interpretation and analysis of interviewee’s responses, reactions and other emotional signs.

As documented by Dugree (1986);

“The main focus is not how to go into the field – which questions to ask, which respondents to pick, but rather to come out, how to interpret and think about what’s going on” (Dugree, 1986).

Relevant and up-to-date data was collected for this purpose. In addition to collecting primary data, secondary data, such as academic articles and research papers, was also instrumental in the completion of this study. A portion of the information collected for this study will be collected from companies’ websites along with printed marketing material, such as brochures.

4.11 Data Collection Methods

To answer the research question both primary and secondary data collection methods were used.

4.11.1 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data is commonly known as desk data that already exists. According to Wren et al. (2002), sources of secondary data include newspapers, magazines, journal articles, Government agencies, directories, the World Wide Web, etc.

The use of secondary data can have the following advantages:

- Gathering data from secondary sources is significantly quicker than designed and conducting a new investigation.
- Secondary data can provide the researcher with a broader view of the context for their study.
Saunders et al (2007) suggest that secondary data can be raw, where there has been little if any processing, or compiled data that has been received some form of selection or summarising. Secondary data can be sub grouped into documentary data, survey based data, and those compiled from multiple sources. Written documents also include books, journals, magazine articles and newspapers.

The secondary data for this research study was primarily obtained from journal articles available on emerald, ads database, mintel etc and DBS library website. Plus, sources such as books, business pages from the national press and trade journals and magazines related to the small business sector were examined. All of the above mentioned resources proved to be invaluable in terms of developing the research proposal, the research objectives and the following primary research. Journals provided the most relevant information on IMC while the books laid the foundation for the research. All the secondary articles have been identified and thoroughly referenced using the Harvard referencing system.

4.11.2 Primary Data Collection

According to Wren et al. (2002), it is not sufficient to confine oneself to only desk data (also called secondary data) when attempting to answer some research questions. Primary data is firsthand data that is normally obtained through interviews, questionnaires and observations from important stakeholders.

4.12 Interview Preparation

The primary data collection method was obtained through in-depth, open-ended interviews with micro enterprise owners. During each interview the researcher used an interview guide that had previously been prepared.

The use of the interview guide ensured that there was structure to the interviews, despite the interviews being held in a conversational manner. The interviewer drew out detailed information and comments from the respondents. “One way to provide more structure than in the completely unstructured, informal conversational interview, while maintaining a relatively high degree of flexibility, is to use the interview guide strategy” (Patton, 2001).
The interview guides construction is detailed in the following section.

4.13 Interview Guide

To ensure that sufficient information was gathered from the interviews, a comprehensive interview guide was constructed. Several drafts were prepared and revised with advice being given from the author’s dissertation supervisor.

The interview guide was tested twice on business owners to ensure that questions were easily understood.

4.14 Non – probability sample

Riley et al (2006) stated that “Non – probability or purposive sampling is technically defined as where the chance of selection for each element in a population is unknown, and for some elements, is zero. In general non – probability may be crudely understood as everything that probability sampling is not”.

Due to some limitations on the study, such as time, the researcher will take samples using subjective judgement rather than random selection. This form of sample is well suited for the qualitative and mixed – method approach that the researcher was undertaking.

Purposive Sampling:

Purposive sampling involves a group of sampling techniques that rely on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units that are to be studied. The researcher chose a number of cases that are best suited to the research questions that yielded the most accurate results.

Regarding this, Saunders et al (2007) states that:

“Purposive sampling enables you to use your judgement to select cases that will best enable you to answer your research questions and to meet your objectives”.

Three business owners were selected for interviewing. Each of these interviewees came from micro enterprises within The Republic of Ireland.
4.15 Conclusion

The basis and main aim of the research is to compile information about how Integrated Marketing Communication campaigns are applied within micro enterprises, specifically within the Republic of Ireland.

Primary research will be conducted and analysed to answer research questions within the following areas:

1. How is IMC applied within micro business?

2. What impact does IMC have on micro businesses?

3. What IMC solutions work for micro business in practice?

The previous chapter clearly outlines the research methods that are most suited for these topics.

In addition to the explanation of the research methods that were used throughout the duration of this study, the researcher also created a dissertation diary to document all lessons learnt. Larsson (2011) states that:

“Lessons learnt represent an analysis carried out during and shortly after a project: they attempt to capture the positive and negative learning’s of a project”.

The use of the dissertation diary was an effective tool in the completion of the self-reflection section of this paper, as opinions and observations were noted throughout the research period.
Chapter 5 – Findings & Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings with regard to the application of IMC in micro enterprises. These findings will be presented and analysed. The chapter is divided into five sections; each section corresponds to a respective research objective.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the current study’s primary research findings from three interviews that were carried out on micro businesses in the Republic of Ireland. The chapter examines each interview’s findings in order to ascertain whether any similarities or differences exist between ME’s in their application IMC. The researcher’s aim is to analyse these findings to provide an understanding of the most successful and beneficial ways to implement IMC. The researcher also intends on noting the challenges faced by ME owners when applying IMC.

This chapter is divided into the following themes:

- ME owner profile
- How is IMC applied within Micro business?
- What impact does IMC have micro business?
- What IMC solutions work best for micro businesses in practice?
- Current Business Climate

5.2 The Respondents

Below is a brief description of the micro enterprises that participated in the research through the undertaking of interviews.

5.2.1 Company 1: CGrogan & Co. Solicitors

CGrogan & Co Solicitors is a solicitor firm based in Clane, Co. Kildare. The firm specialises in thinking creatively to offer a truly original service based on their intimate understanding of the intricacies of Irish Law.

For the purpose of this study, CGrogan & Co. Solicitors will be referred to as either Respondent 1 or Interviewee 1.
5.2.2 Company 2: SkidProof Ltd.

SkidProof Ltd. is a micro firm based in Knocklyon, Co. Dublin. SkidProof Ltd. is part of the Health and Safety industry within Ireland and specialises in introducing new safety technologies such as Nano - Technology.

For the purpose of this study, SkidProof Ltd. will be referred to as either Respondent 2 or Interviewee 2.

5.2.3 Company 3: NetTech Ltd.

NetTech Ltd is an Audio and Visual firm based in Clontarf, Co. Dublin. NetTech specialise in supplying equipment to conferences, equine auctions and sporting events. Although NetTech currently operates throughout Ireland, they are now intending on focusing their marketing on entry into further markets, such as the United Kingdom.

For the purpose of this study, NetTech Ltd. will be referred to as Respondent 3 or Interviewee 3.

5.3 Research Objectives

The early stages of the research led to the development of the research objectives. To reaffirm, these objectives are as follows:

1. Profile the micro business owner
2. Determine how IMC is applied within a micro business.
3. Identify the impact that IMC has on a micro business.

These objectives frame the research findings and the discussion chapter that will follow.

5.4 Research Findings

The findings are presented from information collected through qualitative interviews and observations observed at these interviews.
5.5 Objective 1 – Interviewee Profile

Questions were compiled to profile the owner of each micro enterprise. This was carried out to acquire more thorough understanding of the owner’s knowledge of marketing and business promotions.

5.5.1 Education and Training

Education is a key factor that can impact positively on growth of firms (King and McGrath, 2002). Those entrepreneurs with larger stocks of human capital, in terms of education, are better placed to adapt their enterprises to constantly changing business environments (King and McGrath, 1998).

Questions put to candidates:

- Can you please tell me about any training or courses that you have undertaken with regard to marketing?
- How many years of study did you carry out?
- How do you feel about the training you received?

Findings

The author sought to identity the level of education that the ME owners possessed with regard to marketing and business promotion. As evident from the literature review, it is known that education has an effect on how micro business owners view promotional activities.

Two of the three interviewees responded as having no level of education or training in marketing promotions.

Respondent 2 stated, “I completed a Management Diploma that included a module on marketing”. This module was one year in length. Respondent 2 has attended several marketing conferences but does not have any formal training in marketing.
With regard to the training that was received, the respondents were in agreement that the content was “basic stuff” or felt that it was “just going through the paces”. The respondents were not overly impressed with the information that they received.

Both respondents 2 and 3 made it clear that they were eager to learn more with regard to marketing and promotions, as evident through their reading of marketing books.

**Summary**

The central theme generated from the above discussion revealed that the majority of the micro firms are possess little or no marketing education and have a distinct lack of training and knowledge in this field. A greater knowledge of marketing would benefit the owners of these micro firms. Kelly (2009) stated that knowledge is “what people understand as a result of what they have been taught or have experienced; knowledge may then be applied to solve problems”.

**5.5.2 Attitude**

Attitude to marketing can be described as: “Applying marketing attitude requires a discipline that blends and promotes strategic planning, creative thinking and focused implementation” (FocusOne, 2002).

Question put to candidates:

- Would you consider yourself to be a marketing driven person? Why?

**Findings**

All three interviewees responded with the following:

“No”, not really”; “No, marketing has always been a weak point of my management skills”; and “No, not really. I probably should be”.

**Summary**

The theme generated from the above discussion is that the respondents do not consider themselves to be marketing driven. This is a trait that is required for the successful promotion of a business and the ability to implement IMC in their firm.
ME owners must be prepared to embrace such notions and enforce themselves to be marketing driven with an emphasis on new marketing tools.

5.5.3 Business Start – Up

There are numerous reasons why people start their own businesses as stated by Rogerson (2008) states that there are numerous reasons why people start their own business. These can range from ‘Having control of your work and personal life’ to ‘Creating and building something’.

Question put to candidates:

- Why did you start your business?

Findings

The interviewees responded as follows: “I saw an opportunity in the local area”, “Due to unemployment in 2010 it was an opportunity that presented itself and I took advantage of it” and “To legitimise some of the work that I was doing at the time.

Summary

The findings show that there was not a common theme in why the respondents started their own business.

5.5.4 Time on business

The time that a business owner spends promoting their business can have a direct impact on their personal life, social life etc.

Question put to candidates:

- How do you feel about the time that you have to spend on promoting your business?

Findings
Responses were “It doesn’t impinge on social times” and “It’s done mainly during working hours”. Respondent 3 stated, “I feel good about it. If it works it’s good use of the time”.

Summary

The general indication is that time spent on marketing does not affect the ME owners personal life and that it is a good use of time.

5.5.5 Family Involvement

Working parents often struggle to balance time commitments involved in balancing work and family roles (Hochschild, 1997). Due to this, it has been noted that family members sometimes to help out ME’s owners with the business.

Question put to candidates:

- Does your family help out with the business and, if so, how?

Respondent 1 and 2 were clear in their answers. Both stated “No”.

Respondent 3 responded with “Yes, a lot”.

Summary

Out of these three cases, it was found that only one family helped out with marketing in the business. The other two respondents preferred to keep family and work separate.

5.5.6 Business Logo

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design or a combination of these intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers, and differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler, 2000). According to Haviv. S (2012), “the hallmark of an effective logo is that it doesn’t alienate your audience”.

Questions put to candidates:

- Do you have a logo?
If yes, why do you think it is important for your business to have a logo?
If no, why do you not have a logo?

Findings

Hilton (2009) stated that “more than any single piece of marketing communication you send out into the marketplace, the one most frequently seen is definitely your corporate or brand logo”.

With regard to having a company logo, both respondents 1 and 2 stated that they have logo whereas respondent 3 stated that they do not have a logo.

Respondent 1 declared that a business logo should be “recognisable”. Respondent 2 stated that it is important for a business to have a logo because “It is a companies’ stamp and increases brand awareness”.

Respondent 3 stated that “I don’t have a logo, unfortunately”. The reasoning was that they could not see the value in spending the money.

The responses to the question what does your company logo represent:

Respondent 1 stated “It’s quite recognisable and professional looking.”

Respondent 2 said “It represents the company. It’s recognisable and a well thought out logo with corporate colours. It represents what we do, what we aim to do and the service that we offer”.

Summary

Two of the ME’s instantly noted the importance in having a logo and how it can represent their business within marketing.

While moving through the interview questions it was discovered that Respondent 3 did use a logo to represent their company. However, it should be noted that although a symbol is not used, the company name is displayed at marketing events. This is evidenced by them stating: “Yeah I suppose. It would be. That would be the only kind of brand thing that we would push but I suppose I always considered a logo a symbol rather than, or a shortened version of a name or initials or something like that.”
Objective 1 – Main summary

Summary of the themes generated in terms of interviewee profile from the analysis of all three interviewees is as follows:

- Marketing education is weak amongst the three business owners
- The business owners did not tend to be marketing driven; a fault admitted by them.
- The responses obtained depict that the business owners found logos to be important and they understood how they can aid a business.

Objective 2 - How is IMC applied within a micro business?

5.6.1 Marketing Plan / Strategy

Marketing takes time, money and a lot of preparation. One of the best ways to prepare oneself is to develop a solid marketing plan. A strong marketing plan will ensure that you are not only sticking to your schedule, but also that you are spending your marketing funds wisely and appropriately.

An organisation must also have the ability to renew and recreate its strategic capabilities to meet the changing and challenging needs of the environment (Johnson et al, 2011).

Questions put to candidates:

- Do you plan your marketing activities?
- If yes, how do you plan your marketing activities?
- If no, why do you not plan your marketing activities?
- How often do you act on your marketing plan?

Findings

Respondents 1 and 3 indicated that they do plan their marketing activities.

Respondent 1 does plan their marketing activities and stated that “we have always had a scheduled time to advertise through smaller local newspapers. That’s a yearly subscription.”
Respondent 3 stated that they promote their business at a yearly charity event. “We do some charity events”.

Respondent 2 stated that “I don’t have a marketing plan per se, I have a marketing ambition. I probably have an ad hoc type marketing plan but I don’t have a budget at the moment to implement such plan.”

In response to the question, how do you plan your marketing activities? The interviewees responded as follows:

Respondent 1: “Yearly subscription for golf tee sponsorship”, “monthly magazine”.

Respondent 2: “Primarily marketing has been done through networking. So all day everyday”.

Respondent 3: As often as an opportunity presents itself.

**Summary**

While two of the ME’s have plan their marketing activities, respondent two stated that they have a more ad hoc or opportunity-based model to their marketing. Budget certainly affects how they go about promoting their business.

5.6.2 Promotional Work

In order to successfully grow your business, you’ll need to attract and then work to retain a large base of satisfied customers. Marketing emphasizes the value of the customer to the business (SBA.gov, 2013).

Question to candidates:

- Do you complete the marketing work yourself?

**Findings**

Respondent 1 confirmed that they do not do the promotional work themselves by stating: “No, a girl in the office does it”.

Respondents 2 and 3 confirmed that they perform the promotional work themselves.
Summary

As firms 2 and 3 are one-person organisations, it is necessary that they must perform the promotion work themselves. The budget does not permit for them to hire an experienced marketing person.

Micro firm 1 has the luxury of having an employee with some marketing experience, to whom they can rely on.

5.6.3 Strategy of Investment

Marketing performance and ultimately competitiveness will suffer without adequate alignment, investment and capability building (Osak, 2013).

Question put to candidates:

- Do you have a strategy of investment for your marketing?

Findings

A number of marketing investment strategies were read to the respondents. Whilst discussing various options, respondents 1 and 2 confirmed that they would work with the affordable option and would be keener to invest more on opportunity rather than with a target or objective in place.

Respondent 2 had initially planned on investing a certain percentage of their yearly turnover, however, as a result of a lower than expected turnover, they must also now follow the more affordable option.

Summary

In short, it appears that the ME’s are not following the most productive marketing investment theory, that of investing to reach goals. The discussion revealed that budget is the primary reason as to why the three respondents generally follow the affordable marketing investment option.

5.6.4 Marketing Tools

Fill (2009) stated that:
“Marketing communication is an audience-centred activity so it is vitally important to understand the way in which audiences process information prior to, during and after making product/service decisions.”

When applying the above statement, one would suggest that it is vital to know what how your customers are thinking in order to select the correct marketing tools.

Question put to candidates:

- From the following list, can you please tell which marketing tools that you have used and which work best for your business?

Respondents answers were noted on the following tables. See Fig 5.1, Fig 5.2 and Fig 5.3.

**CGrogan & Co Solicitors – Fig 5.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advertising</th>
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<tr>
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<td>LinkedIn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brochure</td>
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<td>Website</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<th>Content Marketing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Send regular email to contact list</td>
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<td>Ask for referrals</td>
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<td>Free monthly newsletter</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Make referrals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email Signature</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sponsor local team</td>
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<td>Holiday gifts for best customers</td>
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**Holiday gifts for best customers**

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**NetTech Ltd – Fig 5.3**

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Findings

Advertising - Business cards, website, brochures, free samples and local newspaper are the most predominantly used marketing tools within advertising. Of all the options, the respondents were amused by the notion of using radio.

Digital - FaceBook and LinkedIn are the most predominantly used concepts within digital.

Internet Marketing - Google Adwords is used by two of the micro businesses but the rest of options were alien to the ME owners.

Email Marketing - All of the respondents use email signatures with only respondent 2 using social media functionality on their emails.

Relationship Marketing - This is a strong point for all of the respondents. From asking for referrals to being part of a professional organisation, they all take this form of marketing quite seriously.

Content Marketing - This marketing is quite alien to the respondents with only respondent 3 using Podcasts.

Marketing Help - Beyond hiring someone to develop their websites, none of the respondents have sought any marketing help.

Unique Marketing - Respondents 1 and 3 use a number of unique and innovative marketing ideas to help promote their business.

Two of the three respondents are currently members of local business groups. These include CLD (Clane Local Development) and The Knocklyon Network. Both of the respondents felt that these were very worthwhile and that new business was gained by participating in them.
Summary

All of participating micro firms keep current contact lists so they are missing out by not taking advantage of this with marketing tools such as ‘sending regular emails’.

Due to the importance of networking being highlighted so often, one would suggest that the Relationship Marketing tools are of vital importance to all of the micro firms.

It is interesting to note that none of the micro firms hire any professional help such as a marketing firm or PR professional. This is noted due to the ME’s answer in the final interview question, where all three indicated that they would recommend a new businesses to hire somebody with marketing experience.

5.6.5 Digital Marketing

Micro firms are often restricted by funds and so any designated marketing funds should be spent on activities that can bring maximum benefits to the firms. Digital media should be viewed as a cost effective medium with a wide reach.

Questions put to candidates:

- How useful have you found digital marketing for your business?
- What has been your experience with using such means of marketing?

Findings

Respondent 1: Noted that they had gained some business through their website, however, admitted that it was not their strong point.

Respondent 2: Had explored several methods, such as direct email, but found them to be a waste of time. Although, the respondent did acknowledge that it was not their forte.

Respondent 3: Found digital marketing useful and noted that it was relatively inexpensive and required an investment more so in time rather than money.

Summary
A lack of knowledge appeared to be the overwhelming result from this discussion. Although the respondents have gained business to a certain extent through digital media, they also explained that it was not a part of marketing that they are familiar with.

5.6.6 Competition

For a micro enterprise to be successful in any industry, there is no single competitive advantage that will ensure success. “Competitive strategy is about being different. It means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value” (Johnson et al, 2011).

Questions put to candidates:

- Compared with your competitors, what do you do differently?
- Why do you think this gives you a competitive advantage?

Findings

All three respondents explained that they believed their customer service to be better than that of their competitors. Respondent 1 stressed that they market more locally which greatly assists. Respondent 2 felt strongly about obtaining customer feedback.

Summary

From the above, one can deduce that all three ME owners are aware of their competition and how they go about business. They have made conscious efforts to do things differently compared to their competitors and believe that it is successful.

5.6.7 Innovative Marketing

Innovation is doing new things that customers ultimately appreciate and value - not only developing new generations of products, services, channels, and customer experience but also conceiving new business processes and models, Cash et al (2008).

In today’s business climate, companies must look for new and innovative ways to market to their customers in order to gain a competitive advantage.
Question put to candidates:

- Do you have any innovative means of promoting your business? Explain in detail.

Findings

Respondent 1 stated that they run a weekly free advice clinic that leads to new business.

Respondent 2 stated that “they don’t have any innovative means of marketing”.

Respondent 3 has combined email video marketing and YouTube to target certain clients. They believe that their competition does not do this.

David J. Treec explained “that proper structures and management can help firms generate innovation which can dramatically shape competitive outcomes and the commercial success of the enterprise” (Treec, J.D. 1998).

The respondents understanding that they need innovative means of marketing will lead to greater success for them.

Summary

One would suggest that the firms have been successful with the use of innovative marketing. They understand that they need to do something differently and this seems to be part of the culture of their business. O’Regan et al. (2005) considered culture to be:

“one of the most common impediments to the implementation of innovation. SMEs tend to have flexible innovation cultures and which are typically characterized by low resistance to change”.

5.6.8 Marketing Message

It was proposed by Fill (2009) that:

“A message proclaims something that is personally significant to the individual in their current context and that it is important to understand
audiences and develop messages and use media that helps audiences attain value that is significant to them”.

Question put to candidates:

- How consistent are you with your marketing message?

Findings

Respondent 1: “So, we try to keep our signage, our letterhead, the colours, the colour of our logo, we try to kind of keep the same theme so it’s, so it’s not to confuse it for customers and things”

Respondent 2: “It’s consistent in the business cards, website, brochure and letterhead. They are all consistent. Consistent logo with a consistent presentation.”

Respondent 3: “It would probably be very inconsistent because the company is multi-disciplinary”. However, they also stated that “the only thing that would be consistent would be the customer service and reliability”.

Summary

The micro firms have shown a good knowledge of consistent marketing messages. As Plavoukas states, they understand that “the marketer who succeeds will be the one who co-ordinates the communications mix so tightly that you can look from medium to medium and instantly see that the brand is speaking with one voice” (Plavoukas, 2009).

It is interesting for respondent 3. Although they believed that they did not have a consistent marketing message, all of their marketing printed and verbal marketing was based around customer service and reliability that certainly shows that it is quite consistent.

5.6.9 Customer Involvement

A new marketing generation is evident through the recognition that communication is a crucial element to the building of relationships with both customers and stakeholders. Therefore, one must recognise that it is impossible to create and foster
relationships without considering communication as an essential strategic element (Porcu, 2012).

Question put to candidates:

- How do you engage customers in your marketing campaign?

Findings

All three respondents indicated that they like to follow up with customers to ensure that they are satisfied. They also like to look for feedback and engage with the customer.

Some of the responses included, “we look for some feedback and testimonials” and “make sure everyone is happy enough with the service to refer us”.

Summary

Marketers must to learn about their customers. The old enter-and-win promotions no longer cut it in the age of relationship marketing (Butchen, 2008).

The ME’s have demonstrated that their engagements with customers and attempts to build solid relationship with them is an important task.

Objective 2 - Summary

In order to gain a competitive advantage in business, there are a number of elements that need to be in sync with one and another. Effective relationships or links must be created between each of resources, competencies and activities within the company.

In terms if promoting a business and IMC, using the correct marketing tools, marketing messages and engaging with customer are all vital. The respondents have shown that they use some effective marketing tool but their shortcomings are also evident through their lack of digital media usage.

The majority of the ME’s have shown some very innovative ideas along with the desire to have a consistent marketing message.
Objective 3 - What impact does IMC have on a micro business?

5.7.1 Importance of Marketing

There are capabilities that are incredibly rare and only available to certain firms. Rare capabilities are those possessed uniquely by an organisation or by few others, (Johnson et al 2011). Excellent marketing capabilities can give a firm a competitive advantage.

Questions put to candidates:

- How would you rate the importance of marketing in your business from 1 – 10?
- Explain why you have rated it this number?
- Do you now think that you need to rank marketing higher on the scale?

Findings

Respondent 1:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Respondent 2:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Respondent 3:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Explain why you have rated it this number?
Respondent 1: “It’s really just down to networking”.

Respondent 2: “I understand the philosophy of marketing and the power of marketing. I have just been restrained by budget. Because we are a start up company with a very low profile, marketing is the key to survival and growth.”

Respondent 3: “Because of networking”.

**Re – Ranking**

Respondent 1:

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**Summary**

It is clear that after a second ranking of ‘The Importance of Marketing’ all three ME’s indicated that marketing should be paramount to their business success.

By explaining to respondent 1 that networking is an element of marketing, they increased the ranking of marketing from six to a nine due to their realisation of the importance of this concept.

**5.7.2 Trust & Business Integrity**
Trust can be defined in many ways. Frankel (2008) defines it as “the reasonable belief that trusted persons: both tell the truth and keep their promises” (Frankel, 2008).

Question put to candidates:

- How do you use marketing to build up a level of trust with your customers?

**Findings**

The interviewees stated the following: “we inform everyone know that we stand over our work”, “the level of trust with our customers is based on our guarantee” and “we never let a customer down”.

**Summary**

These are guarantees and philosophies that the ME’s affix themselves to and include on their promotional material.

**5.7.3 Marketing Challenges**

According to Steven D. Strauss (2008), small businesses are confronted with several problems including marketing as they realize that marketing is needed but they do not know how to go about it, and the learning curve is for sure very expensive for small businesses.

Questions put to candidates:

- What are your biggest challenges that you face with promoting your business?
- How much time are you able to allocate for daily tasks such as updating FaceBook, Twitter and blog pages LinkedIn etc.?
- How do you feel about staying up to date with new marketing techniques?

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Findings

The interviewees answered as follows:

Respondent 1: “Budget and it’s finding the right events to advertise in”.

Respondent 2: “Budget. Knowledge. Time. Because I am a one - man show, time is a challenge and because it is a start-up business, budget is a challenge. And also lack of experience in marketing.”

Respondent 3: “Financial”

All of the respondents indicated that they do not spend much time on daily tasks such as FaceBook and social media.

On being asked about new marketing techniques, respondent 2 and 3 admitted that they are eager to learn more about them.

Summary

The general theme that arises here is that lack of resources and a lack of experience are the major challenges that the ME’s face with regard to promoting their business.

Objective 3 – Main summary

All three interviewees acknowledged and understood the importance of business promotion. Lack of time, budget and marketing experience were all stated as being the main challenges to the promotion of their businesses. With this in mind, the ME’s did state that they were eager to learn new marketing concepts going forward.

5.8 Objective 4 - What IMC solutions work for micro business in practice?

5.8.1 Marketing Success
Skok and Legge (2002) explain that the requirements for success in all areas of a business organisation require good planning, control procedures and good teamwork. This can also be applied more specifically to the concept of marketing.

Questions put to candidates:

- What are the most successful marketing practices / concepts that you have used?
- How were they successful?

**Findings**

Respondent 1: “100% networking. It’s just absolutely vital”. It is shown that this was successful by the number referrals that they receive from such work.

Respondent 2: “Networking”. The respondent stated that 90% of their work came from the process of networking, which demonstrates that this is their most important business generation tool.

Respondent 3: “It’s definitely networking”. The respondent stated that by becoming involved in networking, this respondent was able to pick up a number of new customers.

**Summary**

“What does make a business distinct and what is it’s peculiar resource, is its ability to use knowledge of all kinds … It is only in its respect of knowledge that a business can be distinct, and therefore produce something that has a value in the market place” (Drucker, 1996). This statement reflects the success that the ME’s have gotten through the use of marketing. They are using their skills and knowledge of networking to gain new business.

**5.8.2 Marketing Failures**

Questions put to candidates:

- What marketing practices were unsuccessful?
- Why do you think that these did not work?
Findings

Data collected indicated that there were a number of marketing failures across the different micro firms.

Respondent 1 considered their use of ‘FaceBook’ to be a failure but admitted that they did not invest enough time into this activity. They also stated that “it does not really suit their industry”.

Respondent 2 noted failure from use of brochure deliveries, magazine advertisements and local paper advertisement. They declared that “they were a total waste of time”, but also admitted that “the target audience was probably wrong” with regard to the brochure delivery.

Respondent 3 did not have any success with “local newspapers” but according to them this venture was “badly managed and we probably picked the wrong sections for ads”.

Summary

Respondent 1 seemed to lack knowledge regarding the various methods of marketing available through social media.

One would suggest that perhaps respondent 2 began a number of marketing measures, with brochures and newspapers, without having conducted thorough research into this form of marketing.

5.8.3 Marketing Objectives

“Businesses today face a stark reality: anticipate, respond, and react to the growing demands of the marketplace, or perish”, (Nah and Lau and Kuang, 2001). With this said, setting ongoing objectives for your marketing will help your business to compete.

Questions put to candidates:

- Do you plan your marketing campaign according to objectives?
- What objectives did you have for your marketing campaigns?
Findings

The interviewees answered as follows:

Respondent: “Not really” and “our objective is to get new business”.

Respondent 2: “Yeah, I have a plan in mind, a target. The swimming pool industry and the leisure industry”

Respondent 3: “yeah, picking up new business”.

Summary

It is clear that the theme of this discussion is the lack of objectives and goals identified by the ME’s promotional campaigns. Generally, the ME’s stated that attaining new business is their marketing objective. They do not seem to see a road from marketing to hitting an objective that in turn may lead to new business. Respondent 2 stated that they would like to target “the leisure industry” but at the moment this is not being done due to budget restrictions.

5.8.4 Marketing Success Measures

Questions put to candidates:

• How do you measure the success of your marketing campaigns?

Findings

The respondents stated that they measure success in the following ways “by the number of new clients that come in through the door or email us or phone us”, “by results” and “I would measure it through turnover, sales or getting the foot in the door”.

Summary

The respondents’ answers were quite specific in showing that the measure of success for promotional work done would be through gaining new business, increasing turnover or making sales. Whilst these are all the desirable outcome of marketing, the
lack of marketing objectives that these firms have in place suggests that they have no other success metrics installed.

**Objective 4 – Main summary**

It is evident that networking is the most successful marketing activity for these ME’s. Although the ME’s have had failures with some of their marketing attempts, with both traditional and new marketing methods, one would suggest that this is down to a lack of experience in marketing and promotional concepts.

**5.9 Objective - Current Business Climate**

**5.9.1 Irish Recession**

Question put to candidates:

- Can you please tell me if the recession in Ireland has had any effect on you in regards to marketing your business?

**Findings**

The respondent’s answers generated the following:

Respondent 1: “Not really. A positive of the recession is some of the newspaper marketing etc., has become cheaper”.

Respondent 2: “It’s had a dramatic effect within our target market. We generated quite a lot of interest in small companies, small commercial premises or small retail premises but the budget wasn’t there. People just don’t have the money to spend any more on something as intangible as health and safety”.

Respondent 3: “It has had a significant effect. I have to market a lot more in the UK”.

**Summary**

The respondent’s answers brought up some interesting points concerning how the recession affected their marketing activities. Both positive and negative results were visible as a result of the downturn in the Irish economy.
5.9.2 Business Start-up advice

New business owners can always do with some advice so the interviewees were asked to impart some of the knowledge to them.

Question put to candidates:

- In regards to marketing, what advice would you give to someone that is starting out with a small business?

Findings

Respondent 1: “Allocate money correctly to an event where you think that you are going to get the best return. Hire someone with marketing expertise”.

Respondent 2: “Employ a professional. Allocate a budget for marketing”.

Respondent 3: “Do a marketing course or hire somebody to do the work for you”.

Summary

The general consensus among the business owners is that they would advise people starting out in business to hire a marketing professional to assist. One would suggest that these opinions are founded through their own lack of education in marketing and there awareness that one would need professional advice.

Objective 5 - Main summary

The recession in Ireland has had a positive affect on one of the ME’s with regards to marketing expenditure. Generally, though, the Irish recession has had a negative affect with regard to the other two ME’s.

5.10 Conclusion

Research findings were discussed in this chapter with analysis carried out on the interviewee’s answers and statements. Further discussions, recommendations and conclusions are drawn in the next chapter.
Chapter 6 – Recommendations and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This research sought to analyse the application of IMC by micro enterprises. Having discussed the research findings, this chapter outlines the research outcomes. The limitations of this research are highlighted and recommendations for further research are presented.

6.2 Summary of research findings

A review of the literature in relation to this study permitted the researcher to assess the similarities and differences between this study and previous research studies.

The outcome of this research provides an insight into micro firms’ application of IMC. The researcher seeks to evaluate the micro firms’ promotional activities. From the interviewee’s responses, the researcher hopes to develop ideas that can be discusses and reflected upon.

The primary research findings were derived from the objectives and summarized as follows:

Part 1 – Interviewee Profile

- Marketing education is weak amongst the three business owners.
- The business owners were not marketing driven; a fault admitted by them.
- The responses obtained depict that the business owners found logos to be important and they understood how they can aid a business.

Part 2 – How is IMC applied within a micro business?

- Effective marketing tools are used.
- Distinct lack of digital marketing usage.
- Innovative marketing is used.
- Consistent marketing message is understood and used to some extent.

Part 3 – What impact does IMC have on a micro business?

- Respondents understood the importance of business promotion.
Main challenges to business promotion were lack of resources and marketing experience.

ME’s are eager to learn more about promoting their business.

Part 4 – What IMC solutions work best for micro business in practice?

- Networking is the most successful marketing concept being used.
- All ME’s have experienced failure to some level with both traditional and new marketing methods.
- Lack of marketing experience is responsible for these marketing failures.

Part 5 – Current Business Climate

- Both positive and negative affects have occurred as a result of the Irish recession.

6.3 Recommendations

The research suggests that the following recommendations may improve a micro firms’ application of IMC that may, in turn, result in a competitive advantage.

Recommendations - Interviewee Profile

A higher level of marketing education is necessary for these ME owners. This would enable them to be more marketing driven and they would be more comfortable in this role within their business. The owners experience and knowledge set the limits for the companies’ activities.

Recommendations - How is IMC applied within a micro business?

The ME’s need to test new marketing practices to verify their suitability. If the ME notes that one particular practice is successful, they should then apply additional funds into this method. To increase their presence online, one would suggest that they should increase investment into digital marketing. This would make it easier for them to promote their business with a consistent message, while reaching new markets at the same time.

Recommendations - What impact does IMC have on a micro business?
As the ME’s are eager to learn about new marketing practices, they should develop a learning culture in their firm and dedicate time to researching and practicing new methods. Lack of resources may limit this development, but without taking new steps to increase business, they will not progress their business.

**Recommendations - What IMC solutions work best for micro business in practice?**

The ME’s should continue with the use of networking but ensure that this method is included within an IMC plan. They must also find a balance between new and traditional methods of marketing.

**Recommendations - Current Business Climate**

Each ME’s should apply their advice that they offered to new business owners, i.e. if they are unable to complete promotional work due to inexperience or lack of knowledge, they need to allocate funds to hire a professional to this work on board. Micro firms need to recognize that marketing is not an expense but rather an investment into the success of their business.
Chapter 7 – Critical Reflection on learning and performance

7.1 Introduction

There is a reason why we reflect on experiences such as the completion of an educational course. Gibbs (1998) suggest that:

“It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively”.

In order to understand and complete the reflective section of this dissertation, I began by investigating the meaning of reflection. One definition of reflection is offered by Moon (1999):

“as a form of mental processing with a purpose and/or anticipated outcome that is applied to relatively complex or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution”.

The information contained in this section is a reflection of one’s learning and development while pursuing an MBA from the Dublin Business School. The chapter is an opportunity for one to critically look at one’s ambitions, career path and personal skills set. This section compares my initial level of knowledge and development to that of post dissertation stage.

One’s ambitions, life experiences and inspirations play an important part in evaluating and portraying the person that I am today. With the completion of this reflective piece, my main objective is to be open and express my experiences and ambitions in an honest manner.

This research project has proved to be a worthwhile and often testing learning experience, which has provided new knowledge in the following areas.
7.2 Self Reflection on Learning

Kolb is the inspiration for a large numbers of theorists. For example, Honey and Mumford's model, *Learning Styles Questionnaire* (LSQ), is directly derived from Kolb's theory. Honey and Mumford (2000) note their debt to Kolb's theory, however, they also note that they produced their own Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ) because they found that Kolb's LSI had low face validity with managers.

![Diagram of Learning Styles](image)

Fig 7.1 Coffield(2004)

The author completed Honey & Mumford’s Learning Style Questionnaire (See Appendix 111) to establish what their predominant learning styles are. On completion, it was evident that the author learning’s style is predominantly Reflector and Pragmatist. As suggested by Honey & Mumford (2000):

“A reflector prefers to learn from activities that allow them to watch, think,
and review (time to think things over) what has happened. Likes to use journals and brainstorming. Lectures are helpful if they provide expert explanations and analysis”.

Also suggested by Honey & Mumford is that a:

“A pragmatist prefers to apply new learnings to actual practice to see if they work. Likes laboratories, field work, and observations. Likes feedback, coaching, and obvious links between the task-on-hand and a problem.

This fits in with the experiences that one had throughout the course. It is also noted that people prefer different methods of learning, depending upon the situation and their experience level, thus they move between the four modes of learning, rather than being dominantly locked into one mode.

7.3 Development of Skills

The core modules that were focused on were very appropriate and provided the author with a strong foundation to move forward in their career.

I want to expand / continue my career within self - employment as I have a good understanding of this area. This course modules and dissertation research that was carried out has helped to develop and expand this skill – set. The skills and knowledge learnt throughout the coursework of the MBA has proved to be of great benefit in developing this research.

On completion of the course and research dissertation, one can look back in time and realise that there were a number of skills that were missing from my skill set but have since been developed to a competent level.

Throughout the course of my career, I have held positions in information technology, strategic/business planning, business intelligence and market research. Although each of these positions required distinct skill sets, I was always eager to attempt new tasks and strive to succeed in new areas. In order to achieve this, I understood that there were knowledge gaps that I first needed to fill. Although the course did not specifically cover topics such as ‘Running your own small business’, the modules that
were covered throughout the MBA are of benefit to the management aspects of this profession. Some of the knowledge and skill set gap that were improved included:

**Increased Team-working skills**

According to Marden (2008), “no employer today is independent of those about him. He cannot succeed alone, no matter how great his ability or capital. Business today is more than ever a question of cooperation”.

While pursuing the MBA program, I have considerably expanded my team-working skills. Throughout my undergraduate studies, work and social activities, I have always struggled team-working skills. I struggle to delegate workloads, as I tend to lack confidence in my colleagues.

I carried this trait into group work within this MBA course and I must admit that I admit that it proved difficult to move away from it. I am inclined to take a leadership role within group situations, but have used this course to my benefit to help in my lack of team working skills. I began to work more closely with team-mates and began delegating work in a more effective way. This is a work in progress but I must master it if I am going to be successful on my career path. This new skill will be essential when the time comes for me to take on a number of new employees within my businesses.

**Multi-Tasking in Business**

Upon finishing my MBA, I will be involved with operating a number of small businesses. Before starting this course I had always struggled with trying to achieve a number of goals at once. Multi-tasking had not come easy for me, however, throughout this course I have begun to manage my studies, work and business opportunities in a better manner. I believe that group work throughout this course has helped with this, as we had to set deadlines, allocate work and juggle a number of assignments at the same time.

**Planning Skills**

Skok and Legge (2002) explain that the requirements for success in all areas of a business organisation require good planning.
Since starting this MBA course I have begun to see the importance of planning and executing ideas that I believe are worth moving forward with. Through extensive reading of case studies throughout the course, I have seen how companies have advanced themselves with new ideas and well-constructed plans.

One can look to a quote by Benjamin Franklin which clearly shows the important of the above discussion.

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail” (Benjamin Franklin).

7.4 Research and Investigative Skills

Researching and writing a dissertation, particularly one based on qualitative research methods, demanded a different set of skills and offered some special challenges because of its nature and scope. In reflecting on that experience, I can identify various lessons learned along the way.

Never stop reading

The first lesson I learnt, and that was stressed throughout our module on Research Methods, was to read extensively. This was an essential part of the course as one needs to know what research exists and how others have treated a particular topic so that one can identify gaps in the research and where additional information is needed.

Prior studies published within academic journals and articles provide a foundation, background and possible context for future research. Lecturers throughout the course also stressed the importance of reading past and present business periodicals.

Ask the Experts

Through the course, I learned to consult with lecturers and supervisors. They provided necessary oversight for my final dissertation. All phases of my research were subject to their scrutiny and review. They were my consultants and advisors, and I was quite fortunate that they also played the role of mentors, providing counsel and guidance along the way.

Detail Research Methodology
One of the primary lessons I learned as I prepared my dissertation was that details are not just necessary but vital. I realized that I needed to spell out the methodology in detail to make the process as transparent as possible. A research supervisor stressed the importance of outlining the conceptual or theoretical framework of the study. It is important, as well, to provide a theoretical rationale for the selection of central concepts and to define these concepts in operational terms. Details should also include the population of interest, the research subjects and how they were recruited or selected for the study, and the units of analysis. It is especially important to give details of the data collection methods and instruments as well as the data analysis techniques and procedures.

For a period I did not see the importance of recording the methodology for this project and thought that it may be a waste of words since the word count is quite limited, but through discussion with my supervisor and from further reading, it became apparent as to why such importance is weighted on the Research Methodology section of this dissertation.

7.5 Plans to sustain and extend this learning

As indicated throughout the dissertation, it is important to educate yourself in every aspect of your business such as marketing and to continue to learn as you progress forward. I intend on completing a course in digital marketing and design that I will start within the next year. This will be the start to my continuing study in the field of business promotion.

7.6 Limitations

I found that a limitation for the MBA course and research was that there was no module on preparing a student for working in their own business. One would suggest that the MBA course prepares you to work in a large company rather than working for yourself.

The short time period of the dissertation affected the findings as they were only a ‘snapshot’ of the micro firms. It would be interesting to see the results if the research was expanded to a year, for example. This would enable the researcher to record, in
depth, how a micro firm applies IMC and in real time, look at the results that they are achieving.

7.7 Conclusion

Throughout the MBA program, I have gained a more insightful knowledge in business management and communications as a whole. I have learned that the most important thing for graduates is to continue to try and improve oneself. By pushing oneself to learn and improve one’s skills, one will gain you a competitive advantage in the professional workplace.

Pursuing an MBA, in many cases, is associated strictly with seeking greater monetary reward or higher status, not personal fulfillment. The truth is that author had always intended to complete a Masters level course and the timing and opportunity fell into place for them. It will benefit the business that I am in and will be of assistance on my path forward in business. My next career step is to implement what I have learned into my business strategies and continue to work on my skill set.

Having now finished my MBA course, one can suggest that they are more prepared to solve a variety of business problems that will be faced throughout their career path.
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Appendices

Interview Transcripts

Interview guide

Consent forms

Learning Style Questionnaire
Interviewer: Can you please tell me about any training or courses that you have undertaken in regards to marketing?

Respondent: Just in regards to marketing itself. Personally I have none. I was lucky enough to have a girl in the office there, she’s got some kind of marketing degree that she had from some previous education.

Interviewer: You wouldn’t know how many years of study that she carried out?

Respondent: I presume just your typical four year degree course but I couldnrt be fully sure.

Marketing Attitude

Interviewer: And, would you consider yourself to be a marketing driven person?

Respondent: Not really no, look I’m so busy that I have to concentrate on the legal side of the business. So I would have to say no I’m not, I’m not a marketing driven person.

Business Start Up

Interviewer: So why did you actually start your micro business your business in the first place?

Respondent: Well we just saw an opportunity in our local area. That was pretty much it. We just wanted to set up in a new area.
Time on Business

Interviewer: Ok, so how do you feel about the time that you spend on promoting your business or marketing your business?

Respondent: The time spent... Like really, like my side of promoting the business it comes down to just networking. You know, which is done mainly through working hours or social events. You know. I will always have a business card to hand if ever an opportunity arises that I’d see someone in a bar or a clubhouse or whatever it is.

Family Involvement

Interviewer: And, does your family help out with the marketing side of the business in anyway?

Respondent: No, no they don’t. It’s all in house stuff.

Interviewer: You just kind of keep those separate between the family and the business.

Response: Yep, absolutely.

Business Logo

Interviewer: And, in regards to your business, do you actually have a logo for your business?

Response: Oh yeah yeah, of course we do. You know, it’s pretty much essential, you know for brand awareness and familiarity and stuff. Yeah yeah, we do.

Interviewer: And, just as you said, you have a logo so why do you think it is important for the business to actually have a logo?

Response: Well again, I suppose, you know. It’s for people recognition. We want people to be familiar with it. Yeah that’s just it really.
Interviewer: And the logo that you actually have for your business, what would your company logo represent or says about your business?

Respondent: Ok well as you know, It’s a family run business in a local area so I mean we had to keep our family name key on the business name and on the logo. The nature of the business, it’s legal industry so we wanted to keep it quite recognisable and professional looking.

How is IMC applied within a micro business?

Marketing Plan / Strategy

Interviewer: Alright, the next section that we are going to look at is kinda like the marketing plan and marketing strategy, so the question will be; do you actually plan your marketing activities or promotional activities for your company.

Respondent: “Do you plan your marketing activities”... I suppose yeah, we do, yeah. I mean, We have always tended to market throughout the year at specific times. We would always have our eye open on maybe if an opportunity arised, maybe like a local charity event or whatever that, we feel like we could get a decent return from. So yeah yeah we do yeah.

Interviewer: What do you mean by ‘Charity’ event, just like a sports event?

Respondent: Yeah it would mainly be sports events, yeah, again local clubs and things like, yeah.

Interviewer: Is there any kind of particular clubs or would it be GAA or soccer or golf or anything of those?

Response: Yeah, I mean the main kind of clubs in our local area is definite, the GAA is strong, I mean, there is an abundance of golf courses in North Kildare as you would probably well know. So, yeah, GAA, soccer, golf, they would be the big ones, yeah.

Interviewer: Alright, that good. How do you actually plan your marketing activities?
Response: Well ok well, we have always had a scheduled time to advertise through, through kind of smaller local newspapers if you take like the Liffey Champion as a kind of local newspaper or like Le Cheile magazine or whatever it is. So, we’ve always has a kind of set, you know, there a kind of monthly magazine, so throughout the year, we kind of pay for that. We also have our company logo and name up on a sign in a golf course, so kind of a Tee sponsor in a local club. So, that’s a yearly subscription, so is that the kinds of things that you mean.

Interviewer: Yeah, just on, you mentioned, was it Le Cheile and the Liffey Champion. Are they local papers that are delivered house to house or are they just left in local shops where people pick them up.

Respondent: Yeah, exactly yeah. There the ones that you find beside a till like you know or yeah yeah.

Interviewer: How often do you actually act on this marketing plan that you kind of have in place?

Respondent: Well, I mean, you know. It’s monthly. It’s a monthly magazine. I’m sure it’s just a monthly subscription that we pay. But, you just don’t, word on the street is you hear about kind of events that we would be looking for. So we would always have to keep our eye on that. Generally though most work comes from networking which would be done on a regular basis.

Promotional Work

Interviewer: Do complete all of your marketing work yourself?

Respondent: Nah, to be honest, not really. No No. Again, I mentioned the girl at the start, in the office, like, she. You know, as part of her job she can handle all of that so I just kind of give her free rein. I’ll always, if it’s anything big though, I’ll always like to sign off on it for her, for her work and stuff, like.

Interview:Alright, so she would do any of the work, like anything online and sorting out the newspaper and you just handle the networking side of it.
Respondent: Yeah, exactly. If there was a budget or if she was signing cheques or something, you know, I would have to give it the all clear. Ah, she’s good ya know and she is pretty savvy in that kind of area.

Strategy of Investment

Interviewer: Ok, the next question is actually to do with investment. So the actual question is, do you have a strategy of investment for your marketing? So, I’ll just give you a quick example for that> So would it be that you invest 20% of your turnover from year to year and that is just to give you an idea of it.

There actually four options that I will read through and you might be able to answer one of them. So the first one is:

Affordable option – Do you invest just as much as you can afford into your marketing?

Number 2 – Is there a percentage of your turnover that you reinvest into your marketing?

Number 3 – Do you benchmark your investment in marketing against that of your competitors?

Or Number 4 – Does your strategy of investment in marketing reflect, say your objectives, goals or any tasks that you have?

Response: Right ok, just just, run through those again. The first one was the affordable, yes?

Interviewer: Yeah, the first one is ‘Affordable Option’ – do you invest just as much as you can afford into your marketing?

Respondent: Right, the second one was the, what was the second one?

Interviewer: Is there a percentage of your turnover that you reinvest, year on year?

Respondent: Yeah
**Interviewer:** And the third one – do you benchmark your investment in marketing against what your competitors are doing?

**Respondent:** Ok right.

**Interviewer:** And the fourth one was – does your strategy of investment in marketing reflect any objectives or goals that you are trying to achieve?

**Respondent:** Nah, look, I’d say it would have to be the first one. The affordable option, like, if an opportunity arises and you know, we think we can definitely generate a return, and we can afford it, we’ll go for it. I mean, yeah, definitely the affordable option. Yeah yeah.

**Interviewer:** So I suppose that would be kind of like, if you hear about one of these charity events or some kind of society event in golf that might be happening in a local club, there the kinds of things that you might invest some money into

**Respondent:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah, Yeah.

**Marketing Tools**

**Interviewer:** Ok, the next section that we are going to go through is to do with marketing tools, so I have a list of a number of kind of marketing tools that are popular and people and businesses tend to use. So, I’ll go through the list and you can just say basically yes or no, or if you use them or not and we might elaborate on a few of them.

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<th>Relationship Building</th>
<th>Content Marketing</th>
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<td>Send regular email to contact list</td>
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<td>Ask for referrals</td>
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<td>Sponsor local team</td>
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<td>Cross promotion with another business</td>
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<td>Online marketing firm</td>
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Respondent: **OK**

Interviewer: So do you use business cards?

Respondent: **Oh absolutely, yeah.**

Interviewer: Do you use any kind of vehicle signage?
Respondent: Sorry what was that?

Interviewer: Vehicle signage, you know, you might see some companies advertising on vans or on cars and things like that?

Respondent: Oh no, absolutely no way. Not a chance.

Interviewer: Do you have a brochures?

Respondent: Yeah we do, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you have a digital version of this brochure that you can send to potential clients?

Response: As in?

Interviewer: That would be, you have received them before. People would have like a screen shot of their actually paper brochure that they are able to attach to emails and send them off.

Respondent: Yeah, we have something like that. Again, the girl has all that set up on the email. Yeah

Interviewer: You obviously, you have a website?

Response: We do yeah.

Interviewer: Do you ever attend the Chambers of Commerce meetings?

Respondent: No, No.

Interviewer: Have you ever taken out a booth at a trade show?

Respondent: No, no we haven’t no.

Interviewer: Direct mail?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Any kind of free samples?

Respondent: For legal aid yeah (Sarcastic comment).
Interviewer: They don’t really suit you business.

Interviewer: Do you have an advertisement in the yellow pages?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Do you ever advertise on local radio?

Respondent: No, we never do, no.

Interviewer: Do you take out any kind of billboards or kind of outdoor signage?

Respondent: No again no.

Interviewer: Advertisements in local newspapers?

Respondent: Yeah, yeah we do that.

Interviewer: Any kind of sidewalk signs or again any kind of outdoor signs?

Respondent: Well, I mean, outside one of our offices we need a street facing sign but it’s kind of attached to the building. Is that what you mean?

Interviewer: yeah, yeah, well something people can see outside and it has your contact details etc on it.

Respondent: Yeah, given the location of our office it was important to have it. Yeah, we do.

Interviewer: Ok, the next section that we will look at is Digital, so do you use FaceBook?

Respondent: We do yeah.

Interviewer: LinkedIn

Respondent: Yeah, yeah we do.

Interviewer: Twitter?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Instagram?
Respondent: No

Interviewer: YouTube?

Respondent: No

Respondent: Does your business have a blog?

Respondent: No, No.

Interviewer: Ok, well move on to like internet marketing. Do you use any kind of like Google Adwords or do you know what they are about?

Respondent: Ahhh, I wouldn’t be again, I wouldn’t be familiar. I mean, I do know, I’ve searched the company, you know, myself and things and if I search the specific name it is top of the list. I don’t know if that’s down to the AdWords or whatever it is. Yeah

Interviewer: Just looking then at email marketing. Do you ever send out regular emails to your contact lists?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: You don’t have any kind of free monthly news letter with kind of information that would be relevant to your clients?

Respondent: No we don’t really. Like how much could we fill.

Interviewer: Do you have an email signature at the bottom of all emails that you send out?

Respondent: Yeah we do. It kind of gives it that personal touch.

Interviewer: Exactly

Interviewer: Do you have any kind of audio, visual, social sharing functionality to emails? I might just explain that. You mentioned that you do use FaceBook and LinkedIn, so do you have buttons on the end of your emails that people can click on to go to directly to your pages.

Respondent: No I don’t think so.
Interviewer: We’ll I’m sure you would have noticed them if they were there.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Ok, so the next section of the marketing tools is relationship building. Do you ever send out any customer satisfaction surveys?

Respondent: As in like a paper on?

Interviewer: Or like a digital one that you can email to clients?

Respondent: No, we wouldn’t do that. It would mainly just be, we would either see them face to face or a phone call. Again local business, you know, you see these people on a regular basis.

Interviewer: Do you ever ask for referrals?

Respondent: Oh we do yeah.

Interviewer: Do you ever make referrals?

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely yeah.

Interviewer: Do you sponsor any local teams or anything like that?

Respondent: Well I mentioned the golf course earlier. And if there was a local team event or they were looking for, if they were looking for money for a fundraiser, yeah absolutely we’ll donate money. We don’t have our name on a jersey if that’s what you mean.

Interviewer: Are you involved in any kind of cross promotion with other businesses?

Respondent: As in, just helping other businesses or helping other businesses in particular?

Interviewer: Kind of working with other businesses to generate business for each other so that it is beneficial to both that are involved?

Respondent: Yeah, no no, definitely. I mean given, like ok for example – your selling a house, you going to need your solicitor, your going to need mortgage brokers. So
mortgage brokers we definitely promote and also local auctioneers aswell. There just an example.

Interviewer: So I suppose between those few companies you would be making referrals to each other and generating business through some kind of cross promotion.

Respondent: Yeah yeah yeah. I mean again, local stuff, you need to kind of have these guys on board, yeah.

Interviewer: Are you a member of any professional organisation so that just any kind of local business community or local business groups?

Respondent: I am actually, yeah. There’s a local business committee here in the area that we’re a member of. Absolutely yeah.

Interviewer: Do you know the name of it?

Respondent: It’s Clane Local Development.

Interviewer: I just have a separate question about that. Can you tell me about your experience with this group and do you think that it is a worthwhile measure?

Respondent: Just to be involved in it, is what you mean?

Interviewer: yeah, exactly.

Respondent: The great, the great, the nature of the whole group is like minded people, you know, getting together, you know, trying to promote not just the development but other local businesses so I mean the amount of referrals and off shoot business that we have gotten from it has been good. Yeah. They are quite well known in the area, you know, we tend to help with funding for new local events, like the pitches up there. Yeah, no it has been really beneficial.

Interviewer: ok, the next one is content marketing? It may not be relevant to your business but I don’t suppose you have ever recorded a podcast?

Respondent: No, No.

Interviewer: Do you even know what a podcast is? (Humorous)

Respondent: I’m not quite sure. No.
Interviewer: have you ever written any press releases that you have sent to any local newspapers to help generate some more business for the firm?

Respondent: No, no I haven’t.

Interviewer: Ok the second last section under marketing tools is marketing help. Have you ever hired a marketing consultant?

Respondent: No. Again the girl, I have her working in the office there.

Interviewer: Have you ever hired a PR professional?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Have you ever hired any kind of online marketing firm to help out.

Respondent: An online marketing firm? I mean would you consider a web developer as one, like we have the website. Is that what you are getting at?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, you had someone in and you paid them to develop the website and to help online and as you said now it is one of the top searches.

Respondent: Yeah, Yeah. Yeah we did. We got someone to do that.

Interviewer: very good.

Interviewer: The last one is to do with unique marketing, just kind of trying to see if there is any new business ideas or any innovative ways that you have been able to promote your business. A quick example there would be, probably not suitable to your line of work, but it would be wearable advertising. You might see guys with say a high visibility jacket on and they would have the name of the company on the back. Anything like that?

Respondent: Oh god, let me think. Just your kind of, not your run of the mill way to get the name out there.

Interviewer: Yeah, I’m just wondering if there are any kind of new ideas that people have come up with themselves that are working?

Respondent: We were approached there, it’s going back a few months now by a local community organisation to, we designate about two or three hours on a Wednesday
for people to come down with legal issues, I mean it could be anything. And it’s just to kind of give them a feel, they’ll approach the case and it’s all private and confidential and we’ll run the case through whatever it may be and if we believe that they have a genuine case, you know, we’ll recommend it or we’ll just tell them there that there is no point in pursuing this. That’s all free but it runs on the idea that if we do think that there is something there that they can, that it’s a tangible case, you know, we’ll then invite them down to the office to try and get the business side if it. Yeah, so I suppose that is quite a unique way really. It’s a good way of kind of lining up business and we have gotten work out of it but yeah, I suppose that’s being a pretty productive think that we have adopted.

Interviewer: That’s very good. That’s really informative. It actually answers another question that I have later on which was do you have any innovative means of promoting your business? So, that’s a great answer. Thanks.

Digital Marketing

Interviewer: The next question is how useful have you found digital marketing for your business? So digital marketing would be anything online, websites, social media any of those?

Respondent: Yeah, I mean. The website. Yeah. The website has generated a number of leads, I suppose you know, if a person calls the company they might mention that I saw your site or whatever. So yeah, I suppose it has generated a number of leads more for informative information.

Interviewer: Ok, just keeping with that theme, what is your experience with using such a means of marketing? So, like your digital marketing?

Respondent: Again you know. It’s not really my strong point. You know. Look, I honestly just leave that up to one of the employees. To one of the girls in the office there, you know, she deals with website or anything like that. I can’t really give you a strong answer on that one I’m afraid.
Competition

Interviewer: Ok, the next section that we are going to move onto is competition. So, compare with your competitors, what do you do differently in regards to marketing?

Respondent: What do we do differently? I suppose you know, I keep trying to push the idea of local business. I mean all of our employees that are down in the office, there all local people. They have been in the area for years so there is that kind of familiarity when people come into the office or that kind of way. We also find that if you hire local people, it does generate a kind of more comfortable and better customer service so I suppose in that way it kind of gives us the edge. We would like to think that we have a better, higher customer service over our competitors.

Interviewer: Ok, very good.

Interviewer: Ok, just moving on from that theme. Why do you think that actually gives you a competitive advantage?

Respondent: I suppose from, I suppose the feedback that we get form the customers and we get positive feedback from the customers. We also get, you know people are never afraid to mention referrals from previous customers and look we always appreciate to hear that and things. I suppose that’s it really.

Interviewer: Ok, very good.

Marketing Message

Interviewer: the next section that were going to look at is to do with a businesses marketing message, so what I would like to know is how consistent are you with your marketing message?

Respondent: How consistent are we with our marketing message? So I suppose the only way that I could answer that is, so we have more than one office around the area, ok. So, we try to keep our signage, our letterheads, all that kind of thing, the colours, the colour of our logo, we try to kind of keep the same theme so it’s, so it’s not to confuse it for customers and things.
Interviewer: So that would be the same kind of colours. Brand message on website, store fronts and any kind of promotional material.

Respondent: Yeah, exactly. We’ve got quite a distinct name so it’s quite memorable but we still like to keep it within theme.

Customer Involvement

Interviewer: Ok, so now I would just like to know, how do you engage your customers in your marketing campaigns?

Respondent: Could you just say that again? How do you engage customers in your marketing campaign?

Respondent: We like to follow up on as many cases as possible, I mean, look at, again your going to meet these guys in pubs or whatever it is or your about on the streets so we always like to follow up after a case is finished or a house is sold or whatever it may be. It’s just to make sure that everyone is satisfied in the service so that’s kind of how we engage. Yeah, once the job is finished we like to make sure that everything ran smoothly.

Interviewer: Ok, great.

What impact does IMC have on a micro business?

Importance of Marketing

Interviewer: Ok, the next section to look at is to do with the importance of marketing or kind of like your opinion on the importance of marketing. The question is how would you rate the importance of marketing for your business on a scale of one to ten.

Respondent: I suppose personally I’d have to give it a six I think, like you know. Yeah, I think a six. Again, you know it’s not my strong point so I’d have to say a six or seven.
Interviewer: Why have you actually rated it a 6?

Respondent: Well look, we have generated a number of cases through marketing and the website and that sort of stuff but look if I’m honest about it I have to say it’s generally down to networking and meeting people. That’s the main thing, it’s networking. Just networking. Yeah

Interviewer: I just might pick you up on something that you said there. You were saying that it’s generally down to networking, well networking is actually and you have already mentioned it a number of times and networking is a very big part of marketing so since you now know that networking is a marketing tool do you think that you would rank it a bit higher on the scale or would you just leave it as a six again?

Response: Ah well I mean like, I can’t underestimate the power. Okay right, yeah I would. If your including networking it would have to be up there at about 8 or 9.

Interviewer: Excellent, very good.

Trust & Business Integrity

Interviewer: The next section that I would like to look at is just a question on trust and business integrity. So I have a quick quote that I will run over. It’s “Building trust with potential customers can be important to a small business”.

So, How do you use marketing to build up a level of trust with your customers?

Respondent: Sorry, what do you mean by that.

Interviewer: For example, someone that is selling a product, they may guarantee the product and they may place on all of their advertising and their website and brochures and things like that, that they offer a 100% guarantee. So people will trust the company more. So, do you know what I mean? And they know that you’re a reliable company.

Respondent: Ok, well you can imagine that we can never guarantee anything. But, look we always like to stand over the work that we have done and the works that’s
been completed. I mean we're never afraid to contact previous clients because of the standard of work that we put in. We want to make sure that they are happy. So yeah. Does that answer your question?

Interviewer: Yeah. Good.

Marketing Challenges

Interviewer: Now I just want to look at a couple of challenges that people face in regards to marketing. So, what are your biggest challenges that you face with promoting your business? If you feel that there are any challenges.

Respondent: There are yeah. I mean, I suppose the obvious one that stands out is your budget and it’s finding the right events to advertise in. You know, we have been caught a few times when we have pumped a bit of money into one and the return was not worth the money. So yeah, I suppose budget and finding your market. Finding the right place to advertise.

Interviewer: Ok, Good.

Interviewer: And then, how much time would you be able to allocate for daily tasks such as updating FaceBook and stuff like that, that you said you do use?

Respondent: Yeah, I mean again. You know, it’s not my thing. Honestly I would say if she spent a couple of minutes, a week. Yeah, I mean we don’t really use it a whole amount. So yeah, just, not often. A few minutes a week.

Interviewer: Ok, so the next question is just to do with, obviously there lot of new forms of marketing and promotional activities and new marketing tool and methods coming out every week nearly, so I was just wondering how do you feel about staying up date with new marketing techniques. You can just use a scale to answer that. So, one being easy and ten being eager to learn more about it.

Respondent: “Eager to learn new marketing techniques”. See you know, I wouldn’t say any of these really. I mean, it’s down to the nature of the business. We don’t take so much notice of new marketing techniques. You could call us old fashioned. We stick with the basics, newspapers etc. Again, we just concentrate on our day to day
work. Trying to find the time for new marketing techniques and trying to keep a law firm going., just where would you find the time really.

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What IMC solutions work for micro business in practice?

Marketing Success

Interviewer: Ok, the next section is, what is the most successful marketing practice or concept that you have used?

Respondent: Well, I suppose going back to earlier. You mentioned networking as a..yeah 100% networking. It's just absolutely vital.

Interviewer: Why would you say that this is the most successful?

Respondent: Well, I mean if you look through the number of referrals or familiar faces that you would have met at an event you will just know, that it has worked or whatever. Ah, you just never know where it comes from. You just have to stay in touch and just kind of get yourself out there. I suppose advertising in newspapers as well, yeah, we'd get a good bit of work on that particularly for sales of property, the newspaper seems to be a good one for us.

Marketing Failures

Interviewer: And then, What marketing practices were unsuccessful?

Respondent: “Unsuccessful”... suppose we have only invested a small amount of time into faceBook so you know that kind of thing. Yeah, I suppose you know, yeah, facebook and things.

Interviewer: Why do you think that these did not work?
Respondent: I suppose one maybe, we didn’t put the time and effort into it and number two, look look, you know yourself, the nature of our business and the nature of our industry just doesn’t suit the likes of your facebook or your twitter or whatever. If you asked how many people honestly would say they searched there local solicitor or GP on facebook, It’s just not the done thing. It’s kind of more of a more professional kind of field. Yeah, I suppose that would be a reason why.

Marketing Objectives

Interviewer: Alright, and the next question is, Do you plan you marketing campaign according to objectives?

Respondent: Not really. No. Look the bottom line is, you mentioned objectives, look our bottom line, our objective is to get new business so we invest a small amount into marketing throughout the year just to get that new business, just to find new clients. So do we plan marketing campaigns on objectives? No, no we don’t, we just focus on trying to find new clients.

Marketing Success Measures

Interviewer: Ok, the next one is how do you measure the success of your marketing campaigns etc?

Respondent: Simple I suppose. The number of new clients that come in through the door or email us or phone us. That’s it.

Misc:

Irish Recession

Interviewer: Ok, I just have two final questions to ask you. Can you please tell me if the recession in Ireland has had any effect on you in regards to marketing your business?
Respondent: Generally no, I mean, we still use the same papers that we have always used. We still do the sponsorship and things. I mean it might be quite rare to hear but I suppose on a positive side, newspapers and these sponsorships, rates have come down for us to advertise. So there is a positive effect. It’s cheaper to kind of advertise because these papers and things would be struggling now. Yeah, so I suppose it has had a positive effect really.

Interviewer: That’s good.

Business Start up Advice

Interviewer: And finally, In regards to marketing, what advice would you give to someone that is starting out with a small business?

Respondent: God you would probably be better off talking to the girl in the office. I suppose, just watch your money. Allocate it correctly to an event where you think that you are going to get the best return. Again probably hire somebody, I keep going back to the girl, but she does have a bit of knowledge so I suppose if your really pushing for it, depending on the business, get someone in or hire somebody externally who has a good knowledge of local marketing and again someone that is capable of online marketing, if, if that suits that business. But again, I cannot recommend, it’s networking that is the key. Get your face out there. Get contacts made. That’s the main advice that I would give you.

Interviewer: Ok, that’s actually the end of the interview so I would like to thank you for your participation. Your time and input will be valuable to the completion of my dissertation

End of interview
SkidProof Ltd – Transcribed Interview – Respondent Number 2

Candidate Profile Section

Education & Training

Interviewer: OK, so you just please tell me about any training or courses that you have undertaken in regards to marketing?

Respondent: I did a management Diploma in Australia and part of the course was marketing. I published a book in conjunction with the management class. I was in a management class for four years and we did a joint publication of a book on researching, a feasibility study and marketing study on car parking in a combined public parking and hospital and third level education facility. I published a book and a large part of it was marketing, market research and marketing the car park facility to the staff and students and patients in both the hospital and the Third level education facility.

Interviewer: So how many years or months of study did you complete in regards to marketing?

Respondent: The marketing component would have been about 40% of the four year course. Say 40% of half of the course so probably about 20% of the course.

Interviewer: OK

Interviewer: So how do you feel about the training that you received? For instance, was it up – to – date, helpful, do you think that it was a waste of time?

Respondent: A lot of it was the obvious, because we were management focused the marketing was an adjunct to what we were doing so it wasn’t our primary focus so it was a matter of going through the paces rather than focusing on marketing cause there was a marketing class, although I became the president of the joint marketing management class. So, my role was administration and management rather than marketing.
**Marketing Attitude**

**Interviewer:** Ok, would you consider yourself to be a marketing driven person?

**Respondent:** No

**Interviewer:** And why not?

**Respondent:** It’s not my forte. We tend to concentrate on your abilities rather than your challenges, so marketing has always been a weak point of my management skills.

**Business Start Up**

**Interviewer:** So why did you start your micro business?

**Respondent:** Necessity, Opportunity, Ambition and yeah necessity. Due to unemployment in 2010 it was an opportunity that presented itself and I took advantage of it.

**Time on Business**

**Interviewer:** Ok, so how do you feel about the time that you spend on promoting your business. For example does it have an effect on family or any kind of events, or taking up time. Does it put any pressure on your personal life or anything like that?

**Respondent:** No. No. Most of my marketing is through networking so it's a new innovative product so there is a high level of interest in what we do. Right, so it doesn't impinge on any time, social times.

**Family Involvement**

**Interviewer:** Does your family help out with the business?

**Respondent:** No
Business Logo

Interviewer: Do you have a logo?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: Why do you think it is important for the business to have a logo?

Respondent: Brand awareness. It’s a, It’s the companies stamp. Yep that would be about it.

Interviewer: What does your company logo represent?

Respondent: It, It represents the company. It’s a recognisable and well thought out logo with corporate colours and it represents I suppose what we do, right, what we aim to do and the service that we offer.

How is IMC applied within a micro business?

Marketing Plan / Strategy

Interviewer: Ok, now we are going to talk a bit about marketing plans and strategy. So do you actually plan your marketing activities?

Respondent: My marketing activities are restricted by budget at the moment. I don’t have a marketing plan per se, I have a marketing ambition. I probably have an ad hoc type marketing plan but I don’t have a budget at the moment to implement the plan.

Interviewer: So you don’t specifically plan your marketing activities. And you would say you don’t plan them because you don’t have an ongoing budget that you can use.

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: How often do you actually go about marketing, weekly, monthly, every three months, six months? Roughly.

Respondent: Formal marketing has only been through a couple of attempts at advertising through trade magazines and local newspapers. But primarily marketing has been done through networking, probably 90% of the projects we’ve got have
come through networking. We also have a website which is marketing tool but we have only ever had one or two enquiries through our website but the marketing from the website would be more people checking out the website after they have met us, so it has, we have attracted people with our website, it’s more of a checking facility for people.

**Interviewer:** So although you don’t specifically plan your marketing activities you work on networking, which in itself is actually marketing so daya to day you would be working on networking.

**Respondent:** *All day everyday.*

**Promotional Work**

**Interviewer:** Do complete all of your marketing work yourself?

**Respondent:** *Yes*

**Strategy of Investment**

**Interviewer:** Ok the next question is about strategy of investment in marketing. Do you have a strategy of investment for your marketing? For example: 20% or all turnover goes straight back into marketing.

1. Affordable option – Do you invest just as much as you can afford into your marketing?
2. Is there a percentage of your turnover that you reinvest into your marketing?
3. Do you benchmark your investment in marketing against that of your competitors?
4. Does your strategy of investment in marketing reflect an objectives, goal or task approach?
Respondent: My marketing strategy, or my marketing strategy would be part of my business plan which I wrote two years ago and updated about 6 months into a one page business plan, a part of that is marketing. My initial budget for marketing was 5% of turnover which I haven’t had the turnover to justify the marketing. But my immediate target based on recent developments in the company, would be to target swimming pools in the leisure industry.

Interviewer: Ok, so just to clarify that, You started off having a percentage in mind to reinvest each year. Your now working off an affordable option, whatever you can reinvest and your goal would be to be able to invest to reach objectives and goals which would be swimming pool etc etc.

Respondent: Yes that’s right.

Marketing Tools

Interviewer: OK, I have a list, there is quite a few on it now of different marketing tools. I just want to run through them all to see if you use them or not.

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<tr>
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<th>Digital</th>
<th>Internet Marketing</th>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>FaceBook</td>
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<td>Brochure</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Sidewalk Sign</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send regular email to contact list</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ask for referrals</td>
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<td>Free monthly newsletter</td>
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<td>Make referrals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email Signature</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sponsor local team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audio, Visual, social sharing functionality to emails</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Cross promotion with another business</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Member of professional organisation (Go to question)</td>
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<td>Holiday gifts for best customers</td>
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<th>Unique Marketing</th>
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<tr>
<td>PR Professional</td>
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<td>Online marketing firm</td>
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**Interviewer:** Business cards?

**Respondent:** Yes

**Interviewer:** Vehicle Signage?

**Respondent:** No

**Interviewer:** Brochures?

**Respondent:** Yes

**Interviewer:** Do you have a digital version of your brochure?

**Respondent:** Pause. Respondent unsure of the question..
**Interviewer:** It would basically be along the lines of, if you had a paper brochure it would be a screen shot of this that you could send to potential customer.

**Respondent:** *We have, yeah*

**Interviewer:** A website?

**Respondent:** *Yes*

**Interviewer:** Do you attend Chambers of Commerce meetings?

**Respondent:** *Yes*

**Interviewer:** Do you use trade show booths?

**Respondent:** *As in taking them out?*

**Interviewer:** Have you ever set up a booth at a trade show?

**Respondent:** *No*

**Respondent:** *Well we did one. We did one on the North Side, in the Regency Hotel. It was a waste of time.*

**Interviewer:** Direct Mail?

**Respondent:** *No*

**Interviewer:** Free samples?

**Respondent:** *Yes*

**Interviewer:** Yellow Pages Ads?

**Respondent:** *No*

**Interviewer:** Radio?

**Respondent:** *No*

**Interviewer:** Billboards or outdoor signage

**Respondent:** *No*
Interviewer: Sidewalk Signs?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Ok, we’ll move onto Digital

Interviewer: FaceBook?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: LinkedIn

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: Twitter?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Instagram?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: YouTube?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Do you have a business blog?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: For internet - marketing. Do you use Google Adwords?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: Ok, for email marketing/ Do you ever send regular email to your contact list

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Do you have a free monthly news letter?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Do you have an email signature?
Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Do you have any kind of audio, visual, social sharing functionality to emails?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Ok, we’ll just move on to relationship building?

Interviewer: Do you ever ask for referrals?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Do you ever make referrals?

Respondent: Do I what?

Interviewer: Do you ever make referrals?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Do you sponsor any local teams or anything like that?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Do you cross promote with any other business?


Respondent: No No, hold on. We do. We cross promote with a couple of cleaning companies. And with, Northern Ireland chemicals in the swimming pool game in the North

Interviewer: Are you a member of any professional organisation such as any kind of local business group?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: What’s the professional organisation that you are a member of?

Respondent: I’m on the executive of the Knocklyon Network.
Interviewer: Can you please tell me about the experience that you have had with this group and if it a worthwhile measure?

Respondent: I am a very early member of the group. I promoted my business through the group and grew the business through the group and I have gotten a couple of referrals through the group, so yes it has been worthwhile

Interviewer: Do you ever write press releases?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Just a few to go through now on marketing help. Have you ever hired a marketing consultant?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Have you ever hired a PR professional?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Have you ever hired any kind of online marketing firm?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: The last is just to go through, do you have any kind of unique marketing ideas that you use, such as wearable advertising or anywhere unique that you put your business name for people to see?

Respondent: No

Digital Marketing

Interviewer: The next question is how useful have you found digital marketing for your business? So that would be anything to do with online marketing, your website, social media etc.

Respondent: I suppose we had 2500 emails went out some time ago. Did we get anything from that? No.
Interviewer: What is your experience with using such a means of marketing? For example, did you find expensive, did you find it easy, did you not understand it? Etc

Respondent: This email marketing?

Interviewer: Just any kind of digital marketing, anything online.

Respondent: It would not be my forte. Right. So lack of understanding of how it works would probably be my answer.

Competition

Interviewer: Just moving on to competition now. Keeping it in mind that it is to do with marketing. Compared to your competitors, what do you do differently?

Respondent: I believe that our customer service is probably better than anyone else in the market and our company philosophy would be different to a lot of other people in the market and we don’t try to sell other products. We are a one product company.

Interviewer: Why do you think this gives you a competitive advantage?

Respondent: Feedback from customers who have come to us in frustration and I think that customer satisfaction is high on our list of priorities.

Innovative Marketing

Interviewer: You said that you don’t have any innovative ways of promoting your business?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: So you just go with the traditional forms of marketing such as papers, flyers etc etc.

Respondent: Yeah
Marketing Message

**Interviewer:** The next section is about marketing message. So, the question is, how consistent are you with your marketing message? So, I’ll just give you an example. If your website is in one colour and has one logo and brand message do you transfer this across flyers, papers or are they different all the time?

**Respondent:** No. It’s consistent in the business cards, the website, the brochure, the letterhead. They are all consistent. Consistent logo, consistent presentation.

Customer Involvement

**Interviewer:** How do you engage customer in your marketing?

**Respondent:** We don’t

**Interviewer:** I just might rephrase that. Do you ever look for any feedback from customers after jobs have been completed?

**Respondent:** Yeah, I have asked a couple of companies for testimonials, without success. The problem is there, that you have to write them for them and get them to sign them.

What impact does IMC have on a micro business?

Importance of Marketing

**Interviewer:** Ok, the next question is to do with the importance of marketing. How would rate the importance of marketing in your business on a scale of 1 – 10?

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**Respondent:** 8

**Interviewer:** Can you explain why you rates it this number?
Respondent: I understand the philosophy of marketing and the power of marketing. I have just been restrained by budget. Because we are a start up company with a very low profile, marketing is the key to survival and growth. Right.

Interviewer: Ok, just from what you said there, you obviously find marketing to be very important. Would you still keep it as an 8 on the scale of you had to answer the question again.

Respondent: Yes

Trust & Business Integrity

Interviewer: I just have a quote here. “Building trust with potential customer can be important to small business? How do you use marketing to build up a level of trust with your customers?

Respondent: We don’t. The level of trust with our customers is based on our guarantee. Right.

Interviewer: So you would place that on any kind of advertising that you, you state that you offer a full guarantee.

Respondent: Yes a full guarantee for performance and for time. Yeah

Marketing Challenges

Interviewer: What are the biggest challenges that you face with promoting your business?


Interviewer: Anything else like lack of experience or other responsibilities that take away from that you would otherwise be able to invest in promoting your business.

Respondent: Time. Because I am a one - man show, time is a challenge and because it is a start up business, budget is a challenge. And also lack of experience in marketing.
Interviewer: How do you feel about staying up to date with new marketing techniques? Such as Twitter, FaceBook etc.. Do you find it easy or on a scale of one to ten with one being easy, 5 being a struggle and 10 being eager to learn?

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<td>Eager to learn</td>
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Respondent: Eager to learn would be the answer there.

What IMC solutions work for micro business in practice?

Marketing Success

Interviewer: What are the most successful marketing concepts or practices that you have used?

Respondent: Networking

Interviewer: How was this successful?

Respondent: Well it’s reflected in the number of jobs that we got through networking which is probably about 90%

Marketing Failures

Interviewer: What marketing practices were unsuccessful?


Interviewer: Why do you think that they did not work?

Respondent: Unsure how to answer question!

Interviewer: Do you think that for instance on the leaflets that were delivered that there was not enough information on them, that people just didn’t view them, that
there wasn’t enough content on them, it wasn’t informative content, it was not what they wanted to hear. Do you think that it was anything like that?

**Respondent:** The content I think was ok. The target market was probably wrong, which was the domestic market. We could have employed the Domino Pizza thing which is flood marketing, repetitive flood marketing but we didn’t have the time or resources to do that. So, our brochure deliveries were a one off failure. If it had been one delivered every two or three weeks we may have gotten some more from it.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that you would look at doing something like that again if the funds were there or is it a form of marketing that you would leave alone?

**Respondent:** If the funds were there it would certainly be worth trialling, right, but to the business community rather than to the domestic market. We have pulled out of the domestic market because of recessionary reasons. People don’t seem to have the budget.

**Marketing Objectives**

**Interviewer:** The question is, do you plan your marketing campaigns according to objectives?

**Interviewer:** As in, we talked about strategy of investment and you said that going forward you would to invest to achieve certain objectives, like get the swimming pools, so is that the way that you would like to move forward?

**Respondent:** Yeah, I have a plan in mind, a target. The swimming pool industry and the leisure industry.

**Marketing Success measures**

**Interviewer:** How do you measure the success of your marketing campaigns or any kind of marketing that you do?

**Respondent:** By results and as I said networking has been one that has worked. The success of that will lead to say, would convince me that the market is there. Right, so
market research based on networking is that, just because I know somebody has generated some work, So all the people I don’t know, I could generate some work from them as well. Right, the market is there. The requirement is there. We have the solution. We know the market is there, right, so it’s just, marketing budget. That’s why I rate marketing so high at 8 out of 10. It’s just that it’s there. We know that it’s there. It’s just about a matter of drilling down into the market and presenting solutions to places where we know they have a requirement for our product or service.

**Interviewer:** Just on that question again. Would it always be a measure of success if only you get a job out of it or would it be say an increase in people just looking for more information or an increase in hits on your website. Would you consider that to be a success in marketing?

**Respondent:** Well the whole idea of marketing is to generate business. It’s all very well to have if you have a logo that everybody knows but nobody uses. So, the level of success, we know the market is there, if the enquiry level increased naturally the product or the projects generated by the level of enquiry would be an obvious measurement or success or failure of the marketing campaign.

**Misc:**

**Irish Recession**

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me if the recession in Ireland has had any effect on you in regards to marketing your business?

**Respondent:** It’s had a dramatic effect within our target market. The obvious markets are the ones where people walk on floor and they get slippy. We generated quite a lot of interest in small companies, small commercial premises or small retail premises but the budget wasn’t there. People just don’t have the money to spend anymore on something as intangible as slip prevention.
**Business Start Up Advice**

**Interviewer:** One final one then. In regards to marketing, what advice would you give to someone that is starting out with a small business?

**Respondent:** Employ a professional. A company to do the marketing and allocate a budget. Generate an allocated budget for marketing and do market research because our market research was more opinion, personal opinion rather than a marketing company doing research and identifying the market, because we spent 6 months wasting our time and then changed our philosophy to target companies with the budget and the culture to prevent slips happening rather than reactive companies who would contact us when they had a problem, rather than companies that had the budget and culture to prevent. The health and safety budget and culture.

**Interviewer:** That’s the end of the interview. Thank you for your time.

**End of interview**
NetTech Ltd – Transcribed Interview

Respondent Number 3

Candidate Profile Section

Education & Training

Interviewer: Ok, were just going to start off with the section on knowledge of marketing and education. So, Can you please tell me about any training or courses that you have undertaken in regards to marketing?

Respondent: Yeah, well I have not done any college courses on marketing or anything like that but I have done conference on it and part of the AV work I’ve been running the conferences where there have been a couple of different people doing marketing, so I have picked up a bit on it that way rather than doing a course per se. So that’s it

Interviewer: So, just on what you have picked up, can you tell me about what you think about it, like was it for instance, did it involve like old stuff that was kind of out of date or was there something missing that you would have liked to have heard about?

Respondent: Some of it was basic enough stuff that I would not have known before. I have read some marketing books to try and bring my level of knowledge of marketing up and then some of it was on electronic marketing and click throughs and things like that to try and generate traffic to try and get more hits to try and get more advertising. That kind of E marketing stuff which I did not know a lot about.

Marketing Attitude

Interviewer: Ok, so would you consider yourself to be a marketing driven person? Why?

Respondent: No not really. I probably should be. I do a lot of networking so I would be driven for, you know, in the networking if I come across a lead I would follow that
lead. So front that point of view yes, but in terms of ... I wouldn’t get a lot of market response.

Business Start Up

Interviewer: Ok, can you please tell me why did you start your business?

Respondent: Two reasons: One was to legitimise some of the work that I was doing at the time. And the second one was to pay for myself to go through college.

Time on Business

Interviewer: Ok, can you now tell me about how do you feel about the time that you have to spend on promoting your business?

Respondent: I feel good about. If it works it’s good use of the time. A lot of it is during business hours that I would be working but there are some unsociable hours but it’s still during the period of time that you would be working so it’s not too difficult to do it.

Interviewer: It doesn’t have any effect on any kind of personal life or family life?

Respondent: The unsocial hours of the particular jobs have that effect but not the marketing. So, the marketing doesn’t really.

Family Involvement

Interviewer: Does your family help out with the business and if so how?

Respondent: Yeah. A lot. Both my father and grand father were in part of the business that I am in now so the legacy that they left on the family name of reliability and never letting a job be a failure or dealing with problems has left it very easy to trade on the reputation of previous family and my brother helps out with some of the technical stuff and software development and things like that.

Interviewer: Ok, good stuff.
Business Logo

Interviewer: Do you have a logo for your business?

Respondent: I don’t have a logo unfortunately.

Interviewer: Can you tell me why you don’t actually have a logo?

Respondent: I never spent the money on getting one made because I didn’t really think that I needed one because I wasn’t doing .... I’m not trying to pick up 10,000 purchases, I’m trying to pick up one client that their purchases might have 20 invoices sent to them one a year and yeah, I never spent the money cause I could not see any value in it.

How is IMC applied within a micro business?

Marketing Plan / Strategy

Interviewer: ok the next section that we are going to look at is marketing plan and marketing strategy so I would just like to know, do you plan your marketing activities at all?

Respondent: Yeah, I suppose we do. We do yeah.

Interviewer: And can you tell me about how you go about planning these?

Respondent: Well some of our marketing isn’t like advertising in a paper, we do some charity events, one of the directors of a company that we were trying to get in with had set up a charity trust with his wife and was running a Bi-athlon, so we provided the clock, the time keeping system and the PA system and all that to make it work and that had a lot of people at it that we were trying to get in touch with customers, so that gave us the opportunity to talk to all of these people and give them business cards.
Interviewer: Did you have your name or anything on any of the visuals?

Respondent: Yeah, the time clock put up our name at the beginning and sometimes during the event.

Interviewer: So, just getting back to one of the questions that I asked before. You said that you didn’t have a logo but would you consider just your name to be your logo since you were just putting your company name up?

Respondent: Yeah I suppose. It would be. That would be the only kind of brand thing that we would push but I suppose I always considered a logo a symbol rather than, or a shortened version of a name or initials or something like that.

Interviewer: But you do, I suppose you still use your name as a brand that you can put out there that people can see and can recognise it.

Respondent: Yeah, I’ve tried that but unfortunately the fact that most of the connections are built on the family reputation, the family name tends to be the brand where the company tends to be the mechanism for invoicing. I have tried to push the name of the company more to increase it’s value.

Interviewer: ok, that’s good stuff.

Interviewer: How often do you act on your marketing plan?

Respondent: As often as an opportunity presents itself. You know, that charity event that I mentioned is only once a year but you know where I would spend money pursuing a particular client if something came up in networking, that kind of stuff would, but it’s not a monthly or weekly expense. It’s when things happen.

Promotional Work

Interviewer: Yeah ok, Do you complete the marketing work yourself? (Yes / No)

Respondent: Yeah. Yeah I would just like I went to that, I would go to the events myself that we are doing promotions at and I would generally over staff them so that somebody else can be minding the equipment so I can be going talking to the people and networking.
Strategy of Investment

Interviewer: Ok, the next question is about strategy of investment in marketing. So the question is, do you have a strategy of investment for your marketing? I’ll just give you a quick example. It would be like investing 20% of your turnover year on year. There are actually four options that I would like to talk through here. So, I will just go through them and then we can discuss them. So the first one is

Affordable option - Do you invest just as much as you can afford into your marketing?

Number 2: Is there a percentage of your turnover that you reinvest into your marketing?

Number 3: Do you benchmark your investment in marketing against that of your competitors?

Or number 4: Does your strategy of investment in marketing reflect an objectives, goal or task that you want to achieve?

Respondent: It would be more of a combination of two of them. One and four. I do invest money in marketing to go after a specific client, goal or task. But, that’s driven by what can be afforded. And that’s why doing the sponsoring and free gigs, is, your not getting any return on the equipment which is fine and your own free time, so it’s not costing a lot and makes it very affordable but the ultimate goal is to go after a client or a customer for a particular sale so it would be a combination of one and four there.

Interviewer: Ok, great.

Marketing Tools

Interviewer: The next section that we are going to look at is to do with marketing tools and look at a few kind of marketing concepts that are popular today and that
people would use. So I am just going to go through the list and if you could just kind of say yes or no if you use them or not and we might elaborate on a couple of them.

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<td>FaceBook</td>
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<td>Vehicle Signage</td>
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<td>Sidewalk Sign</td>
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<td>Email Opt In on website – Free download or gift</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Customer satisfaction survey</td>
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<td>Send regular email to contact list</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ask for referrals</td>
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<td>Free monthly newsletter</td>
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<td>Email Signature</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sponsor local team</td>
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<td>Audio, Visual, social sharing functionality to emails</td>
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<td>Cross promotion with another business</td>
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<td>Member of professional organisation</td>
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<td>(Go to question)</td>
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<td>Holiday gifts for best customers</td>
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Marketing Help | Unique Marketing |
**Interviewer:** So, Business cards?

**Respondent:** *Yeah.*

**Interviewer:** Vehicle Signage?

**Respondent:** *No*

**Interviewer:** Do you have a brochure?

**Respondent:** *Not in years.*

**Interviewer:** Ok, so you wouldn’t have a digital version of it then.

**Respondent:** *No*

**Interviewer:** Do you have a website?

**Respondent:** *Under - construction. For years.*

**Interviewer:** Do you attend Chambers of Commerce meetings?

**Respondent:** *No*

**Interviewer:** Have you ever set up a trade show booth?

**Respondent:** *No*

**Interviewer:** Direct Mail?

**Respondent:** *Yeah. I have direct mailed specific clients but I have not done mass mailing. I was just going specifically after a customer.*

**Interviewer:** Free samples? I suppose the charity events would be like doing free samples? Or a free gig for someone?
Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Yellow Pages Ads?

Respondent: Not any more.

Interviewer: Radio?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Billboards or outdoor signage

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Any kind of local newspapers?

Respondent: I did once but I got nothing out of it.

Interviewer: Sidewalk Signs or any outdoor signs?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Ok, so we’ll look at Digital then. Do you use FaceBook?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: LinkedIn

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Twitter?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Instagram?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: YouTube?

Respondent: There is stuff on YouTube that links through to other webpages that we use for other customers but we don’t use YouTube directly.

Interviewer: Do you have a business blog?
Respondent: No

Interviewer: From there we will just move down to email marketing? Do you ever send out regular emails to your contact list?


Interviewer: Do you have a free monthly news letter?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Do you have an email signature with all your contact details etc on it.

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Do you have any kind of audio, visual, social sharing functionality to emails? That would basically be like your LinkeD in or FaceBook buttons at the end of your emails that people can click on?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Then, looking at relationship building?

Interviewer: Do you ever ask for referrals?

Respondent: I do ask for referral.

Interviewer: Do you ever make referrals for other businesses?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you sponsor any local teams or anything like that?

Respondent: Well the sponsoring events is by providing free equipment as we said. But I don’t sponsor a local team.

Interviewer: Do you cross promote with any other business?

Respondent: I did do a few years ago but I haven’t in the last 5 or 6 years.

Interviewer: Can you tell me if you are you a member of any professional organisation such as any kind of local business group? So that would be like a local business group where you can meet up, or anything like that?
Respondent: Not in the industry that I am working in now but I am a member of the institute of engineers.

Interviewer: Can you please tell me about the experience that you have had with this group and if it a worthwhile measure?

Respondent: It was when I was working in that industry but not for the industry that I am working in now.

Interviewer: So the next section is content marketing? Have you ever recorded a Podcast to do with marketing or information about your business?

Respondent: I have promotional videos that I send links to. I use the finished product that I have provided for a customer which is on their website and linked through and some videos are linked into that.

Interviewer: Then, there are just two more sections to go. Were looking at marketing help. Have you ever hired a marketing consultant?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Have you ever hired a PR professional?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Have you ever hired any kind of online marketing firm?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Then the final one is just, do you use any kind of unique marketing ideas to get your name out there that you think other people would not be working or some new novel ideas.

Respondent: Well yeah, we built a video replay terminal for horse auctions and customers loved it but the horse auctions weren’t paying for it so we gave it free to one auction company to let the customers see how great it was and then let them drive the sales through the other auction houses which worked quite well cause they got the service that they wanted they demanded it and we got the sales.

Interviewer: Ok, excellent.
Digital Media

**Interviewer:** The next question is, How useful have you found digital marketing for your business? So that would be anything to do with online media, websites, emails, anything like that.

**Respondent:** Well the ability to send people links to finished products and specifically with that conferencing stuff work that we did with videos and integrated power point to show them what it looks like finished makes it very easy to then negotiate pricing cause they know exactly what they are getting.

**Interviewer:** What has been your experience with using such means of marketing? Like, do you find it expensive or easy?

**Respondent:** Well it’s not very expensive because what your doing in terms of emailing and links and stuff like that, your doing a lot of that yourself. It costs you time rather than cash flow. But, it’s being very efficient since I have had to start pursuing customers outside of the jurisdiction. It’s made it very easy to get to them.

**Interviewer:** So that would be domestic customers or international customers?

**Respondent:** International, like people in the UK. So from Ireland your not sending them a piece of paper brochure trying to explain what your doing by post. Your emailing them a link, the phoning them up asking them if they are watching the video and if they don’t understand a part of it, it makes it very easy to sort that.

Competition

**Interviewer:** Ok the next section is to do with competition and competitors, so,

**Respondent:** In regards to marketing, we provide better customer service and we tell the customer that we provide a more tailored solution to their problems and that’s part of our marketing.

**Interviewer:** And, Why do you think this gives you a competitive advantage?
Respondent: Well customers want to feel special, so giving them a more tailored solution make them feel happier and when they are happier it is easier to sell them stuff.

Plus a lot of the customers that I am dealing with, cause it is multi disciplinary, the reason they want to go with us is cause they are reducing their costs of having several contractors and they want a more tailored solution. And having the customer service to be able to deliver that makes what we do different.

Innovative Marketing

Interviewer: The next question is actually o you have any innovative means of promoting your business? We have already touched on this with your video links, you might just explain that a bit more?

Respondent: Well yeah, the links to videos, not a lot of people at the moment when they are videoing a conference have integrated. They either put up the power point afterwards or they will put up a video of the person afterwards so they don’t get the integrated feel of being in the conference where for our customers we have built pages onto the customers website where it has the power point video linked and a ticker tape of all the powerpoints so they can jump along and it allows people to have the full experience of being there. And then with, the other part of the business where we do the replay system for the horse industry. Where people aren’t watching the videos, it goes into a random mode and in between each video it puts up the customers logo and information so the videos are about a minute long and then if nobody picks the next number to play it will put up a fifteen second ad of the customer that we are dealing with, so it’s embedding their branding into the customers experience.

Interviewer: Do you think that anyone else in the industry is doing anything like that?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: So your one of the only and the first to do it?
Respondent: Well we are the only people who have invested in the equipment. The other people are still trying to get them to use DVD players.

Interviewer: Ok, great stuff.

Marketing Message

Interviewer: The next section is looking at marketing message. So can you please tell me how consistent are you with your marketing message?

Respondent: I suppose I’m not really sure on that one. It would probably be very inconsistent because being multi disciplinary, depending on the customer I’m pursuing, I’m emphasising different parts of the company or different parts of the companies abilities.

Interviewer: So your message may have to change from customer to customer?

Respondent: Well yeah, if it’s a straight conference where it’s Av work, your just talking about guaranteeing that people can hear you and see you and it being a good price. If your talking about doing bespoke pieces of software to integrate into their accounts you want to talk about serviceability and reliability and what others things that you have done like that. So, I suppose it would be. The only thing that would be consistent would be the customer service and reliability but generally no I think at a guess, I’m not sure on that one, I think it’s one that is inconsistent.

Customer Involvement

Interviewer: Ok, the next section is looking at customer involvement. How do you engage customers in your marketing

Respondent: ‘Unsure of question’

Interviewer: I’ll just elaborate on that one a bit. Would you get them involved by looking for feedback or would you ever ask them for testimonials that you can use on further marketing.
Respondent: Well we would ask people if they would be happy to make referrals and with some of the projects there are gifts involved. Sometimes, well generally they would be after the things over so when they would be happening I would generally make sure that I am there. I would not just post it to them so you could have a discussion so that you can make sure that everyone is happy and there is not somebody in the company that was unhappy with something. If there is something we try to fix that and smooth it over. It’s like an exit interview.

Interviewer: You could say it is like a follow up promotion of your business. Making sure they are happy.

Respondent: And happy that they would refer us if we send some people there way and that they would be saying good things about us.

What impact does IMC have on a micro business?

Importance of Marketing

Interviewer: Ok, the next section that we are going to look at is the importance of marketing. We have a scale of one to ten here. How would you rate the importance of making within your business on this scale.

Respondent: Somewhere between seven and eight.

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Interviewer: Ok, and why would you rate it this number.

Respondent: Because of networking. Because a lot of my business would be driven that way and marketing generates sales and without sales the company fails. So, that is why I would rate it that high. There is no other part, it doesn’t matter how good you are at doing any of the technical stuff or doing the accounts, if you don’t get any sales for the business the business fails and the only way to increase sales is to drive marketing.
Interviewer: Ok, you ranked it as say a seven or an 8 but after your previous answer and you stating that all of your work basically comes from networking, would you still rate it at a seven or rate or would you rate it any higher.

Respondent: No I rated it at seven or an eight because of that. I don’t know, if I had more or if I was better at marketing or if I had done a course and I understood the finer details of it I might rate it higher.

Trust & Business Integrity

Interviewer: The next section is to do with Trust and business integrity. I just have a quote here that I am going to read out. “Building trust with potential customers can be important to a small business” How do use marketing to build up a level of trust with your customers?

Respondent: I suppose it is the ability to market that we can stand over all of our work and that we will never let a customer down. Nearly all of our work is time sensitive. You can’t turn up, turn up an hour late – you can’t turn up a day late - you can’t deliver it when it’s not on time. It has to be on time because they have marketed their event, you know, six months in advance for specific times and dates so we have always hit our targets and.....

Interviewer: And do you ever let potential clients know how much you stand over things or guarantee things?

Respondent: Yeah, when I would be networking I would let people know that we are going back three generations and we have never let a customer down. You know, we have never failed to hit the right time and deliver the good. We provide the service as described so I suppose it’s an essential part of the marketing is the fact that we can stand over our work

Interviewer: Ok, good stuff.
Marketing Challenges

Interviewer: Were just going to take a look at marketing challenges now. What are your biggest challenges that you face with promoting your business?

Respondent: Financial I suppose, the cost of sales and the cost of marketing, to get those sales is quite high and then the next biggest would probably be level of knowledge in marketing.

Interviewer: You mentioned previously that you used a few pages like LinkD in etc, how much time are you able to allocate for daily tasks such as this?

Respondent: I don’t allocate a lot of time to those kind of things.

Interviewer: Ok, no problem

Interviewer: Ok, I have another scale here to do with, how do you feel about staying up to date with new marketing techniques? Do you think that it is easy to keep up to date with them, do you struggle and at number ten is ‘are you eager to learn’ or are you not bothered in any way about them?

Respondent: I am eager. Yeah, I would be eager to learn. I suppose the concept of keeping up to date with new marketing techniques I’d say that great, but I would probably to learn the fundamentals a bit more. I am eager to learn. I have read a couple of marketing books but I probably should take a course or something.

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What IMC solutions work for micro business in practice?

Marketing Success

**Interviewer:** Ok, the next question is, what is the most successful marketing practices / concept that you have used?

**Respondent:** It’s definitely networking. Networking is the fundamentals of what I have been doing. Being able to tell people, look we have done brilliant work for these people and we can do it for you and trying to pick up new customers.

**Interviewer:** Ok, and how were they actually successful

**Respondent:** By picking up new customers. Or by picking up a new project. Or getting the opportunity to give it to them for free, so they could try it, like a trail basis and then picking them up after that.

Marketing Failures

**Interviewer:** Ok, What marketing practices were unsuccessful for you?

**Respondent:** The Yellow Pages, a couple of newspaper ads that we did. There as an ad in a local newspaper as well and they were pretty unsuccessful.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think that these did not work?

**Respondent:** I’m pretty sure that I advertised in the wrong section. I was advertising only one part of the multi disciplinary company which was the sole AV stuff and that market is pretty saturated and I didn’t offer anything special. It was badly managed, would be the word that I would use.

**Interviewer:** Do you think if you have more resources again such as funds, would you do it again, would try something like that again or would it be a means that you would stay away from?

**Respondent:** No, I think I would have another go at it. I’d have a more planned, a more concise message. Or sorry, a narrower focus on the market instead of just trying to pick up loads of customers so that didn’t work for me.
Marketing Objectives

Interviewer: Do you plan your marketing campaign according to objectives?

Respondent: Yeah, picking up new business (humour), well the business model is not designed for having 100’s or 1000’s of customers. It’s designed for having a few customers and generating a lot of sales from them. SO, I would target specific customers to take them on, so it is very focused on a specific group.

Interviewer: Ok, the next question I think that we have touched on it already, How do you measure the success of your marketing campaigns?

Respondent: I would measure it on turnover and sales or whether I picked up a new project, or the opportunity to give a demonstration to a customer, like a live demonstration where I know once they have it they are not going to go back from it because it is a better standard. So, I measure the success in either getting the foot in the door or sales.

Misc:

Irish Recession

Interviewer: Ok, there are just two finals questions then. Can you please tell me if the recession in Ireland has had any effect on you in regards to marketing your business?

Respondent: It has had a significant effect, yeah it has had a massive effect as in I’m not trying, I’ve nearly stopped marketing in Ireland because most people, most of the people that I try to pursue in Ireland have already got some service that is being provided and the people that are providing it to them are going to hold on for dear life so I have been networking a lot more in the UK to pick up business there and that has been working quite well for me.

Business Start up Advice
**Interviewer:** And then finally, In regards to marketing, what advice would you give to someone that is starting out with a small business?

**Respondent:** get a lot of information marketing or do an evening course or do a course or make funds available to hire somebody that can do it for you. And, come up with a plan but with any start up, be prepared to change that plan a lot, to meet whatever your customer wants to get that money.

**Interviewer:** Ok, that is the end of your interview. I would just like to thank you for your participation.

**End of interview**
Interview Guide

Introduction of interviewee (Profile)

Education & Training

1 - Can you please tell me about any training or courses that you have undertaken in regards to marketing?

2 - How many years of study did you carry out?

3 - How do you feel about the training that you received?

[Prompt: Up to date, Helpful, Waste of time, did they include new and traditional marketing practices?]
Marketing Attitude
4 - Would you consider yourself to be a marketing driven person? Why?

Business Start Up
5 - Why did you start your business?

Time on Business
6 - How do you feel about the time that you have to spend on promoting your business?

[Prompt: Effect on - Family, Sports etc]
Family Involvement

7 - Does your family help out with the business and if so how?

Business Logo

8 - Do you have a logo?

8 A - If yes, why do you think it is important for your business to have a logo?

8 B - If no, why do you not have a logo?
9 - What do your company logo represent?

How is IMC applied within a micro business?

Marketing Plan / Strategy

10 - Do you plan your marketing activities?

10 A - If yes, how do you plan your marketing activities?

10 B - If no, why do you not plan your marketing activities?
11 - How often do you act on your marketing plan?
E.g. – Weekly, Monthly, Every 3 months, every 6 months.

Promotional Work

12 - Do you complete the marketing work yourself? (Yes / No)

12 A - If no, why do you not complete the promotion work yourself?

Strategy of Investment

13 - Do you have a strategy of investment for your marketing? For example: 20% or all turnover goes straight back into marketing.

1. Affordable option – Do you invest just as much as you can afford into your marketing?

2. Is there a percentage of your turnover that you reinvest into your marketing?

3. Do you benchmark your investment in marketing against that of your competitors?
4. Does your strategy of investment in marketing reflect an objectives, goal or task approach?

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<td>Holiday gifts for best customers</td>
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| Marketing Help | Unique Marketing |
| Marketing Consultant | E.g. Wearable Advertising |
| PR Professional | Others - |
| Online marketing firm |

14 A - If yes from table:

What professional organisation are you member of?

*Please tell me about your experience with this group and if it was a worthwhile measure?*

**Digital Marketing**

15 - How useful have you found digital marketing for your business?
16 - What has been your experience with using such means of marketing?

**Competition**

17 - Compared with your competitors, what do you do differently?

[Prompt: Social media, unique ideas etc]

17 A - Why do you think this gives you a competitive advantage?

**Innovative Marketing**

18 - Do you have any innovative means of promoting your? Explain in detail.
**Marketing Message**

19 - How consistent are you with your marketing message?

[Blank space]

**Customer Involvement**

20 - How do you engage customers in your marketing campaign?

[Blank space]

**What impact does IMC have on a micro business?**

**Importance of Marketing**

21 - How would you rate the importance of marketing in your business from 1 – 10?

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21 A - Explain why you have rated it this number?

[Blank space]

21 B - Do you think that you need to rank marketing higher on the scale?
**Trust & Business Integrity**

22 - “Building trust with potential customers can be important to a small business”

How do use marketing to build up a level of trust with your customers?

**Marketing Challenges**

23 - What are your biggest challenges that you face with promoting your business?

[Prompt: Time, funds, lack of experience, responsibilities, too many marketing options to chose from]

24 - How much time are you able to allocate for daily tasks such as updating FaceBook, Twitter and blog pages Lin etc etc?
25 - How do you feel about staying up to date with new marketing techniques?

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<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
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<td>Struggle</td>
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<td>Eager to learn</td>
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</table>

**What IMC solutions work for micro business in practice?**

**Marketing Success**

26 - What is the most successful marketing practices / concept that you have used?

*(Circle on main Tools Table)*

26 A - How were they successful?

**Marketing Failures**

27 - What marketing practices were unsuccessful?
27 B - Why do you think that these did not work?

Marketing Objectives

28 - Do you plan your marketing campaign according to objectives?

28 A - What objectives did you have for your marketing campaigns?

Marketing Success Measures

29 - How do you measure the success of your marketing campaigns?

[Prompt: Increase in customers, Increase in turnover, New website visits etc.]
Misc:

**Irish Recession**

30 - Can you please tell me if the recession in Ireland has had any effect on you in regards to marketing your business?

[E.g. Have you had to cut back on your marketing budget or have you increased your marketing?]

**Business Start Up Advice**

31 - In regards to marketing, what advice would you give to someone that is starting out with a small business?

**End of interview**

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your time and input will be valuable for the completion of my dissertation.
Interview Consent Form

Participant's Agreement:

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

The researcher has explained the purpose of the research topic and the purpose of this interview. All of the risks and benefits of participating in this interview have been explained clearly to me by the researcher. I am aware the data will be used in an academic dissertation that may be publicly available at Dublin Business School and may be published on numerous academic websites. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the dissertation submission. The data gathered in this study is confidential with respect to my personal identity unless I specify otherwise. I agree to this interview being recorded.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher, Ruaidhrí O Broin, or Dublin Business School to verify that this study is for academic purposes.

I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference.

I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in today's interview.

[signature]

[Date]

[Signature]

Interviewer's signature
Interview Consent Form

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[Signature] [Date]

Participant's signature

[Interviewer's name]

Interviewer's signature
NetTech Ltd Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

Participant's Agreement:

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[Signature]
Participant's signature

[Date]

[Signature]
Interviewer's signature
Honey and Mumford Learning Style Questionnaire

Learning Styles Questionnaire
by Honey & Mumford

This questionnaire is designed to find out your preferred learning style. Over the years you have probably developed learning habits which help you benefit more from some experiences than others. Since you are probably unaware of this, this questionnaire will help you pinpoint your learning preferences, so that you are in a better position to select learning experiences to suit your style.

There is no time limit to this questionnaire. It will probably take 10-15 minutes. The accuracy of the results depend on how honest you can be. There are no right or wrong answers. If you agree more than you disagree with a statement, put a tick by it. If you disagree more than you agree put a cross. Be sure to mark each item either with a tick or a cross.

1. I like to be absolutely correct about things.
2. I quite like to take risks.
4. I prefer simple, straightforward things rather than something complicated.
5. I often do things just because I feel like it rather than thinking about it first.
6. I don't often take things for granted. I like to check things out for myself.
7. What matters most about what you learn is whether it works in practice.
8. I actively seek out new things to do.
9. When I hear about a new idea I immediately start working out how I can try it out.
10. I am quite keen on sticking to fixed routines, keeping to timetables, etc.
11. I take great care in working things out. I don't like jumping to conclusions.
12. I like to make decisions very carefully and preferably after weighing up all the other possibilities first.
13. I don't like 'loose ends'. I prefer to see things fit into some sort of pattern.
14. In discussions I like to get straight to the point.
15. I like the challenge of trying something new and different.
16. I prefer to think things through before coming to a conclusion.
17. I find it difficult to come up with wild ideas off the top of my head.
18. I prefer to have as many bits of information about a subject as possible, the more I have to sift through the better.
19. I prefer to jump in and do things as they come along rather than plan things out in advance.
20. I tend to judge other people's ideas on how they work in practice.
21. I don't think that you can make a decision just because something feels right. You have to think about all the facts.
22. I am rather fussy about how I do things - a bit of a perfectionist.
23. In discussions I usually pitch in with lots of ideas.
24. In discussions I put forward ideas that I know will work.
25. I prefer to look at problems from as many different angles as I can before starting on them.
26. Usually I talk more than I listen.
27. Quite often I can work out more practical ways of doing things.
28. I believe that careful logical thinking is the key to getting things done.
29. If I have to write a formal letter I prefer to try out several rough workings before writing out the final version.
30. I like to consider all the alternatives before making my mind up.
31. I don't like wild ideas. They are not very practical.
32. It is best to look before you leap.
33. I usually do more listening than talking.
34. It doesn't matter how you do something, as long as it works.
35. I can't be bothered with rules and plans, they take all the fun out of things.
36. I'm usually the "life and soul" of the party.
37. I do whatever I need to do, to get the job done.
38. I like to find out how things work.
39. I like meetings or discussion to follow a proper pattern and to keep to a timetable.
40. I don't mind in the least if things get a bit out of hand.
### Scoring

For each question you ticked on the other sheets, put a "1" beside the question number on this sheet. Put nothing for crosses. Add up the 1s in each column.

|    | 4   | 11  | 2   | 12  | 1    | 14  | 15  | 8   | 16  | 17  | 18  | 19  | 21  | 22  | 25  | 23  | 26  | 29  | 27  | 30  | 31  | 32  | 34  | 35  | 36  | 38  | 37  | 33  |
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| 3  |     |     |     |     | 14   |     |     |     |     |     |     | 19  |     |     |     | 23  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 27  |
| 6  |     |     |     | 17   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 31  |
| 10 |     |     |     | 13   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 35  |
| 14 |     |     |     | 22   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 34  |
| 17 |     |     |     | 28   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 36  |
| 23 |     |     |     | 38   | 24   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 37  |
| 36 |     |     |     | 39   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 40  |

Theorist  Pragmatist  Activist  Reflector