

## Using Marketing Research in Identifying the Best Marketing Consulting Services for Young Entrepreneurs

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### Abstract

Young entrepreneurs need guidance because they come with a lot of energy and desire to do something, but if this energy is not properly directed and concentrated with the help of specialists, it will not materialize in anything constructive. This is where the role of the marketing consultant comes in, to help the entrepreneur understand what the clients' needs are, what the company can offer and how the two can be correlated so that in the end there is a mutually beneficial relationship. This paper presents the results of two researches, a qualitative one (using in-depth interview) among experienced entrepreneurs and a quantitative one (using survey) among young entrepreneurs at the beginning of the road. The aim of the qualitative research was to identify the marketing consulting services that entrepreneurs need in order to optimize the businesses they own and increase customer satisfaction. The objectives of this research include highlighting the importance of marketing for business growth, the perception of the need for marketing consulting and identifying the types of services needed in marketing consulting. The quantitative research aimed at identifying marketing consulting services for which entrepreneurs at the beginning of the road show interest, having as a basis for comparison the perception of entrepreneurs with more experience, so as to correlate them in order to obtain the optimal mix of services. Following the process of comparative analysis between the way experienced entrepreneurs see consulting and marketing services and the way entrepreneurs perceive them at the beginning of the road, we have built a proposition for implementing a service offer to help young entrepreneurs in terms of activity marketing.

**Keywords:** Marketing consulting services, marketing research, marketing services for entrepreneurs.

**JEL classification:** M31.

### 1. Introduction

No matter the education, age or social status, people inevitably come into contact with service providers on a daily basis, and they are part of the economic exchanges in the market. Thus, we can say that services are present everywhere and their quality has a strong impact on everyday life, be it in the business to consumer or business to business market.

When it comes to the B2B service sector, there is the need for a more specialized construction, as the clients are interested in building their own offer, thus the services they require are put to a more thorough evaluation. This is also the case of marketing services, where the company turn to them to build a more sustainable business, moreover if it is a newly started one.

All being said, we have identified the need for a detailed analysis of the entrepreneurs' world, so we can afterwards provide a dedicated offer of marketing consultancy services, which is even more necessary when the business is just starting. As it will be presented in the next sections, we have conducted two direct researches that helped us understand what the experience entrepreneurs had gone through when in need on marketing and also what the new entrepreneurs need now, when they are just starting their journey and the focus can be lost very quickly if strategies aren't in place.

## **2. Literature review of the services sector and marketing consulting**

### **2.1. The services sector and their influence on the marketing activity**

In Kotler's opinion (2008, p. 583) service is defined as “any activity or benefit that one party can provide to another, which is generally intangible and the result of which does not imply ownership of a material good”. With regard to the definition of the concept of service, it is important to note the opinion of Grönroos (2004, p. 46), who describes service as “an activity or group of activities, more or less tangible, which usually takes place at the moment of interaction between the buyer and the provider”. Services by their specificity are defined by four main attributes, which determine the specificity and uniqueness of service marketing. Kotler (1998, pp. 699-703) outlines these four traits as “intangibility, inseparability, variability, perishability”. A direct, clear and complete separation between services and goods is almost impossible to achieve because the purchase of a good often comes with a service, and the statement is also mutually valid (Palmer, 1994, p. 2). Services by definition cannot be seen, felt, tasted or touched as can tangible goods, and as a result a service cannot be returned. Strategies have been developed to simulate the outcome of the service, but this will not always be perfectly in line with the original situation. Today, marketing activity is no longer strictly transactional, the focus is more towards relationship marketing, on creating constant communication that supports the recipient to return to the services originally received (Edwards et al, 2020, p. 265). Socio-economic dynamism plays a very important role in the volatility of service choice, as the potential customer has many options to choose from.

In terms of the marketing mix concept, in a general approach, McCarty (1960, p. 253) defines marketing activity through four central elements: “product”, “price”, “placement” and “promotion”. We can understand that through the marketing mix the organisation ensures that it achieves its objectives using specific tools. Due to the particularities of the services, it was found that the marketing mix needed to be adjusted and new elements were added. Cowell (1994, p. 672) is the one who defined six elements in the marketing mix, adding “people” and “processes”. Following an even greater degree of specificity, Magrath (1986, p. 48) introduces another seventh element into the marketing mix, called “public relations”.

In the services sector, there is an increased interest in promise management, because the promises made determine individual expectations in customers and one can end up in a situation where the expectations created are much higher than what is offered (Grönroos, 2020, p. 294). A particular feature of the service product is the involvement of the customer in the process of provision, referred to in the literature as “servuction” (Armsstrong, 2001, pp. 32-33). According to Cetină (2004, p. 217), the employees represents the service, represents the organization in the eyes of the customer, making it tangible, reducing risks and customer distrust, and making the offer more valuable. It is important in services to prioritize the market segments according to those that have the most need for the service offered, then to analyze how easily the customer can call on the service, subsequently to choose the market segment that delivers to the provider the desired profit margin, but at the same time the segment should be attractive enough in terms of size (Maurya, 2012, p. 75). For a service to be well received by the market it is recommended that the needs of customers in each target market are carefully

understood, and the services are designed so that the end customer feels the greatest added value. Leaders of successful service companies have promoted simple visions that they have built over time and have not given up on, working on the premise that if they have something they set out to achieve, surely at the right time it will happen (Schmidt, Adler and Weering, 2005, p. 68). Service positioning process is “the act of designing a firm's offer and image so that it occupies a distinct and valued place in the attention of targeted buyers” (Kotler, 1998, p. 39). It can thus be understood that the way in which service characteristics are interpreted determines the competitive advantage, and with the help of promotional techniques, service image differentiation can be achieved.

Regardless of the field in which services marketing is practiced, a correct application of methodology requires a clear understanding and separation of principles from tactics, thus principles guide actions and tactics are the tools with which they are carried out (Grönroos, 2020, p. 291). Balaure (2002, p. 254) argues that three main dimensions are included in strategic management: correctly defining the scope of the organization's work, formulating objectives and implementing the strategy. He defines strategy as the course of action that the organization has chosen to follow in order to achieve its objectives, and a correctly constructed objective is required to contain three elements: an attribute (by which the objective is expressed), a scale (an indicator by which the measurement of the attribute is achieved) and a goal (i.e. the point on the scale that the organization aims to reach).

Hillestad and Berkowitz (1991, p. 111) define the term added value in the service market as referring to location, reservation system, ambience, prestige or other elements that can differentiate the service, and by the concept of product line width they define the total number of services that can be called upon.

According to Biech (2003, pp. 132-134), it is necessary in the service market for the provider to remain in the mind of the customer even after the customer has received the service, even if this correlation can also be made through a physical good. Frontline employees should be allowed to have alternative ways of providing services and should not be obliged to treat all customers in the same way, but should be encouraged to adapt according to the customer.

Biech (2003, p. 108) argues that in service marketing there is a need for communication even after the service has been provided, the customer feeling that the provider is thinking about them and how they can add more value for them, with a commitment for the future. This perspective can be reinforced by the fact that it is more important what the customer thinks after they have received the service, than what they think before they receive it, because that is when the comparison between the benefits promised and those received takes place.

## **2.2. Marketing consulting**

A good marketing strategy requires the provider to be consistent in what they say, but also in what they propose. Marketing consultancy is one that manifests a high degree of complexity as the results of the research carried out need to be linked to specific and repeatable actions that optimize the information obtained (Maurya, 2012, pp. 91-92). Creating plans that are almost impossible to achieve may cause the provider to try to provide the perfect service that is not perfect for the customer (Biech, 2003, pp. 140-141).

It is noted that there are many situations where the demand is unknown and the consultant needs to ensure that they recommend the right actions for the client so that all the proposed marketing actions help to achieve the company's objectives. An effective marketing consultant, Biech (2003, pp. 34-35) argues that there is a need to clarify what service the organization provides, what he is good at, what it doesn't do well, what the customers want, how the firm ensures that it supports the needs of the customers, how it predicts needs, what the competition

is, what the its competitive advantage is, what the vision of the organization is and what it does to get there.

Consulting services have a complex character as they take into account elements related to both the internal environment of the company, but also the external one. The consultant is motivated to help the client understand what the customers need, what the company can offer and how the two can be correlated so that in the end there is a mutually beneficial relationship. At the same time, the consultant needs to help the client to understand where he is in relation to the competition and subsequently what are the competitive advantages he has, so that he can differentiate himself.

Regardless of the type of client, there is the need for a clear definition of the objectives that the client wants when calling a consultant. Regarding the nature of the objectives that an enterprise can adopt, two categories are identified, economic objectives and social objectives. Granger (1964, pp. 63-64) states that through economic objectives it is desired to optimize the use of company resources, and through social objectives outlines the result of the relationship between the interests of the organization and those of the environment in which it operates. It is thus observed that this is not an approach of alternative type objectives, but it is necessary that the two types be harmonized, all in order to be able to finally obtain the desired result.

The market strategy synthetically clarifies the relationship between the organization and the environment in which it operates, the position that the organization has in the environment, in order to achieve optimal efficiency (Málcomete, Vorzsak and Vorzsak, 1976, p. 83). Analyzing the previous statement, it is understood that, for the marketing consultant, the establishment of the market strategy must be the most important element of the marketing activity.

Depending on the market in which the company operates, the marketing consultant is required to choose the market strategy based on how the demand manifests itself in the market. Kotler (1973, pp. 42-49) defines the fact that demand can manifest itself in the market in eight forms, and each form determines different strategies that the organization must adopt. In a situation of a negative demand, the marketing role is to demystify the demand, the strategy being called "conversion". If demand is absent, the role of marketing is to create it, and the market strategy is "stimulating". In the case of latent demand, marketing aims at demand development, using a "development" strategy. The fourth stage of demand is that of declining demand, with marketing having the role of revitalizing, through a "remarketing" strategy. The fifth stage of demand is a fluctuating one, where the role of marketing is regularization, with the help of a "synchro marketing" strategy. The sixth stage of demand is the situation of a complete demand, where marketing has only the role of maintenance, thus applying a "maintenance strategy". The seventh stage of demand is that of excessive demand, in which case marketing must reduce demand, the strategy being "demarketing". The last stage of demand is that of undesirable demand, here marketing having the role of destroying the demand, with the help of an "antimarketing strategy".

We notice that there are many situations in which the demand can be found, and the consultant needs to make sure that he recommends the right actions for the client, so that all the proposed marketing actions meet the company's objectives.

In the following sections we will present the results of two researches meant to identify how the offer of marketing consulting services can adapt to the needs of entrepreneurs, be they newcomers or experienced ones.

### **3. Qualitative research to identify marketing service needs**

#### **3.1. Research methodology**

The aim of the research is to identify the marketing consultancy services that entrepreneurs need in order to optimize their businesses and increase customer satisfaction.

The research objectives in this study are to:

- 1) Identify perceptions about start-up entrepreneurs;
- 2) Highlighting the importance of marketing for new businesses;
- 3) Perceptions of the need for marketing advice;
- 4) Highlighting opinion on the quality of marketing consultancy services;
- 5) Identify the types of services needed in marketing consultancy.

The present research was carried out by means of individual in-depth interviews and then the information stored in the form of audio files to be analyzed. To carry out this research, interviews was held with 10 experienced entrepreneurs, who have been in business for more than three years. Participants have used marketing consultancy services in the past.

In order to conduct in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs, an interview guide was used as a support to identify and outline relevant aspects of the research. As in-depth interviews are highly complex, the use of a research tool for the conversation guide is imperative, all-in order to eliminate as much as possible the chances of the interviewer to influence the research results. Data was collected in the spring of 2022, on the Romanian market.

#### **3.2 Research results**

The first question related to the three most common marketing problems faced by young entrepreneurs had, among the most common answers, "not defining the target audience correctly", "lack of recurrent communication" and "not defining a clear marketing strategy". The majority of subjects mentioned among the advantages of young entrepreneurs the desire to have innovative products/services, concern for "online communication" and "appetite for development in more product/service categories". A considerable proportion of respondents mentioned that the first thing they would change in young entrepreneurs is "the lack of patience", stating that they want things to move very quickly and results to appear in a very short time, which is not always possible.

Many of the entrepreneurs pointed out that success is not just about completing a sales process, success can also mean not selling. This view outlines the desire of entrepreneurs to have businesses that make an impact and know that through transparency and customer focus, they will benefit in the long run. Many entrepreneurs have made it clear that marketing is what makes the difference between a successful business and one that is trying to survive. At the same time, the same majority said that marketing is much more interactive and attractive to do, as the tools available have changed, as well as the purchasing process and consumption behavior.

A large proportion of respondents mentioned that since they chose to work with marketers or agencies, things have changed for the better as they have been able to focus on creating the product and service as expected following a coherent and achievable marketing strategy. A large proportion of participants indicated that for them effective marketing is when people think about their product as soon as they hear certain words, then they have managed to be in the mind of the consumer for a good period of time. In terms of the reasons why experienced entrepreneurs turned to marketing consultancy, here participants mentioned the desire to hand over this responsibility to experts, the desire to have a coordinated strategy and the lack of internal capacity to manage marketing activity. A good proportion of entrepreneurs mentioned that despite the fact that they are very confident in their product/service, there is a need to know how to pass this on to potential customers.



The question on the balance between investing less time and more money or more time and less money was one that separated the participants somewhat as those with one business they were involved in chose the option of investing more time and less money compared to the situation where those involved in multiple businesses chose to invest more money and less time.

The majority of entrepreneurs found marketing to be more complex than they initially thought, because they realized that the most important thing is to communicate recurrently and in the customer's understanding. In terms of the list of criteria by which entrepreneurs choose their consultancy firms, among the most common are the reputation of the consultant, the firms they have worked with before and the price. It is thus observed that price is not the most important criteria, since if there is a sufficient number of conversions, the price of the consultant is no longer a critical issue, as the purchase of services is shown to be a wise one and made on economic grounds.

In relation to the areas in which entrepreneurs feel there is a need for knowledge on the part of marketing consultants, most responses related to the concepts of marketing strategy, branding, consumer behavior and communication.

The marketing services that entrepreneurs called upon were varied, the most common of which were marketing strategy consultancy, data analysis, branding and content marketing. Many of the entrepreneurs indicated that the strategy behind any approach is very important, so marketing strategy consultancy is one of the most common services used.

Now, having already the perspective of experienced entrepreneurs, we turned to the new comers, as they have a very different approach of things, mostly due to their lack of experience, thus is important to get to know also their opinion on the need of marketing services.

#### **4. Quantitative research on the marketing services needs by young entrepreneurs**

##### **4.1 Research methodology**

As mentioned before, the purpose of this quantitative research is focused on identifying the marketing consulting services for which entrepreneurs at the beginning of the road show interest, having as a basis for comparison the experience of entrepreneurs with more experience, so as to make a correlation to obtain the optimal mix of services. The marketing services highlighted by experienced entrepreneurs are tested on entrepreneurs with less than three years of experience, to see to what extent they need to be guided.

The objectives of our quantitative research were:

- 1) To identify the preference of early stage entrepreneurs regarding the conduct of marketing activity;
- 2) To highlight the areas of expertise for a marketing consultant needed from the perspective of entrepreneurs;
- 3) Identify the most common marketing services that are developed and performed in-house by entrepreneurs;
- 4) Highlighting the most common services that marketing consultancy has been used for;
- 5) Outlining the services for which entrepreneurs would use marketing consultancy in the future.

The hypotheses of the quantitative research can be found in the following list:

- 1) Just starting out entrepreneurs prefer to carry out marketing activity using in-house means;
- 2) The four most common areas of expertise from the perspective of entrepreneurs are marketing strategy, branding, content marketing and market research;
- 3) Start-up entrepreneurs perform the following three marketing services in-house: branding, marketing strategy and social media;

4) In the top three marketing services that entrepreneurs turned to for advice were marketing strategy, branding and copywriting;

5) In the future, just starting out entrepreneurs will turn to marketing consultancy for the following services: growth hacking marketing, content marketing and data analytics.

Data collection was carried out through an online survey. The questionnaire was distributed in a random way with the help of social platforms, thus being able to be completed exclusively online. At the same time, the questionnaire was distributed also in groups and communities of entrepreneurs, in order to ensure a completion from different areas of specialization.

Data was collected with the help of the platform [www.typeform.com](http://www.typeform.com), this being a versatile platform that offered the possibility to design and complete in an accessible and easy to view way. After the completion of the questionnaire, followed the stage of data processing and information analysis using the SPSS program, but also the Microsoft Power BI program. The interpretation and visualization of the information was possible with the Excel spreadsheet tool, completed by Microsoft Power BI, all in order to be able to draw a relevant and intuitive graphical image.

#### 4.2. Research results

The results will be presented following a structure adapted to the research objectives, with insight both from the univariate and bivariate analysis.

In terms of respondents' experience in entrepreneurship, 50% have less than 1 year, 31% have between 1 and 2 years and 19% have 2-3 years' experience, thus it is clear that from an age perspective, the questionnaire was completed by the original target group. The level of education is as representative as possible, as approximately 87% of respondents have a university degree. Also, 72% of the entrepreneurs mentioned that they had taken at least one marketing course, thus giving the first indication of the entrepreneurs' desire to understand what is going on in marketing.

In terms of the areas of expertise of a marketing consultant, the respondents' answers revealed four main needed specializations: 89% considered expertise in marketing strategy to be necessary, 84% chose the ability to set objectives and performance indicators, 70% chose knowledge of market analysis and 68% expertise in understanding customer consumption and purchasing behavior. These four sub-areas of expertise highlight the entrepreneurs' concern for the customer, the company and the competition, in order to achieve an optimal package in their work. Table 1 presents the importance of criteria taken into consideration when choosing a marketing consultant.

**Table 1. Importance of criteria for choosing marketing consulting services (on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means very important)**

CRITERIA	VALUE					AVERAGE
	1	2	3	4	5	
Price	0,00%	4,63%	<b>52,66%</b>	23,48%	19,23%	4
Reputation	0,00%	9,48%	12,00%	<b>45,31%</b>	34,34%	4
Experience	6,86%	5,71%	16,43%	<b>42,43%</b>	29,43%	4
Domain	4,05%	7,19%	7,48%	<b>54,03%</b>	27,25%	4
Company size	12,28%	5,13%	11,25%	<b>47,42%</b>	25,46%	4

The perspective of early-stage entrepreneurs on the importance of the marketing activities is presented in Table 2, where we can see that the higher focus that these types of respondents put on copywriting and web analyze.

**Table 2. The importance of marketing activities**

CRITERIA	VALUE				
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Communication strategy</b>	0,00%	8,36%	19,44%	38,58%	33,62%
<b>Data analysis</b>	0,00%	2,09%	18,37%	45,49%	35,32%
<b>Marketing strategy</b>	0,00%	9,22%	14,93%	46,85%	29,37%
<b>Clients identifying</b>	3,36%	11,39%	13,41%	53,46%	20,27%
<b>KPI s</b>	0,00%	3,49%	31,38%	39,26%	27,25%
<b>Growth hacking marketing</b>	3,56%	19,23%	44,89%	21,58%	11,30%
<b>Social media</b>	0,00%	8,03%	30,49%	34,57%	26,91%
<b>Content marketing</b>	1,98%	10,09%	23,52%	28,68%	35,73%
<b>Branding</b>	4,11%	7,96%	26,25%	31,83%	29,85%
<b>Web design</b>	1,98%	5,65%	11,86%	48,02%	32,49%
<b>Copywriting</b>	0,00%	0,86%	13,24%	38,95%	<b>46,95%</b>
<b>Web analyze</b>	0,00%	0,00%	23,75%	33,86%	<b>42,39%</b>

Another research objective looked at the services for which young entrepreneurs would seek marketing advice. The results here are surprising as the most common choices are no longer online related, but entrepreneurs are more oriented towards marketing strategy (76%), setting goals and performance indicators (78%) and data analysis (74%).

### **5. Creating a marketing consultancy service offer for young entrepreneurs using AI**

As a result of the benchmarking process between how experienced entrepreneurs see consultancy and marketing services and how they perceive start-up entrepreneurs, it is proposed to implement a service to help young entrepreneurs with their marketing activity. The aim of this marketing consultancy service is to support, guide and develop young entrepreneurs in the marketing needs for their companies, following the identification of their areas of weakness. The mission of this marketing consultancy company is to help start-up entrepreneurs by providing marketing consultancy services, using a dedicated online platform created as a result of analyzing their needs and wishes.

The vision of this service is to achieve full automation of marketing consultancy services through Artificial Intelligence. Everything is oriented towards the concept of SMART work, here we are not referring to having a more complex activity, but to having a more efficient activity, to teamwork, to paying close attention to sales channels and to adapting to the existing context.

The strategy of launching a marketing consultancy service for young entrepreneurs aims to raise awareness of the need for expertise and analysis when setting up marketing activity. Given the Ansoff matrix, as the service offered is a new one and addresses a new market, the strategy used is diversification. Moreover, given the basis for reporting the state of demand, since this is fluctuating, a synchro marketing strategy will be used, the role of marketing activity being to regulate demand. Last but not least, taking into account the size and characteristics of the market, a strategy of increasing turnover in terms of market dynamics, a differentiated strategy in terms of market structure, an active strategy in terms of market changes, based on the strategy of average requirements/expectations and an offensive strategy to increase market share will be used.

The target audience of this service is represented by young entrepreneurs in Romania, eager to develop their businesses, regardless of the field of activity they have. In other words,



the target audience is made up of people aged 19-35 from Romania who have a university degree, have less than one year in entrepreneurship and who are interested in marketing.

The service program is called BusinessUP. The online platform has a descriptive name, so the field of activity is indicated illustrating that it helps to develop existing businesses. The application process for these marketing consultancy services will be done through the platform. This registration consists of mentioning some aspects related to the entrepreneur and the business he owns, such as the experience he has, his specialization, what is the stage of his business, the main problems he has and his long-term vision. A specialist will then analyze the data and a 2-hours virtual meeting will be held for a detailed discussion. This process of getting to know each other is done to see what stage the young entrepreneur is at and to be able to identify how and what advice can be offered.

After getting to know the business, the next two stages will take place. The first stage looks at the entrepreneur's interaction with the entrepreneur's employees and how the interaction is carried out. In this step the aim is to identify how the employees feel, how they know what they have to do and how satisfied they are with the work they are doing. The second step looks at external and interactive marketing. The time allocation structure is the same and the two types of marketing are analyzed together as they reach the end customer directly. The role of this stage is to understand and simulate the customer journey with the services/products offered by the contractor. Because entrepreneurs need support and guidance in their marketing activity, according to the results of the research, they will benefit from a mentor entrepreneur who will help them with the expertise he/she has in the consultancy services. This is because entrepreneurship requires commitment, determination and vision, as well as accepting help from those with expertise.

The BusinessUP branded marketing consultancy service aims to become the promoter of young entrepreneurs in Romania, becoming the way for them to access highly specialized marketing consultancy services that they would not normally have access to so easily or cheaply. The program regardless of the period they opt for is tailored to the three levels of marketing within the services, external marketing, internal marketing and interactive marketing. Because the research identified that entrepreneurs carry out marketing work not with specialist people, all in order to optimize costs, this concept needs to be changed as it is not beneficial to the future of the business. Recurrent and integrated communication manages to generate results over time.

On the consultancy platform there will be recordings and interviews with specialists in the field trying to pass on their experience. Access is free for the first 14 days, and thereafter the service is charged. This free period arises because of the need to demonstrate that the services offered are qualitative and useful for entrepreneurs. The aim of both is to support initiatives across financial barriers.

## **6. Conclusions and discussions**

From the qualitative research conducted we identified that new business marketing is much more competitive to do, involves more experience and effort, but if things are done well, the results are amazing. The qualitative research revealed that marketing consultancy services exist in Romania and are diversified, but they are not perfectly accessible for young entrepreneurs, sometimes they do not even have the opportunity to talk to consultancy firms as they are preoccupied with bigger companies. The results of the two researches showed that there is a demand for marketing consultancy services, but that these services need to be provided in a way that is adapted to the level of each company. The BusinessUP platform is precisely optimized to the level of each client, with services perfectly optimized and tailored to the specifics of the business. The concept behind the platform is to link the community of

entrepreneurs at national level, this conceptualization is in order to transmit in the most dynamic and fast way the new trends and results on the market.

As a result of the trend towards a digitized and automated experience, the idea of the BusinessUP platform is perfectly adapted to the economic and technological context, thus removing many existing barriers. Young entrepreneurs need support in their marketing activities and the research conducted revealed a concern for marketing strategy, data analysis and optimizing the way their companies communicate with the market.

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