

## **Research in action: Developing a B2B marketing strategy for a Scottish SME**

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**Abstract:** The UK lift service industry has become highly competitive with the existence of several lift maintenance service providers. Different service providers follow different marketing strategies to attract customers in both private and public sectors. The case company, a B2B SME has acknowledged the importance of market research and marketing strategy to drive business growth. It has teamed with the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) and successfully secured a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP), funded by Innovate UK to help businesses innovate and grow (Innovate UK, 2022). Although a lot of studies have been carried out on B2B marketing strategies, there is still a gap in the understanding of marketing strategies in the lift service industry, especially B2B SMEs. The study aims to carry out an audit of the current marketing strategy, identify areas for improvement, and provide solutions to grow the businesses. A single case study and participatory approach was adopted. One of the researchers works at the company. Data collection was based on environmental scanning activities including an internal audit, an external analysis, TOWS analysis, a product portfolio review via documentation analysis, reflective journals, field notes, observation, semi-structured interviews with managers, individual staff, and clients. The findings show that a tailored integrated marketing communication plan needs to be adopted to increase brand awareness, brand image and brand recognition. The overall digital presence needs to be improved, especially social media platforms. A CRM system is urgently needed to improve operational efficiency and customer relationships. An up-to-date agile marketing strategy can help the company to maintain a competitive advantage in the market.

**Key words:** B2B Marketing strategy, Lift services, SME, CRM, competitive advantage

Given the economic importance of the Business-to-Business (B2B) sector, both scholars and practitioners have been keen to understand B2B marketing strategies (Ferreira et al., 2022). According to the World Bank (2023), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) contribute to 90% of world businesses and over 50% of world employment. With the current complexity of the environment including the implications of Brexit and the ongoing global pandemic, B2B SMEs with financial constraints, and limited resources, knowledge, and skills, have been facing challenges in the market. The marketing practices in B2B companies are different from those in B2C, with B2B having a greater focus on sales and relationship building (Setkute and Dibb, 2022). In SMEs, marketing practices also have their own characteristics. Company owners have more power; companies have fewer formal structures, limited resources, and are more short-term goal oriented (Centeno and Hart, 2012; Gilmore et al., 2001). Therefore, SMEs tend to adopt informal, sporadic, reactive, unstructured marketing, focusing on short-term objectives rather than long-term strategic planning (Reijonen, 2010). Adopting an appropriate marketing strategy can support business performance and growth, help companies maintain a competitive advantage, and contribute to business success (Shaw, 2012).

The UK lift service industry has become highly competitive with the existence of several lift maintenance service providers. Different service providers follow different marketing strategies to attract customers. The case company, a B2B SME, has acknowledged the importance of marketing strategy. It has teamed with the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) and successfully secured a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) funded by Innovate UK helping businesses to innovate and grow (UKRI, 2023). The authors of the paper are involved in this project.

Several studies have been carried out on B2B marketing strategies (Ferreira et al., 2022; Pedersen et al., 2020; Prior and Keränen, 2020), but there is still a gap in the understanding of marketing strategies pertaining to the lift service industry, especially B2B SMEs. The study aims to carry out an audit of the current marketing strategy, identify areas for improvement, and provide bespoke solutions to grow the businesses.

A single case study and participatory approach (action research) were adopted. One researcher works at the company. Data collection was qualitative in nature and based on an internal audit, an external analysis, a TOWS analysis, a product portfolio review via documentation analysis, reflective journals, field notes, observation, semi-structured interviews with managers, individual staff, and clients.

The initial findings showed that a tailored integrated marketing communications plan needs to be adopted to increase brand awareness, brand image and brand recognition. The company's overall digital presence can be improved, especially its social media platforms. A CRM system is urgently needed to improve the operational efficiency and manage the customer data. An up-to-date marketing strategy can help the company to maintain a competitive advantage in the lift market.

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