

IT applications in international marketing

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1 From strategy to IT application

Strategic alignment, processes and digitalization, i.e. the use of IT applications, form the foundation for a company's success (Figure 1). In order to optimize international marketing, it is crucial to consider and improve all three elements. These elements are interrelated and work together to achieve the company's goals. The internationalization strategy outlines the long-term development plan of a company on a global level, defines the desired direction and the necessary steps to achieve the goal. A well-thought-out strategy is essential as it shows the way and serves as a basis for important decisions. Processes comprise the specific measures and procedures required to implement the internationalization strategy. They create a structure for working methods and ensure that everyone involved pursues common goals. Processes are of central importance for every organization as they ensure consistency and efficiency in the execution of work. IT applications, in turn, are crucial for the effective implementation of these processes by enabling the automation and optimization of the associated tasks, thus contributing to increased efficiency and quality improvement.



Figure 1 The three central elements of strategy, process and digitalization

Companies should use a structured approach to improve the international marketing process in line with their internationalization strategy. It is then necessary to determine which IT applications can support the optimized process.

2 Internationalization strategy

Before working on the process of international marketing, it is crucial to study and understand the company's international strategy. This is because this process is closely linked to the company's internationalization strategy.

Understanding the internationalization strategy is essential to ensure that the IT applications used are in line with the company's overall objectives.

A poor choice of IT applications can lead to reputational and financial losses that can affect the company in the long term. However, if the company takes the international strategy into account and acts accordingly, it can ensure that it selects the best partners for the specific sales activities required.

Only if the team responsible for handling the process understands the internationalization strategy can it ensure that its process improvement is aligned with the company's goals and thus guarantee successful implementation.

Team members should ask themselves the following questions about the internationalization strategy before they start thinking about IT applications. If a company does not have an explicit and documented internationalization strategy, these questions should be discussed with the management.

- What are the company's future target markets and why were they selected? This question lays the foundation for all further considerations by defining the geographical focus of the internationalization efforts.
- What are the target customer segments and what is their purchasing behavior? Once the target markets have been identified, it is important to understand the specific customer segments within these markets in order to adapt product offerings and marketing strategies.
- What are the company's Unique Selling Propositions (USP) for the target customer segments? Based on the understanding of the target customer segments, the company can define its USPs that set it apart from the competition.
- What kind of sales strategy does the company pursue? The choice of sales strategy depends heavily on the target markets, customer segments and USPs. It is decisive for the way in which products or services reach the end customer.
- What are the logistical and legal challenges faced by the company when entering new target markets and how are they solved? This looks at the practical aspects of market entry, including compliance, logistics and local business practices.

- What human resources are available for expansion into new target markets? Which personnel, technical or methodological skills are not yet available within the company and still need to be built up? Identifying the required skills and resources is crucial for successful market entry and ongoing business activities.
- What is the budget for international expansion and to answer all the questions above? Budgeting is essential for the planning and implementation of the expansion. This question ensures that financial resources are allocated appropriately.
- How high is the sales potential and what are the sales targets in the future target markets? Once the strategic and operational foundations have been laid, the sales potential and sales targets are defined in order to measure success.
- What is the timetable for entering the defined new target markets? The development of a timetable is crucial for the coordination and management of all activities associated with international expansion.
- What are the opportunities and threats as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the internationalization strategy? Finally, a SWOT analysis should be carried out to evaluate and adapt the strategy. This enables the company to refine its plans on the basis of a comprehensive assessment.

3 Digitalization in international marketing

The introduction of digital technologies and IT applications in international marketing is a decisive step towards optimizing business processes and improving collaboration with international customers and partners. However, before embarking on digitalization, companies should analyze and optimize their processes. Careful consideration of which digital solutions best suit the company's needs is essential. This approach ensures that digitalization is built on a solid foundation and that the efficiency and effectiveness of international marketing is maximized. Digitalization in the context of international marketing means the introduction and use of IT applications designed to facilitate collaboration with customers and partners, improve communication and increase sales success. Through the targeted use of digital solutions, companies can not only optimize their processes, but also build a closer and more productive relationship with their customers and partners. A prerequisite for the successful introduction of IT applications is an overall view of existing processes and a clear strategy on how digital solutions can support and improve them. Companies should assess their IT maturity level to understand the extent to which they are ready to implement and use new technologies.

4 IT applications to support international marketing

IT applications can play a central role in international marketing by simplifying processes, increasing efficiency and providing valuable data and insights. The following illustration Table 1 shows which IT solutions can support the four factors of international marketing.

		Marketing mix			
		Product	Price	Promotion	Place / Distribution
IT applications	Augmented reality				
	Chatbot / Artificial Intelligence				
	Content Marketing				
	CRM - Customer Relationship Management				
	E-Commerce				
	E-learning				
	NPS Net Promoter Score				
	Video conference				
	Virtual Reality				
	IT application can support the corresponding marketing mix factor				

Table 1 IT applications in international marketing

The following IT applications can support the international marketing mix:

- **Augmented reality** integrates digital elements into the real world, supports customers and partners during service assignments with visual aids and promotes qualification and motivation through innovative technologies.
- **Chatbots/Artificial Intelligence** provides real-time text or voice-based responses to customer and partner inquiries and contributes to motivation and evaluation by enabling fast and efficient support.
- **Content marketing / marketing automation** focuses on the creation and publication of content on the Internet and includes tools such as newsletters, social networks, blogs, podcasts and SEO, thus promoting the targeted dissemination of information.
- **CRM (Customer Relationship Management)** centrally manages customer information and sales processes, covers the entire value chain with the partner and thus supports all four factors of international marketing.

- **E-commerce** enables online purchases for partners and customers, supports selection and motivation through easy access to products and spare parts.
- **E-learning** enables forms of learning that are supported by electronic media and contributes to the qualification of customers and partners.
- **NPS (Net Promoter Score)** measures customer satisfaction and loyalty through online surveys.
- **Video conferences** enable a synchronous exchange of information with video and audio transmission, support qualification and motivation through direct communication and promote the exchange between exporters and customers and partners.
- **Virtual reality** creates artificial environments for user training using digital twins¹, supports qualification through immersive learning experiences and improves the product knowledge of customers and partners.

4.1 The use of IT applications as an integral part of the "product" marketing mix factor

See book "Going International", page 122

4.2 The use of IT applications as an integral part of the "price" marketing mix factor

See book "Going International", page 133

4.3 The use of IT applications as an integral part of the "promotion" marketing mix factor

See book "Going International", page 142

4.4 The use of IT applications as an integral part of the "Place - Distribution" marketing mix factor

See book "Going International", page 170

¹ A digital twin is a virtual representation of a physical object that enables the improvement and training of machine processes through simulations with real-time data.

4.5 Requirements for the introduction of IT applications

An overall view of processes and IT applications is important for the introduction of IT applications. It is advisable to use a guide for this, such as "Digital Master Plan for SMEs" by Marc K. Peter. (Peter M. K. (2023))

Before introducing IT applications, a company must determine its own IT maturity level. IT maturity refers to the degree of integration, automation and standardization of IT systems and processes as well as the IT skills of a company's employees. There are several factors that contribute to a company's IT maturity.

At the heart of an efficient IT organization is a well-defined governance structure characterized by formal policies, procedures and processes. This structure is used to carefully manage IT decisions, investments and operations to ensure seamless integration and functionality. Another key aspect is the development of an IT strategy that not only reflects the overall business strategy, but is also tailored to the company's specific objectives. This ensures that IT services are optimally aligned with business objectives, enabling effective measurement of the business value of IT investments.

The infrastructure forms the backbone of the IT organization, with a high degree of automation, standardization and integration of hardware, software and network systems. These elements are crucial for creating a robust and responsive IT environment. In parallel, the level of security is of paramount importance. Advanced security and risk management practices are essential to protect IT systems and data from external and internal threats.

The skills of IT employees also play a decisive role. A high level of skills and abilities, coupled with active involvement in the decision-making process, promotes a dynamic and innovative IT culture. Closely related to this is service management, which is characterized by mature IT service management practices, including incident management, problem management and change management. These practices contribute to the stability and adaptability of IT services and support the management of challenges and changes.

Another pillar is continuous improvement. A culture that promotes innovation and continuous development is crucial for the long-term success and competitiveness of the IT organization. Finally, data management is of central importance. A mature approach to data management, encompassing aspects such as data governance, data quality, data security and data analytics, enables the value of data to be fully exploited and informed decisions to

be made. By integrating these components into a coherent strategy, an IT organization can not only achieve its goals, but also make a significant contribution to the overall success of the company.

4.6 Benefits and feasibility of IT applications

When evaluating IT applications to support processes, both the benefits and the feasibility should be taken into account (Figure 1). The benefit refers to the positive results or advantages that the application brings to the company, such as the quality, speed or cost of the processes. Feasibility refers to the ease and feasibility of implementing and integrating the application into the existing IT infrastructure, including factors such as compatibility, technical requirements and availability of resources, as well as the likely acceptance of the IT application by customers and partners.

When companies consider both benefits and feasibility, they can make informed decisions about which applications to invest in and which to prioritize. An application with high benefits but low feasibility may not make sense if the resources required to implement it cannot be justified. In addition to direct financial resources, time resources should always be taken into account here. An application with low benefits but high feasibility may be worthwhile if it is quick and easy to implement and can bring measurable benefits to the company.

- Potential benefits of IT applications for exporters:
 - Process quality increases: The IT application reduces the number of errors and/or the process objective (e.g. training) is better achieved.
 - Process speed increases: The IT application means that the process can be completed more quickly (e.g. orders go directly into the ERP without manual processing).
 - Reduce process costs: The IT application makes the process more cost-effective (e.g. elimination of manual processing).
- Feasibility of IT applications for exporters
 - Technical feasibility: Has this application already been introduced many times or is it still at the beginning of its technical development?
 - One-off and recurring costs: How high are the costs for the introduction and ongoing operation of the IT application? What adjustments need to be made to integrate the new application into the existing IT infrastructure?
 - Acceptance by customers and partners: How likely is it that customers will use the IT application? What hurdles are there on the customer side? How can these be overcome?

International market development - assessment of the potential support of the marketing mix by IT applications

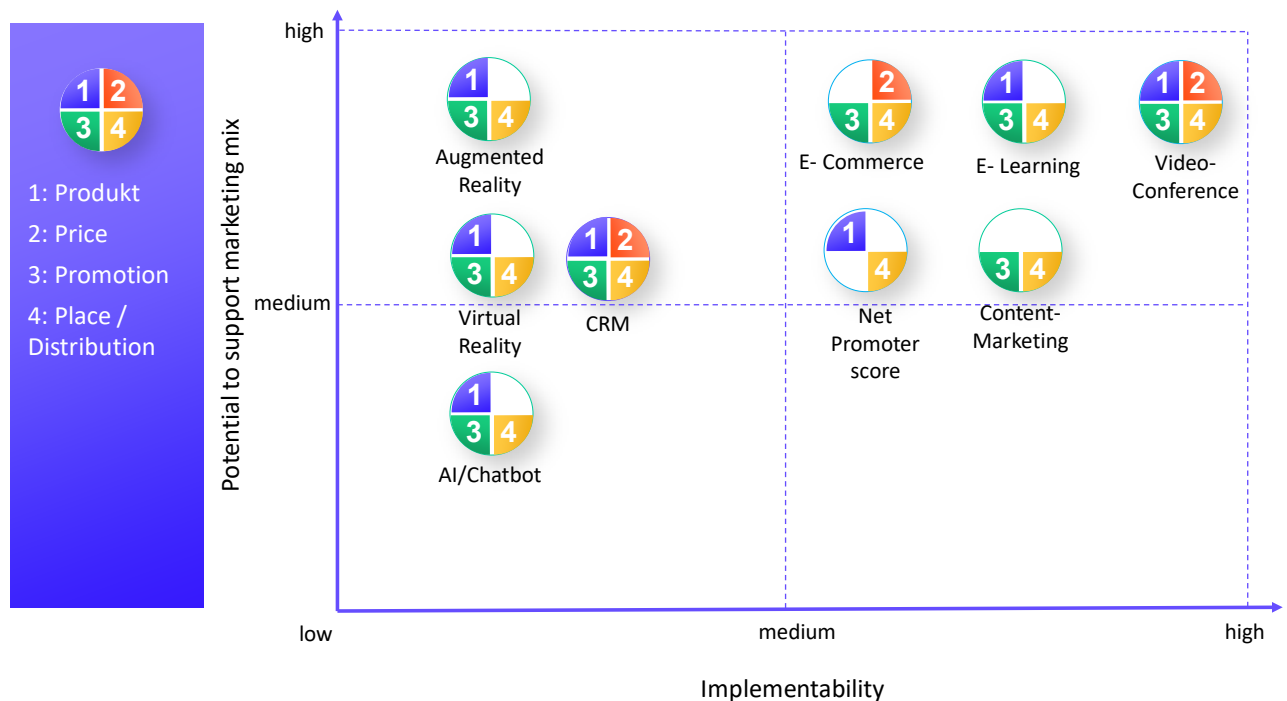


Figure 2 Potential benefits and feasibility of IT applications as well as the supported factors of the marketing mix.

The graphic Figure 2 provides exporters with an initial approach for prioritizing IT applications. The evaluation of potential benefits and feasibility was carried out in a research project based on best practice examples and together with process and IT specialists:

- The following applications have high potential benefits and a high degree of feasibility: E-commerce, e-learning and content marketing, video conferencing and Net Promoter Score. These applications not only promise high benefits in the motivation and selection phase, but are also relatively easy to implement. They should therefore be considered as a priority and included in the initial clarification of the introduction of IT applications.
- High potential benefits with low feasibility: Augmented reality, virtual reality, CRM. These technologies offer great benefits, particularly in the qualification and evaluation phase, but could pose major challenges during implementation. They should

therefore be evaluated after the applications mentioned first, if the resources and ability to implement more complex solutions are available.

5 IT applications in international marketing

The IT applications presented are discussed in detail below. For each application - from augmented reality, chatbots and artificial intelligence to e-commerce, CRM systems, e-learning, online net promoter score, video conferencing and virtual reality - a definition is first provided in order to create a basic understanding of the technology. Specific examples of the use of these technologies are then used to illustrate their practical application and the added value for companies in the context of international marketing. In addition, the evaluation of the potential benefits of each technology is presented, showing how it can contribute to increasing efficiency, improving customer relationships or optimizing business processes. At the same time, the challenges and feasibility aspects that companies need to consider when implementing these IT solutions are examined. Factors such as the technical and financial outlay, the need for training and acceptance by employees and customers are also addressed.

5.1 Augmented reality

Augmented reality is a technology that superimposes a computer-generated image over the user's view of the real world, providing a composite view (Ammann, P., Burkhalter, P. (2019)). In this way, users can interact with virtual objects in the real environment, often via a device such as a smartphone, tablet or special AR glasses. The virtual objects can contain text, images, videos or 3D models and be anchored to real places or objects. This technology can be used for a variety of purposes, e.g. to present products at a trade fair or to support service staff on site at the customer's premises.

Example Gilgen Logistics AG

Gilgen Logistics (www.gilgen.com) is a general contractor for warehousing and intralogistics. The family-owned company offers complete systems for intralogistics in various industries. Gilgen Logistics specializes in the design, development and manufacture of logistics solutions and uses AR technology as a tool for the sale, installation, maintenance and repair of its products and systems. This technology allows technicians and engineers to use a smartphone, tablet or smart glasses to see virtual overlays of the inner workings of individual conveyor elements superimposed on the real view. This helps them to identify and diagnose problems more easily and quickly and to carry out maintenance and repair work more precisely and efficiently.

Gilgen Logistics can also use AR to support customers remotely, with a remote expert seeing the same virtual overlays as the on-site technician and providing guidance and support. In addition, the company can use AR in training so that new technicians can

practice maintenance and troubleshooting on a virtual conveyor element instead of a real system.

Augmented reality evaluation

Potential benefits

- Improved communication: AR allows partners, customers and specialists to see the same thing, eliminating communication errors. This is particularly useful for complex products or processes where visual representations can significantly improve understanding.
- Increased efficiency: Processes such as the transfer of expertise or service calls are accelerated thanks to an immediate, shared view of the problem. This leads to faster problem solving and avoids time-consuming and costly multiple trips or queries.

Feasibility

- High costs: The implementation of AR technologies is associated with high costs due to the need to procure and adapt specific hardware and software. This applies to both the initial setup and the ongoing updating and maintenance of the systems.
- Acceptance challenge: The acceptance of AR by customers and internal users is crucial to the success of the technology. Targeted training and support programs are needed to familiarize users with the new tools and demonstrate their benefits.

5.2 Chatbot / artificial intelligence

A chatbot is a computer program that can simulate a conversation with human users. Chatbots can be integrated into various messaging platforms such as websites, mobile apps and messaging apps. They can be used for a variety of purposes, such as customer service, e-commerce, entertainment and information retrieval. Chatbots use artificial intelligence (AI) techniques such as natural language processing and machine learning to understand and respond to user input. Some popular examples of chatbot applications include virtual assistants, customer service chatbots and conversational agents (Hundertmark, 2020).

Example energy company

An energy and infrastructure company has developed a chatbot as a customer service tool (Figure 3). The chatbot is to be integrated into their website or mobile app. It will be used to provide customers with information about their energy consumption, bills and account balance, as well as to handle simple requests and inquiries, such as reporting a power

outage or making an appointment for a technician visit. The chatbot is available to customers around the clock and can have several conversations at the same time.

«Hey Siri/ Google. Ich will mit dem Energieerzeuger reden.»

«Hallo. Ich bin dein Energieerzeuger Bot. Wie kann ich dir helfen?», antwortet eine Männerstimme.

«Ich habe keinen Strom!»

«Was ist Ihre Postleitzahl?»

«5 — 1 — 7 — 9»

«Wir führen derzeit in Schmalzbach geplante Instandhaltungsarbeiten durch. Besten Dank für ihr Verständnis. »

Figure 3 Communication process with a chatbot (Ammann, Burkhalter, 2021)

In addition, the chatbot can be equipped with machine learning algorithms to improve its performance over time. This means that it can learn from interactions with customers, making it more accurate and efficient when it comes to understanding and responding to their needs. It can also be integrated with other systems to receive information and perform actions, such as checking the status of an order or providing information about the weather forecast.

Chatbots and artificial intelligence are on their way to fundamentally changing the way companies interact with their sales partners and customers. These technologies enable more efficient and effective communication by being available 24/7 and can provide instant responses to queries. They can also provide personalized experiences by learning from previous interactions to better understand users' needs and preferences. In addition, chatbots and AI-powered systems can help automate business processes, leading to cost savings and increased productivity. By taking over routine tasks, they allow employees to focus on more complex and value-adding activities.

However, the integration of these technologies also harbors potential risks. A key risk is that customers may not always receive the correct or appropriate information. Incorrect or insufficiently trained AI systems can lead to misunderstandings or misinformation, which can affect customer trust and negatively impact customer relationships. In addition, data protection and data security pose significant challenges, as the handling of sensitive customer data requires the utmost care to avoid data breaches. Companies must therefore ensure that their chatbots and AI systems are not only efficient and user-oriented, but also secure and reliable in providing accurate information. Overall, the integration of chatbots and artificial intelligence into business processes will sustainably strengthen relationships between companies, sales partners and customers and lead to a competitive advantage in the digital economy, provided that the associated risks are carefully managed.

Chatbot / Artificial Intelligence evaluation

Potential benefits

- Chatbots offer the possibility of answering inquiries quickly around the clock, which speeds up the process for customers and sales partners. They are an efficient solution, especially for frequently asked questions, and can therefore shorten response times and improve the availability of support.
- Support costs can be reduced through the use of chatbots, as fewer help desk staff are required. This can lead to a more efficient use of resources and improve the scalability of support services.

Feasibility

- Implementing chatbots can be difficult due to technical requirements and the need to provide high quality and relevant answers. Careful planning is required to develop a system that offers real added value and not just simple FAQ lists.
- Acceptance by customers can be a challenge, as they may prefer personal contact with real people. Successful implementation therefore requires measures to convince users of the benefits of using a chatbot and to continuously improve the system.

5.3 Content marketing / marketing automation

With the success of social media applications such as Instagram, LinkedIn, etc., the function of a company's website has changed. In traditional e-business, the website was the company's "megaphone". It communicated information to customers via the website (1:n communication). Now there is very strong n:n communication on the Internet, i.e. customers communicate with each other. The website is now the "hub" with what the company considers to be important information for customers. Social media websites are used to support customer communication with the company - always with the aim of

passing on important marketing information. Content marketing is a marketing strategy that aims to attract customers by creating relevant and useful content and making it available via various online channels. Unlike traditional marketing methods that focus on attracting customers' attention through advertising, content marketing focuses on helping companies be found by potential partners and customers when they search for solutions online. It uses techniques such as content marketing, search engine optimization and social media marketing to create a positive experience, turning visitors into customers and ultimately brand promoters.

Content marketing is a form of marketing that focuses on the creation and distribution of valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience. The aim of content marketing is to create added value for potential customers as a first step in order to trigger profitable customer actions at a later stage. The focus is on sharing know-how and making existing expertise in a defined field visible. Content marketing can be carried out using blogs, videos, social media posts, infographics, e-books or other formats. The main aim of content marketing is to build a relationship with potential and existing customers. Through the added value of the content, a company can not only distinguish itself, but also create trust and credibility. Content marketing aims to promote relationship building and relationship maintenance rather than just the promotion and sale of a product or service.

Clever content marketing can help to ensure an optimized positioning with the common search engines via your own website or online contributions. Search engine optimization (SEO) is essential in order to be found as prominently as possible on the Internet. Positioning can be improved through the targeted use of key words in your own online posts. However, it is essential that user-friendliness is not restricted as a result, which could lead to visitors spending less time on the site or even leaving. A clever combination of interesting content and the use of search engine-relevant keywords can be promising here.

A classic platform for content marketing is the social media platform LinkedIn. Founded in the USA in 2002, the network is now one of the leading online networks and has 774 million registered users. The platform focuses on networking professionals. In addition to the initial networking opportunities, the offering has been continuously expanded. Today, the platform also offers functions such as groups, discussion forums and blogging tools. There are numerous opportunities for companies to gain more visibility with both customers and potential sales partners. In addition to classic posts about their own activities and the sharing of relevant content, there is also the opportunity to make a name for yourself as an expert in a specific subject area.

Example of content marketing for an industrial goods manufacturer

An international company in the industrial goods sector for the construction industry uses content marketing effectively.

The company has created a wide range of content, including blog posts, videos, infographics and e-books that add value to the target audience and help promote the company's brand and products.

One of the main ways the company uses content marketing is to provide educational resources for its target audience, which includes architects, engineers and construction professionals. For example, there is a 'Technical Information' section on the website which contains a variety of resources such as white papers, technical bulletins and case studies. These provide detailed information on the properties and features of the products, as well as best practice for their use in construction projects. This type of content will position the company as a thought leader in the industry and provide added value to the target audience by educating them about the products they use.

The company also uses content marketing to promote its brand and products in a more subtle way. There is a section on the website called 'Solutions', which showcases the company's products in real-life applications and demonstrates the benefits of using the products in different projects. This type of content helps to highlight the value of the products and may inspire architects, engineers and construction professionals to consider using the company's products in their own projects.

In addition to the website, the company also uses other channels to disseminate its content. The company has a strong presence on social media and regularly provides information about new projects, products and innovations. The company also has a YouTube channel where videos about the products and projects on offer are published.

These content marketing efforts have been successful in raising awareness of the company's brand and products and providing value to their target audience. By creating educational resources and showcasing their products in real-world applications, they have positioned themselves as thought leaders in the industry, helping to drive sales and increase brand awareness.

It should be emphasized that the use of content marketing can also be interesting and effective for SMEs with more limited resources than a large company.

Evaluation of content marketing

Potential benefits

- Content marketing increases a company's visibility, which is a basic prerequisite for successful international marketing.
- Potential customers and sales partners can be quickly and efficiently provided with information that they can then pass on to end customers, thus supporting the relationship between partner and end customer. This flow of information helps to strengthen the brand and promote trust among end customers.

Feasibility

- Content marketing is an established method whose main effort lies in content creation. This requires both creative and strategic resources to produce content that appeals to and engages the target audience.
- The acceptance of content marketing can be a challenge, especially in markets or industries where traditional marketing methods predominate. Success in content marketing therefore requires a clear strategy and the ability to effectively communicate the benefits of this form of marketing both internally and to the target groups.

5.4 CRM - Customer Relationship Management

Customer relationship management (CRM) stands for customer relationship management. It is a strategy and set of techniques used by companies to manage and analyze customer interactions and data throughout the customer lifecycle. The ultimate goal of CRM is to improve customer relationships, increase customer loyalty and boost sales. CRM systems typically include software that helps manage and analyze customer data such as contact information, purchase history and communication records. The system can also be used to automate and streamline business processes such as sales, marketing and customer service. It can also be integrated with other systems such as email and social media to manage customer interactions across multiple channels. CRM can be used by companies of all sizes and industries and includes both cloud-based and on-premise solutions. It can be used to manage customer data, automate and streamline business processes and track performance. CRM software can also give companies valuable insights into customer behavior and preferences, which can be used to improve the customer experience and increase sales.

Example industrial goods manufacturer

The company described as an example case is a manufacturer of precision machine tools for milling, turning, drilling and grinding workpieces made of metal, composite materials and ceramics.

The company uses a customer relationship management system to manage and improve interactions with its sales partners and customers. This system helps the company to streamline its sales, marketing and customer service processes and gain better insight into its customer base.

The CRM system enables the company to centralize and organize customer information such as contact details, purchase history and communication data. This information can be easily accessed and shared between different departments, including sales, marketing and customer service. This enables more efficient and effective communication with customers and helps to ensure that customer needs are met promptly and accurately.

The CRM system also provides valuable insights into customer behavior and preferences. For example, the system can track which products and services customers are interested in and identify patterns in customers' purchasing habits. This information can be used to develop targeted marketing campaigns and improve the overall customer experience.

The company uses the CRM system to automate many of its sales and marketing processes, such as lead generation and follow-up. For example, the system can automatically send emails or text messages to customers to remind them of upcoming service appointments or offer special promotions. This automation helps to increase efficiency and improve the overall customer experience.

The CRM system also includes a range of reporting and analysis tools. These tools can be used to track and analyze key performance indicators such as sales and customer satisfaction. This allows the company to identify areas for improvement and make data-driven decisions to drive growth and improve customer relationships.

Overall, the CRM system plays an important role in managing and improving the company's interactions with its customers. It enables better communication and coordination between departments, helps gain valuable customer insights and streamlines sales and marketing processes to improve the overall customer experience.

Evaluation of customer relationship management

Potential benefits

- A CRM system increases transparency about the progress of sales cases by enabling exporters to track the status of sales processes in real time and provide immediate support if required. This improves the control and management of sales activities.
- The central management of customer information makes processes more efficient, which leads to a reduction in costs as fewer inquiries are necessary. Suppliers are also informed more quickly about partner activities, which enables a prompt response.

Feasibility

- The implementation of a CRM system involves a great deal of effort, especially in the areas of software and change management. Despite the challenges, CRM is a proven technology that has already been implemented many times.
- User acceptance can be low, as the introduction of a new IT system requires data to be populated. This can be a challenge, but requires careful planning and support to convince users of the benefits.

5.5 E-Commerce

E-commerce, short for electronic commerce, refers to the buying and selling of goods or services over the internet. E-commerce companies usually have an online platform, such as a website or mobile app, through which customers can search for and purchase products or services. This platform can be used to facilitate online transactions, including the payment process. E-commerce also includes related activities such as online marketplaces, online retail, online auctions and the purchase of digital products and services. In international marketing, an integrated e-commerce platform enables orders to be processed directly by customers via the manufacturer's store. Orders via e-mail are minimized, which increases process quality and efficiency.

Table 5.1 E-Commerce variants with advantages and disadvantages		
Variants of e-commerce	Advantages	Disadvantages
Own online store	Control over brand image and customer experience, direct customer relationships, flexible strategies Control over sales process, direct profit, direct customer feedback	Higher initial investment, need for own customer acquisition, technical responsibility Logistical challenges, different tax/customs regulations, language barriers
Sale via a specialized e-commerce agency	Established networks, lower direct marketing costs, support with regulatory requirements	Commission for agencies, limited control, dependence on the agency
Partnership with local sales partners who sell via their website	Partner's market knowledge, fewer logistical challenges, overcoming cultural barriers	Profit sharing with the partner, loss of direct client relationship, conflicts of interest
Sale via online marketplaces such as Amazon	Large customer base, support with payments and logistics, simple market scaling	High competition, fees and commissions, limited control over branding

E-commerce offers a variety of business models (Table 5.1) through which companies can offer their products and services globally, with each business model bringing its own specific advantages and challenges.

Let's start with direct export, a model where companies sell their products directly to customers in other countries. This provides excellent control over the entire sales process and makes it possible to receive direct feedback from end customers, which is particularly beneficial for companies such as car manufacturers that value brand strength and customer loyalty. However, this approach also brings challenges, particularly in terms of logistics, tax and customs regulations and potential language barriers.

Another model is selling through an agency. Here, companies use the services of an agency that specializes in sales in a particular market. This approach is advantageous for smaller companies, such as specialized breweries, that want to expand into foreign markets without having to worry about the intricacies of the local market. The disadvantage lies in the dependence on the agency and the associated costs.

Partnering with local sales partners is also a common method. In this model, a company works with a local partner who sells the products in the target country. This can be attractive for German luxury goods brands that need a partner who is familiar with local market conditions and customer preferences. However, it also means sharing profits and potentially losing direct control over the customer relationship.

Selling via online marketplaces such as Amazon or eBay is another option. This approach provides access to a broad customer base and can be useful for a variety of businesses, from electronics manufacturers to small craft businesses. However, there are challenges here too, such as high competition and fees that can reduce profit margins.

Finally, there is the company's own online store, which gives companies complete control over their brand image and customer experience. This is ideal for established businesses looking to strengthen their online presence. The challenges here include higher initial investment and the need to generate your own customer traffic. A special form of own online store are branded e-portals, which are described below.

E-commerce in China - everything is done with the WeChat app

"E-commerce is developing differently in the target countries of exporting companies, which must be taken into account when introducing e-commerce in the exporting countries. For Chinese companies, for example, websites have become much less important. Even if you ask them, practically no local company seems to have a website or an online store in the traditional sense anymore. Yet e-commerce is probably the most important channel of all in China. However, there is one difference to the Western world: e-commerce is handled almost exclusively via WeChat, a small, inconspicuous app that looks like WhatsApp at first glance. But only at first glance. If you take a closer look in China, you will see that QR codes (Quick Response) can be found everywhere, really everywhere. If you scan them with a normal QR code scanner, an error message is generated. However, if you scan them with the WeChat app, you end up in your own closed ecosystem - in a hidden, digitized China! The closer you look, the more you realize that everything really is controlled, bought, managed and lived via this app. Bicycles are available on every corner, you just have to scan them with WeChat and then you can ride them straight away. Once you arrive at your

destination, you park the bike somewhere - there are no pre-made parking spaces. As soon as you do a "goodbye scan" of the bike, it is available for the next customer. Billing takes place automatically via the app. Many restaurants no longer accept credit cards and refer to WeChat. Even reading the menu or ordering dishes is handled via WeChat. WeChat is also used to buy groceries. After work and during the subway ride home, people do their shopping digitally, which - in the big cities - is delivered directly to their doorstep within an hour." (Bortoli, 2017, p. 4)

Example Mummazone - sales partner takes over e-commerce for exporter

Although e-commerce is becoming increasingly important in global trade, international distribution partners continue to play an important role for exporters. One reason for this is that they are able to take over e-commerce in local markets and thus facilitate exporters' access to these markets.

One example of this is the company Mummazone in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Mummazone (mummazonemedical.com) is the distribution partner of several exporters in the UAE with a very strong e-commerce presence. The company specializes in the sale of baby and mother products.

The company has managed to establish a strong presence in the UAE e-commerce market by offering a wide range of products at competitive prices and providing excellent customer service. Mummazone sells its products on over 30 webshops in the Gulf region (Figure 4).



Figure 4 E-commerce stores served by an exporter's distribution partner in the target region

One of the key factors that have contributed to Mummazone's success in the UAE e-commerce market is its extensive product range. The company offers a wide range of products for babies and mothers, including clothing, toys, feeding accessories and baby equipment. It also offers products for pregnant women such as maternity clothes and nutritional supplements for pregnant women. This variety of products allows them to cater to the different needs of their customers and appeal to a wide range of consumers.

Another factor that has helped Mummazone stand out in the UAE e-commerce market is their competitive prices. They offer a wide range of products at affordable prices, which makes them accessible to a larger customer base.

This is particularly important in the UAE, where the cost of living is high and many families have a limited budget.

Mummazone also attaches great importance to customer service. The company has a dedicated customer service team to assist customers with any questions or concerns. The

user-friendly website makes it easy for customers to search and purchase products. In addition, they offer fast and reliable delivery services, which is a key factor in customer satisfaction.

In addition to the website, Mummazone also has a strong social media presence, which they use to engage with their customers and promote their products. Mummazone regularly provides information about new products, promotions and offers and also uses social media to collect feedback and respond to customer requests.

There are a number of benefits for exporters when international distribution partners take over e-commerce in local markets. Here are some of the key benefits:

Local expertise: International sales partners often have a deep understanding of local market conditions and customer needs. This enables them to develop online marketing and sales strategies that are tailored to local conditions. Exporters can benefit from this knowledge and experience to promote and sell their products and services more effectively. For example, it is a challenge for exporters to offer a telephone hotline in Arabic - as required in Dubai.

Reduced costs: When international distribution partners take over e-commerce, exporters can save time and resources. The partners take care of storage, shipping and delivery of the products, which saves exporters costs and effort. In addition, partners can develop customized distribution strategies tailored to local market conditions, reducing marketing and advertising costs.

Increasing brand awareness: By working with international sales partners, exporters can increase their brand awareness in local markets. Partners can develop customized marketing and sales strategies to tailor exporters' products and services to local market conditions and customer needs.

Local legal knowledge: International distributors often have a deep understanding of local regulations and legal requirements. They can help exporters to comply with these requirements and thus reduce the risks and costs associated with cross-border trade.

Configurators - customers can define products in detail online before ordering

Online configurators allow target groups to put together a product by answering questions about their needs. Well-known examples of this are car manufacturers or the personal computer manufacturer Dell, which provide configurators for their products on their websites. Standard products are selected on the basis of predefined options. The configurator helps the customer to choose from the possible options. Examples of this are the Sulzer Pumps Division and the pump manufacturer KSB, which make it easy to determine the ideal industrial standard pump based on lists of questions. Variant products are products that are customized on the basis of standardized components. The components are put together based on the information entered by the customer and the relationships and restrictions between the components. The company Bihler (www.bihler.de) uses a configurator in the area of variant products. Systems are developed

from scratch for each customer. Configurators for systems are used to assemble the product modules online as far as possible. By using configurators, manufacturers can support the modularization and standardization of their system products. The result of the configuration is used in engineering as the basis for planning the system to the customer's specifications.

Collaboration with different target groups such as sales partners and customers can be supported by e-business during the sales process. This online collaboration takes place with varying degrees of intensity. The simplest type of online collaboration is joint online project management. The next step is the sharing of the same data and documents on the products by the partners in the sales process. A very close form of collaboration is online engineering, which enables partners to view, assess and comment on CAD volume models online. For example, any incompatibilities between different components can be identified and resolved early on in the engineering process.

The company's website can also be used as a web store. The product catalog includes functions and data that can be used to provide product information to the target groups. An online catalog enables the selection and ordering of standard products. It enables the product range to be queried, records inquiries or orders and often allows access to information on current orders and stock levels. Catalogs also include the administration of access rights for the customer company's employees via a master user. With the appropriate access rights, an employee can, for example, view net prices and current and invoiced orders.

Order processing is also improved through the direct integration of suppliers' and customers' business systems - using EDI and XML applications.

E-portal - portals geared to market segments

An electronic portal, also known as a digital portal or e-portal, is a website or online platform that serves as a gateway to a wide range of information and services. It typically provides a single point of access to a variety of resources, such as news, email, social media and e-commerce. Electronic portals can be designed for a specific audience or purpose, such as a government portal for citizens, an education portal for students or a corporate portal for employees. The portals can also be personalized for the user by using their credentials and preferences. E-portals can also integrate various functionalities such as search engines, news feeds, discussion forums and multimedia content. They can also be used to access different applications and services via a single login. In the management of international sales partnerships, e-portals are often an application that enables sales partners to access product data (parts lists, spare parts, availability, prices, conditions). This increases the autonomy of international sales partners and boosts the efficiency of manufacturers.

Example ABB e-portal

ABB is active in the field of electrification and automation. The company offers its resellers and distribution partners a Channel Partner Portal (<https://new.abb.com/channel-partners/channel-partner-portal>). This portal provides access to a variety of resources and tools, including product information, marketing materials and training modules.

The Channel Partner Portal (Figure 5) is designed to help ABB partners increase their sales and competitiveness in the market. It contains detailed product information, such as technical specifications, prices and availability. This information is updated regularly to ensure that partners always have access to the latest product offerings.

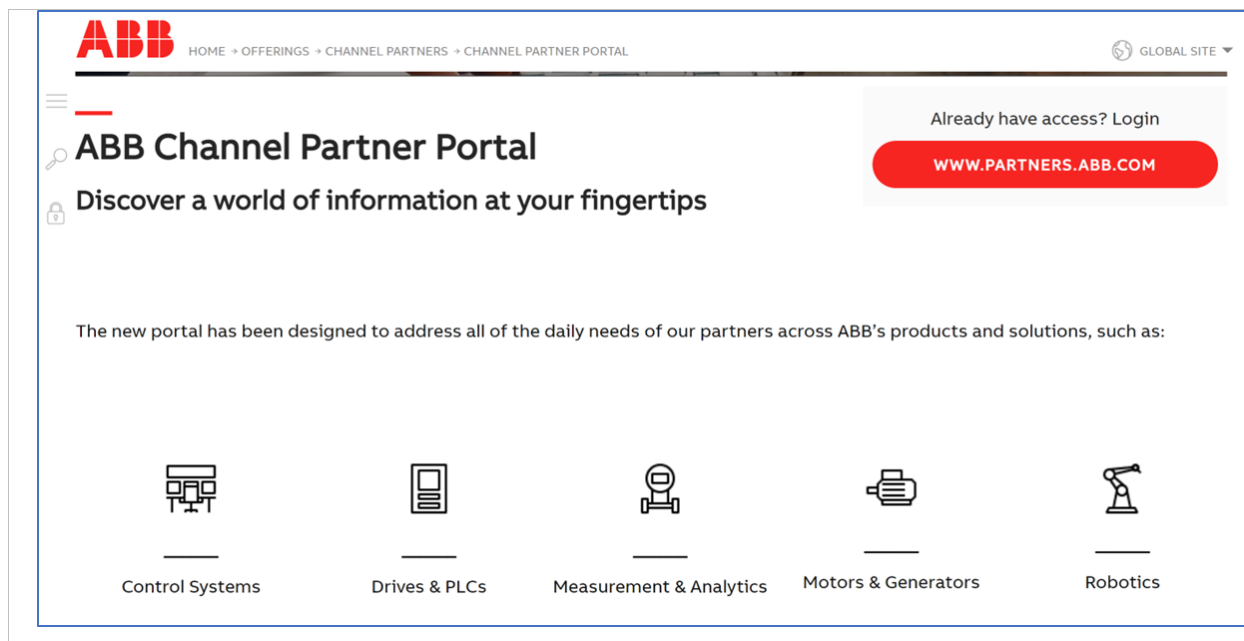


Figure 5 Segment-specific e-commerce applications (Copyright ABB Asea Brown Boveri Ltd)
(<https://new.abb.com/channel-partners/channel-partner-portal>)

The portal also contains a variety of materials, such as brochures, product sheets and videos. These materials can be easily customized with a partner's logo and contact information, making it easy for partners to promote ABB's products and services to their customers.

In addition, the portal offers training modules that cover a wide range of topics, from product installation and maintenance to sales and marketing. These modules are designed to help partners expand their knowledge and expertise, which can lead to increased sales and customer satisfaction.

ABB also provides a secure online ordering system through the portal, allowing partners to order ABB products quickly and easily. The portal also includes a tracking system that allows partners to monitor the status of their orders and receive up-to-date information on shipping and delivery.

The Channel Partner Portal is a valuable tool for ABB's partners. It provides access to the information and resources they need to market and sell ABB's products and services while expanding their knowledge and expertise. By using the portal, partners can increase their competitiveness in the market and drive the growth of their own business.

Evaluation of e-commerce

Potential benefits

- E-commerce improves the quality of the sales process, as incorrect orders are reduced thanks to detailed product information and configurators. This leads to greater customer satisfaction and efficiency in sales.
- The sales process is accelerated as partners have access to the ordering system anytime and anywhere, which increases availability and convenience for the user. This promotes sales and facilitates access to products and spare parts.

Feasibility

- The implementation of e-commerce systems involves a great deal of effort, as the applications have to be constantly updated and adapted to changing market conditions. This requires continuous investment in technology and personnel.
- The acceptance of e-commerce solutions can be a challenge, especially in markets where traditional sales channels dominate. Appropriate training and support programs for partners and customers are necessary to promote acceptance.

5.6 E-learning

E-learning, short for electronic learning, refers to the use of technology to deliver educational content and facilitate learning. This can include online courses, webinars and digital educational resources such as videos, interactive simulations and quizzes. E-learning can be delivered through a variety of platforms, including websites, mobile applications and learning management systems (LMS). Content can be delivered through self-study or in conjunction with instructor-led courses. E-learning allows learners to access learning materials from anywhere and at any time and can provide a more flexible and personalized learning experience. It also enables remote collaboration, which can be significant in international environments across different time zones. E-learning is often used as a supplement to traditional training, but can also be used as the primary training method in distance learning programs.

E-learning often incorporates playful elements that make it more attractive to users. This is based on the realization that people have a natural urge to play and can be motivated by competitive elements. The use of playful elements in a learning process is subsumed under the term "gamification". Learning is encouraged by being able to reach different levels and

receive awards or points credited to a learning account. Manufacturers could also use these rankings to grant different privileges to different customers and sales partners.

E-learning courses are often structured in several stages: after the consultation of videos and documents, an application phase follows, which is validated with a final assessment. There are many possible applications. Numerous companies are already working with e-learning platforms, such as Hamilton Medical College, Sky Frame Academy, Büchi Labortechnik and Reichle & De Massari Academy. Many companies use their own product name for e-learning, such as Hamilton E-Academy or ABB University, in order to better position their training programs with partners and customers.

Example: Hamilton Medical e-Academy

Hamilton Medical is a manufacturer of devices and accessories for patient ventilation. The company offers digital learning to support the training and education of healthcare professionals in the use and application of its devices and technologies. Resources include innovative formats such as learning paths, videos, e-modules and simulation software on topics such as device setup and operation, Hamilton technology, troubleshooting and maintenance, and ventilation basics. Upon successful completion of learning modules, Hamilton Medical issues certificates to recognize newly acquired competencies.

Evaluation of e-learning

Potential benefits

- **Know-how transfer:** E-learning enables a regular and controlled transfer of know-how. Access to IT applications at any time and from anywhere speeds up this process, which is particularly beneficial for exporters as it facilitates collaboration and the exchange of information with international partners.
- **Cost efficiency:** The process becomes more cost-effective as fewer staff are required for the transfer of know-how. This results from the digital nature of e-learning, which reduces physical classroom training and the associated travel and accommodation costs.
- **Increased quality and efficiency:** Process quality and speed are improved through the use of e-learning. Digital learning opportunities can be updated quickly and adapted to changing needs, which leads to more efficient knowledge transfer.

Feasibility

- **Effort:** The implementation of e-learning requires an initially high level of effort, particularly due to the need to keep the applications up to date and often to implement a learning management system (LMS). Despite the challenges associated with implementation, there are numerous best practice cases that demonstrate the feasibility and long-term benefits of e-learning.

- Technical feasibility: The technical implementation is demanding, but feasible. The selection and adaptation of the technology to the specific needs and infrastructure of the company are crucial for success.
- Acceptance: Acceptance by customers and sales partners is another challenge. This can be promoted through targeted incentives (e.g. certificates, bonuses) and demonstrating the added value of e-learning programs.

5.7 NPS / Net Promoter Score

Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a key figure that is used to measure customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The NPS can be determined for sales partners or end customers. The NPS is determined by asking a single question: "How likely is it that you would recommend our company/product/service to a friend or colleague?" The Net Promoter Score (NPS) has established itself as a key figure for measuring customer loyalty.

The answers are rated on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 stands for "very unlikely" and 10 for "very likely". The respondents are then divided into three groups: Promoters (9-10 points), Passives (7-8 points) and Critics (0-6 points).

The NPS can help companies improve their customer retention and loyalty and adapt their business strategies to increase customer satisfaction.

The NPS actually consists of just one question, which can be supplemented by others. Here are example questions from a grinding machine manufacturer. The questions are of course a mixture of questions about the product and about sales and service (the first is the standard NPS question):

- On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely is it that you would recommend our company to a friend or colleague looking for sanders?
- How likely is it that you will buy other machine products from our company in the future?
- How satisfied are you with the quality of our machine products?
- How satisfied are you with the customer service you received from our sales partner?
- How easy was it to order and receive our machine products from our sales partner?
- How quickly and efficiently did our sales partner respond to your queries and problems?
- How well do our machine products meet your requirements and needs?
- How satisfied are you with the price-performance ratio of our machine products?
- How easy was it to communicate with our sales partner's employees?

- How likely is it that you will choose us as your preferred supplier for machine products in the future?

Example use of online Net Promoter Score

A global technology company that provides solutions for the food, chemical and die casting industries uses the online Net Promoter Score. The company uses the NPS to measure customer satisfaction with its products, services and support. It regularly sends surveys to its customers and asks them to rate on a scale of 0 to 10 how likely they are to recommend the company to others. Based on the responses, the company calculates its NPS score and uses it to continuously improve customer satisfaction.

Evaluation Net Promoter Score

Potential benefits

- The use of the Net Promoter Score enables exporters to obtain valuable, fast and cost-effective feedback directly from end customers or partners. This direct feedback can be used to improve product or service quality, increase customer satisfaction and optimize customer relationships.

Feasibility

- Conducting the NPS online is very simple and requires little effort. This makes the NPS an effective tool for market research and customer evaluation that can be implemented quickly.
- Acceptance of conducting NPS surveys with end customers can be low, especially if distribution partners do not want the supplier to make direct contact with the end customer. This requires a sensitive approach and possibly the involvement of sales partners in the process to address concerns.

5.8 Video conference

A video conference is a live audiovisual connection between two or more people who are in different locations and using computers or other devices such as smartphones and tablets. The technology enables real-time audio and video communication over the internet, allowing participants to see and hear each other in real time. This can be used for a variety of purposes, such as business meetings, training and personal communication. The most popular video conferencing platforms include MS Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, Jitsi and Skype.

A modified version of the video conference can be videos produced in advance that are made available to international sales partners. These have the advantage that they can be

consulted at any time, which can be decisive for sales partners in different time zones. Any queries and uncertainties can then be discussed in a live connection after consulting the videos. The advantage is that all participants in the conference already contribute their knowledge to the call.

Example video conference of Frauscher GmbH

Frauscher Sensortechnik GmbH has been providing innovative solutions for the individual requirements of customers worldwide in the field of axle counting and wheel detection for more than 30 years. The company strives to make it easier for system integrators and rail operators to access the information they need to operate and monitor their infrastructure. Frauscher has set up a studio to create courses for its sales partners and customers (Figure 6).

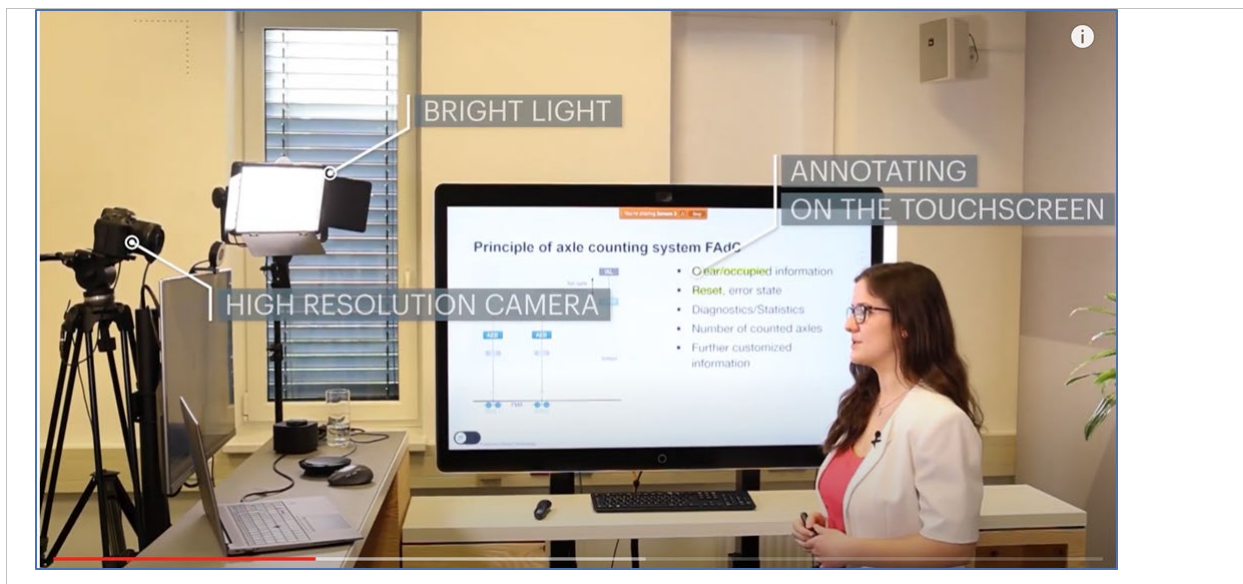


Figure 6 Studio for live video training from Frauscher Sensortechnik GmbH
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56EP_-d6-o)

As part of its customer training program, Frauscher offers video courses to explain the use and maintenance of its products and to train customers accordingly. These videos contain instructions on the installation, operation and troubleshooting of Frauscher products such as wheel detection and axle counting systems. Training is also provided on Frauscher's additional software solutions, which are used to analyse and visualize the collected data in order to make it usable for the customer. Frauscher's video training courses also explain technical details about the products, such as their specifications, functions and certifications. The video training courses serve as a supplement to on-site training, individual remote support and offer a learning option for self-study.

Video conference evaluation

Potential benefits

- Video conferencing enables exporters to maintain personal contacts quickly and cost-effectively worldwide. This technology supports all sub-processes through the possibility of direct, personal exchange online, which significantly improves communication and collaboration across geographical distances.

Feasibility

- The implementation of video conferencing systems is now widespread and involves little effort, even if good technical equipment is required. The availability of high-speed Internet and the user-friendliness of current video conferencing tools have significantly reduced the barriers to entry.
- The acceptance of video conferences among sales partners and customers is generally high, as this form of communication facilitates personal contact without incurring travel costs and time.

5.9 Virtual Reality

Virtual reality (VR) is a computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional environment that can be interacted with using special equipment, such as a VR headset. The equipment provides a fully immersive experience that allows users to look around and interact with virtual objects as if they were in the real world. VR can be used for a variety of purposes, such as gaming, education, training and therapy. VR technology can be used to create realistic simulations of real environments as well as completely imaginary environments. VR equipment typically includes a head-mounted display that covers the eyes and displays the virtual environment, as well as input devices such as handheld controllers that allow the user to interact with the virtual environment.

Example grinding machine manufacturer

The company specializes in the design, development and manufacture of grinding machines. It can use virtual reality (VR) technology as a tool for training and demonstrating its products.

VR technology allows users to immerse themselves in a computer-generated environment and interact with virtual objects as if they were real. The company uses VR to create virtual simulations of the machines so that users can interact with the machines in a safe, realistic and controlled environment. This can be useful for training operators to set up, operate and maintain the machines and for demonstrating the machines' capabilities to potential customers.

The VR simulations can also include virtual scenarios that mimic real-world conditions, such as different types of workpiece materials or different levels of wear and tear on machine components. This can help users to better understand the performance of the machines and identify potential problems before they occur in the actual machines.

In addition, VR technology can be used for remote support and diagnostics, allowing the company's experts to see the same virtual overlays as the technicians on site and provide them with assistance.

Evaluation Virtual Reality

Potential benefits

- By using virtual reality (VR) in combination with digital twins, partners and customers can learn how to handle machines before they are delivered. This enables effective and practical training without the need for physical presence or access to the actual machines.
- The qualification process is accelerated as no time is lost from the completion of the machine to delivery. The process is also cheaper because fewer people have to fly abroad or to Switzerland for training. This leads to a significant reduction in travel costs and organizational effort.

Feasibility

- The implementation of VR at the introductory stage involves a great deal of effort, especially when creating digital twins and programming the learning environment. This technological challenge requires specialized knowledge and resources.
- The acceptance of VR solutions can be a challenge and must be supported by appropriate programs. Promoting the understanding and benefits of VR among partners and customers is crucial to ensure broad acceptance and effective use.

6 Conclusion on the digitalization of international marketing

The digitalization and introduction of IT applications are crucial steps for companies to remain competitive in the digital age. A strategically well thought-out approach is the key to success. Before implementing IT solutions, it is essential to have a set strategy that clearly defines the company's goals and shows how digital technologies can help achieve these goals. The next step involves analyzing and optimizing existing processes to identify and revise inefficient processes so that they can be improved through the use of IT systems. This approach ensures that digitalization is understood and used as an integral part of a comprehensive business strategy, whereby the introduction of IT applications can actually help to increase efficiency, reduce costs and ultimately ensure sustainable business

success. The use of IT solutions without prior process optimization can lead to complications and significantly reduce the benefits of digitalization.

Specific IT applications such as augmented reality and virtual reality potentially revolutionize the product offering through immersive experiences, while chatbots and artificial intelligence enable personalized customer communication and significantly improve customer satisfaction. However, the introduction of these applications is associated with high costs and uncertainties due to the young state of the technologies. Content marketing is playing an increasing role in enabling companies to strengthen their brand and retain customers through valuable information. CRM systems are a great help in effectively managing customer relationships by enabling personalized marketing strategies. E-commerce platforms open up new opportunities in the area of distribution and increase the reach for customers worldwide. E-learning applications support the training and development of employees and customers, while the Net Promoter Score provides valuable insights into partner and customer satisfaction and helps companies to improve their offerings. Video conferencing technologies promote communication and collaboration across geographical boundaries.

The following applications have high potential benefits and a high degree of feasibility: E-commerce, e-learning and content marketing, video conferencing and Net Promoter Score. These applications not only promise high benefits in the motivation and selection phase, but are also relatively easy to implement. They should therefore be considered as a priority and included in the initial clarification of the introduction of IT applications.

High potential benefits with low feasibility: Augmented reality, virtual reality, CRM. These technologies offer great benefits, particularly in the qualification and evaluation phase, but could be associated with major challenges during implementation. They should therefore be evaluated after the applications mentioned first, if the resources and ability to implement more complex solutions are available.

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