

Knowledge and usage of methods of online promotion by students as potential entrepreneurs

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Abstract. According to popular belief, it has never been easier to raise funds to run and manage one's own business. In an era of startups popping up like mushrooms, crowdfunding, business angels, venture capital and mobile Internet, investing in a business is a much easier undertaking than it was two decades ago. Furthermore, Augmented Reality available through mobile devices like smartphones or tablets, the Internet of Things, which makes the consumer feel like a science fiction character in their own home, or Virtual Reality shopping, a Matrix movie-like experience in a testing phase at the moment, provide increasingly more innovative ways to take one's first steps in business, gather momentum, and win loyal customers. According to the results, running one's own business is not a popular professional plan among young people, which is especially surprising given the fact that the majority of the respondents were students of specialisations that equipped them with knowledge facilitating entrepreneurial activities. Running one's own business seemed to be an attractive career path for about 30% of the respondents. Although they realise the significance of the Internet in running their own business, they do not believe that this is always a necessary tool. The students declared knowledge of multiple methods of communication and promotion and often use social media channels, but rarely expressed the desire to use these measures. A particular way of using the Internet to foster entrepreneurship are methods of online promotion like Social Media Marketing or Search Engine Optimization. Those tools enable reaching potential customers and engaging in an active dialogue with them about their favourite brands, products and services. They also allow exchange of information with the entrepreneur and are currently one of the fundamental tools for creating a company's success. The article presents the results of research on the knowledge of methods of online promotion and networking by students as potential entrepreneurs.

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1 Introduction

According to popular belief, it has never been easier to raise funds to run and manage one's own business. In an era of startups popping up like mushrooms, crowdfunding, business angels, venture capital and mobile Internet, running a business seems to be a much easier undertaking than it was two decades ago [1-2]. Furthermore, Augmented Reality available through mobile devices like smartphones or tablets, the Internet of Things, which makes the consumer feel like a science fiction character in their own home, or Virtual Reality shopping, a Matrix movie-like experience in a testing phase at the moment, provide increasingly more innovative ways to take one's first steps in business, gather momentum and win loyal customers [3]. The usage of networking apps, such as LinkedIn, and all the various ways of promotion through Online Marketing should make it easy for beginning entrepreneurs – at least in theory.

2 The study

A study was conducted in February 2017 among 166 students from three universities in Wielkopolska. In that group, 65 people studied Economics, 17 – Education in Technology and Informatics, 30 – Logistics, 16 – Tourism and Recreation, 34 – Law in Business, and four – Management. Most of the respondents were women, representing 67.5% of the total. Male students accounted for 32.5% of all respondents. The students usually lived in the countryside or in large cities (cf. Table. 1). The vast majority (88.5%) were people aged between 18 and 25, and only 11% of the respondents were over 26 years old.

Table 1. Place of residence of the students surveyed

Place of residence:	Quantity:	Percent:
Village	70	42.17
City up to 10K inhabitants	19	11.45
City from 10K to 50K	24	14.46
City from 50K to 200K	22	13.25
City above 200K	31	18.67
Total:	166	100

Source: Own research.

Respondents were also asked about their current job situation and plans for the future. The largest group were people who were not sure yet if they wanted to set up their own business. It is worth noting that they were mainly students who were not employed at the time and, therefore, did not have the opportunity to gain any work experience, which may somewhat restrict the choices related to their career [4-6].

Respondents who intended to start their own business accounted for about 32%, and those who were entrepreneurs at the time represented about 7% (cf. Table 2).

Table 2. Current employment situation and future plans of the students surveyed

Professional situation:	Quantity:	Percent:
Currently, I am not working professionally and I do not know if I want to start my own business.	48	29.8
I am not working professionally, but I want to start my own company	35	21.73
I am not working professionally and do not want to start my own business.	10	6.21
I am working professionally, but I want to start my own company.	18	11.2

I am currently working and I do not know if I want to start a business.	38	23.60
I am running my own company and I own it.	10	6.21
I am running my own company and I am a co-owner.	2	1.24
Total:	161	100

Source: Own research.

The vast majority of the respondents could not imagine running their own business without a website (89.87%), but there were also those who did not exclude this possibility (10.13%). The latter supported their conviction that they “could imagine conducting a business without a website” with the following arguments:

- “Not every business needs a website.”
- “Cooperation with only one entity, no need to acquire new contacts.”
- “This industry does not require me to provide a website.”
- “The industry in which I plan to be active is based on direct contact with the customer. A website would have a negligible impact on work performance.”
- “The industry (trade – a grocery store) does not need online advertising, in my opinion.”
- “There are other forms of advertising.”
- “Because I’d like to acquire customers only from the immediate neighbourhood.”
- “Certain companies do not need one.”
- “I have a fixed number of customers, and I cannot take more at the moment, so I don’t need additional forms of promotion.”
- “It is possible without a website if you have a good location and well-developed marketing.”

3 Knowledge on gaining professional contacts and online promotion

Respondents were asked about their knowledge of crowdfunding internet portals that could potentially help them to raise money for their starting capital. More than half of the students knew the Polish digital platform *polakpotrafi.pl* only. Other, especially foreign ones did not seem to be popular among them (cf. Table 3).

Table 3. Knowledge of internet portals according to students’ declarations

Crowdfund ing portal	kickstarter.com	indiegogo.com	polakpotrafi.pl	wspieram.to
Known (%)	20.48	14.46	55.42	28.31
Not known (%)	79.52	85.54	44.58	71.69
Total	166	166	166	166

Source: Own research.

Networking services like LinkedIn and its Polish counterpart, GoldenLine, are popular tools for networking – gaining new business contacts, maintain relationships with people from one’s industry, and taking part in discussions in topic-related groups.

The study showed that networking websites did not facilitate the respondents in obtaining professional contacts. It should be noted, however, that perhaps only a small number of them (4 to 5%) were actively looking for such contacts at the time, while at university (Table 4). This presumption is supported by the fact that only about 30% of the respondents were expecting to start their own business. Nevertheless, it was interesting that all students who had a GoldenLine account had a LinkedIn account too.

Table 4. Knowledge of internet portals according to students' declarations

Question:	Are you aware of the existence of the Goldenline.pl social network?	Do you have an account on the Goldenline.pl social network?	Have you acquired at least one contact on Goldenline.pl	Are you aware of the existence of the LinkedIn.com social network?	Do you have an account on the LinkedIn.com social network?	Have you acquired at least one contact on LinkedIn.com	Are you aware of the existence of the Xing social network?	Do you have an account on the Xing social network?	Have you acquired at least one contact on Xing?
Yes (%):	76.51	11.44	4.22	64.46	11.44	5.42	27.71	01.81	0
No (%):	23.49	88.55	95.78	35.54	88.55	94.58	72.29	98.192	100
Total:	166	166	166	166	166	166	166	166	166

Source: own research

A wide variety of web promotion methods and tools has evolved along with technological advances over the last three decades. Their selection and scope of use in shaping one's promotion on the Internet depends on the knowledge of the market and the target consumer group, the activities of competitors, and the marketing strategy developed.

Knowledge of the methods of communication and promotion on the Internet among the respondents is shown in the table below (Table 5).

Table 5. Students' knowledge of methods of communication and promotion on the Internet

Method	Yes (in %)	No (in %)	Total
Social Media Marketing (published content)	59.15	40.85	164
Social Media Marketing (paid advertising)	57.66	42.33	163
Blogs	65.85	34.15	164
Display advertising (no PPC such as AdWords)	39.27	60.73	163
PPC Advertising (e.g. AdWords)	30.06	69.94	163
SEO	27.00	73.00	163
Affiliate Marketing	29.27	70.73	164
Couponing (e.g. Groupon)	40.50	59.50	163

Source: Own research.

The respondents were mostly familiar with Social Media Marketing (59.15%), including Blogs (65.85%), while Search Engine Optimization was known to the smallest group (27%) [7-8]. It is worth noting that the respondents had generally good knowledge of those methods of online promotion. Even those scoring the lowest were still known to approximately 30% of the students. On the other hand, it was surprising that those young people did not realise the advantages of using Social Media for business promotion (40.85%). Only six respondents used Social Media for business purposes in the past. It is worth remembering, however, that only 12 people among the respondents had their own company, and more than half of them (53%) was professionally inactive.

Table 6. Usage of social media by respondents

Social Media channel	Currently using	Will use for business
Facebook	74.70	29.52
Twitter	10.84	5.42
YouTube	53.61	10.84
Google+	39.76	10.84
Instagram	38.55	16.87
nk.pl	4.81	1.81
Snapchat	30.72	6.02
Hangout	3.61	3.61

Source: Own research.

4 Summary

In summary, running one's own business is not a popular professional plan among young people, which is especially surprising given the fact that the majority of the respondents were students of specialisations that equipped them with knowledge facilitating entrepreneurial activities.

Running one's own business seemed to be an attractive career path for about 30% of the respondents. Although they realise the significance of the Internet in running their own business, they do not believe that this is always a necessary tool.

The students declared knowledge of multiple methods of communication and promotion and often use social media channels, but rarely expressed the desire to use these measures. It can, therefore, be assumed that they will not make full use of the opportunities offered by that medium, which will most probably limit the development of their professional activities in the future.

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