

## The Viability of Internet Advertising (Social Media) as a Promotion Medium for a Governmental Agency Targeting Industrial Customers

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**ABSTRACT** The study investigates the viability of using Internet advertising, with a focus on social media, as a promotion medium for a governmental agency. An evaluation of Richards Bay Industrial Development Zone (RBIDZ)'s current advertising strategy was undertaken to determine if social media was a viable marketing option for targeting industrial customers. Using survey research and based on a random sample of 100 respondents, the study found that the most preferred medium for business leads were referrals from a network of colleagues and friends, followed by internet search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Twitter and Facebook were found to be the less frequently used mediums. The paper recommends strategies to improve brand awareness for RBIDZ. A conceptual framework for targeting industrial customers is proposed.

### INTRODUCTION

With the business and consumer environment changing at a rapid pace, marketing communication channels have changed, along with the way in which industrial firms communicate with their customers in order to stay relevant in business (Weber 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010; Jones and Harvey 2016; Mitra 2016). It is imperative for every business to employ creative and innovative advertising with relevant content (Connolly et al. 2016; Mitra 2016). The Internet is premised on information sharing and permits users to express an opinion, create and share content, which in turn, has led to users placing more trust in peers than in organisations (Zamani et al. 2015). This paradigm shift has created several challenges for marketers as previously standardised, traditional or blanket-approach marketing strategies have now become redundant (Meuse 2012). Meuse (2012) as well as Dubois et al. (2016) posited further that advertising for a product and an institution differs more now than in previous years due to the advancement of technology, the Internet and a more knowledgeable and well informed consumer. Based on this, the study sought to assess the viability of Internet advertising (social media) as a promotion medium in industrial

advertising. Connolly et al. (2016) postulated that companies have realised that social media is an influential force on customer perceptions and behaviour. Thus they have been making considerable investments in social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter with expectations of improving customer engagement and firming customer relationships in order to increase sales revenues and market share. According to Connolly et al. (2016) to date, "little guidance exists as to what constitutes an effective deployment of social media and there is no empirical evidence that social media investments are yielding positive returns."

### Literature Review

Institutional advertising aims to develop goodwill for a company with its objectives being to improve the advertiser's image, reputation and relations with the various groups that the company transacts with; product advertising, on the other hand, tries to sell a specific product to a consumer. Industrial advertising also places emphasis on institutional advertising with a focus on the brand, while product advertising focuses on the specific benefits of the product. O'Malley (2013) maintained that consistency and visibili-

ty of the brand in all marketing collateral is vital to ensure brand recognition is achieved. Traditionally, the type of media used in industrial advertising has mainly been print media and direct marketing (Diemand et al. 2014). However, Newman et al. (2004) pointed out that “the Internet provides companies with many promotional and communication opportunities, and they further suggested that this communication medium should be integrated by management as part of the firm’s overall marketing strategy for its brand”. Srinivasan et al. (2002), DuFrene et al. (2005), Stafford and Faber (2005) and Godfrey et al. (2011) have all highlighted the Internet’s advertising ability of interactivity, communication and engagement. Rodriguez et al. (2012) indicated that Internet advertising has the ability to improve sales professionals’ ability to communicate clearly with clients and thus has the improved ability to win business through social media’s customer relationship management (CRM) due to the interactive nature of the Internet. Halligan and Shah (2009), Scott (2010) and Mitra (2016) claimed that the roles of the buyer and seller in terms of content creation are changing and marketers today must earn the customer’s attention by publishing interesting, useful and/or helpful content, for example, in the form of a blog, newsletter, whitepaper or magazine.

Generally, Internet-based advertising tools used by companies are the company’s website, email marketing, social media tools and video uploads. Within a short space of time (ten years or so), social media has become significant in consumers’ lives, both personally and professionally (Brenner and Smith 2013; Bradley 2015). Social media by nature is a very disruptive form of technology that has become a vital tool for marketing, promotion and communication between organisations and their prospective target markets and customers (McCallum 2015). With the introduction of social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Flickr and LinkedIn, for example, many companies have followed the trend of using social media tools in their marketing strategy without much knowledge, experience or relevant applicability to their business (McCallum 2015; Connolly et al. 2016). Thus, in some cases, incorrect marketing strategies have been employed using these mediums.

Social media tools’ intended purpose is social in nature and these tools allow engagement

between people and organisations in order to enable people to express their feelings regarding a company, event, person, product or service they have interacted with, and in turn a company or person catapults into action (when needed) to address an area of concern for a customer (Jones 2012b; Rodriguez et al. 2012). Schlinke and Crain (2013) suggested that social media tools are better suited for engagement, awareness building, brand extension development and reputation management. Cinman (2012) argued that whether social media is good or bad, the world has flocked to Facebook, followed by Twitter and Google+ and other social platforms, and these social media tools have transformed the web from being a mere publishing medium to a medium for engagement. Recent reports indicate that large brands such as Coca-Cola are directing more traffic to their Facebook pages instead of focusing on their corporate website (Cinman 2012).

Notwithstanding that not every product or service can be marketed on social media, the president of the United States of America, Barack Obama’s use of social media for his political campaign in 2008 proved that many people are spending time on social media and even political parties can effectively harness this medium to persuade and influence the masses. The presidential campaign shone the spotlight on the importance of using the Internet in New Age campaigning by utilising different types of social media for example Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and custom generated social engines (Jones 2012b). Some services or products may not acquire mileage in terms of market share and sales when using social media; social media, however, may be used for awareness creation about an organisation. For example, an analysis by Stewart (2014) indicated that “most South African Facebook pages are at just fewer than 2 percent engagements”. It is also evident that those Facebook members that surpass the target benchmark of 10 percent, are more of a reactive engagement boosted by short-term advertising and competitions which drive people to ‘Like’ the page and in the process directly affect the ‘talking about’ numbers while falsely inflating engagements (Stewart 2014).

Research scholars (Foster 2005; Michaelidou et al. 2011) have been examining ways in which to combine digital marketing communication (Internet, email, mobile) with traditional mar-

keting communications in order to communicate with industrial customers. The sense is that traditional marketing communications (for example, advertising) play a lesser role than customer relationship management, personal interaction and the 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) in the marketing mix (Gilliland and Johnston 1997; Jackson et al. 1987; Foster 2006). Wertime and Fenwick (2008) and Mitra (2016) indicated that industrial firms are uncertain about which elements are essential to the digital marketing process, the appropriate content, which digital strategy should be followed and are struggling to use it effectively to fulfil their goals. Mitra (2016) pointed out that industrial content marketing can be very effective in addressing two common problems that many manufacturers and distributors face: the lack of awareness among engineers and industrial buyers and the inability to differentiate them from the competition. Due to the easy accessibility of information today, industrial buyers prefer to use a variety of digital tools for research; thus it is vital for industrial companies to address the above stated problems as this could have a negative impact on their sales.

Earlier research on how firms utilise digital communication channels and how the use of these channels affect buyer-seller relationships have been explored (Parasuraman and Zinkhan 2002; Day and Bens 2005; Foster 2005; Constantinides and Fountain 2008; Mulhern 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010; Kerrigan and Graham 2010; Michaelidou et al. 2011; Järvinen et al. 2012). Of particular interest is how industrial marketers combine online and offline marketing communication efforts to create more value for their customers and other stakeholders (Foster 2005; Karjaluo et al. 2015). It is therefore against this background that this study seeks to assess the effectiveness of employing Internet advertising, with the focus on the use of social media as a possible promotion medium for RBIDZ to increase market share and brand awareness.

RBIDZ is a purpose-built and secure industrial estate on the North-Eastern coast of Kwa-Zulu-Natal, linked to the international sea port of Richards Bay. This development zone encourages international competitiveness through tax and duty-free incentives, attracting export-oriented manufacturing companies, as well as world-class infrastructure ([www.rbidz.co.za](http://www.rbidz.co.za)). In

South Africa, Industrial Development Zones (IDZ) were established with the aim of attracting investment and increasing exports and the competitiveness of South African products. Presently, there are five IDZs: Port Elizabeth (Coega IDZ), East London (ELIDZ), Richards Bay (RBIDZ), Gauteng (OR Tambo International Airport) and Saldanha Bay. These IDZs are key drivers to facilitate investment, create jobs and boost exports in the country. However, to ensure international competitiveness and sustainability, investment by major companies both locally and international, is required. Thus, it is paramount for the IDZs to market their offerings in the most appropriate and relevant manner to these companies to secure investment for the zones. To date, RBIDZ still has only one company located in the zone. The advertisements' content of RBIDZ normally includes services that RBIDZ renders, its value proposition, the vision and mission, contact details, physical address as well as a detailed company profile, depending on the platform used. RBIDZ currently uses business magazines (for example, *Sawubona*, *African Decision*, and *Kwa-Zulu-Natal Top Business*) to advertise its services. In addition, advertising is also placed in local newspapers, on the company's website, at certain trade shows and on the nine Airports Company South African (ACSA) airport display televisions to market their services. The Internet and social media advertising are new forms of advertising that many companies worldwide are venturing into. RBIDZ believes that it is not maximising the Internet and social media platforms, since it only uses webpage advertising (as an Internet-based tool) to increase sales and brand awareness. The aim of this study was to explore the effectiveness of Internet advertising, with a focus on social media as a channel of marketing and a brand awareness tool, to promote RBIDZ.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research methodology adopted for this research was of a quantitative nature. A random sampling approach was undertaken to survey the targeted sample using questionnaires, where the targeted sample of this research was divided into three groups: the management of the current client, the management of three potential client companies as well as the management of the main shareholder of the company (Depart-

ment of Economic Development and Trade (DEDT) Ministry), totalling one hundred respondents in the Richards Bay area. Of the 100 respondents, 63 completed the survey in full. The Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.924 emerged from the questionnaire, indicating an acceptable reliability of responses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the survey, the key findings are presented. Following the presentation of the results, there are recommendations on how best to utilise internet advertising for a positive impact on the RBIDZ Brand.

### Advertising Medium's Effect on Brand Visibility and Motivation to Contact RBIDZ

In general, the majority of the respondents (76.7%) in this study knew about RBIDZ through various advertising mediums. The results showed that newspaper advertising was the number one medium for enhancing brand visibility, with the highest percentage (57.9%) of respondents indicating that they heard about RBIDZ through newspaper articles. The second most effective advertising medium was the referral by colleagues and friends (54.5%). The RBIDZ company website ranked third (54.1%), followed by stakeholder breakfast sessions (45.9%). Only 22.9 percent had heard about RBIDZ through Search Engines (SE) which were ranked seventh in the ranking of mediums. This implies that search engines still need to be optimised if the company is to harness the vast potential that computer-based advertising can offer. The least popular medium for advertising was airport advertising with only 14.3 percent of the respondents indicating that they had heard about RBIDZ through broadcasts on airport televisions. As indicated by Wertime and Fenwick (2008) as well as Mitra (2016), industrial firms are uncertain about how best to employ digital marketing. Mitra (2016) went on to say that industrial companies find it challenging to market to engineers with their greatest difficulty being a lack of response from their target audience.

### Advertising Medium's General Effectiveness

The majority of the respondents in the sample group had heard about RBIDZ through newspaper articles, but indicated that the company's website was the most effective medium as it is

very informative (61.5% concur). It can be deduced that the two mediums perform different roles in terms of brand awareness, with the newspaper conveying more noticeability (or visibility) while the company website provides more detailed information about RBIDZ. Thus, it is paramount, as noted by Mitra (2016), that the most appropriate content is used in the digital campaigns that will aid in brand awareness and ultimately sales conversion. Mitra (2016) went on to cite Engineering 360's online survey which found only 39 percent of engineering, technical, manufacturing and industrial companies had begun using content marketing.

### Exploration of the Effectiveness of Internet Advertising as an Advertising Tool for RBIDZ

#### *The Most Preferred Medium for Sourcing Leads or Companies to do Business with*

Table 1 illustrates the 'preferred medium for business leads' and word-of-mouth (Referral by colleagues/friends) was the most often used medium (79.2%) followed by Internet search engines (76.4%). Mohanty and Gahan (2012) claimed that the key success factor in industrial buying is the development and preservation of long-term relationships between buyers and sellers which forms a strong competitive advantage tool including positive word-of-mouth/referrals for the company. Newspapers were earlier highlighted as being the most informative and were one of the leading tools that respondents said they had learnt about RBIDZ through (confirmed by 57.7 percent of the respondents often using this medium for business leads). The less used media for sourcing companies to do business with were Twitter, Facebook, the company website and television advertising.

#### *Useful Features of Internet Advertising*

Based on the questions assessing the most useful features of Internet advertising, it was found that most people (80%) strongly agreed that Internet advertising increases brand awareness of a company. The other two most useful features were that Internet advertising has good interactivity features and that it is informative. Similar findings were found by Srinivasan et al. (2002), DuFrene et al. (2005), Stafford and Faber (2005), Godfrey et al. (2011) and Rodriguez et al.

**Table 1: Preferred medium for business leads**

<i>Medium used for sourcing companies to do business with</i>	<i>Never (%)</i>	<i>Sometimes (%)</i>	<i>Often (%)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Twitter page	45.8	56.3	0.0	12
Internet search engines	3.6	21.0	76.4	2
Linkedin	15.1	49.1	35.8	8
Facebook account	22.4	59.1	18.4	10
Company website	20.4	53.7	16.7	11
Magazine advertising	13.5	46.2	40.4	5
Billboard advertising	14.0	48.0	38.0	6
Television advertising	14.0	58.0	28.0	9
Newspaper advertising	7.7	34.6	57.7	3
Radio advertising	11.5	52.0	36.5	7
Trade shows and Exhibition advertising	9.8	41.2	49.0	4
Referrals by colleagues/friends	1.9	18.9	79.2	1

*Source:* Author

(2012) who highlighted the Internet's advertising ability of interactivity, communication, engagement. The Internet has the ability to improve sales professionals' capability to communicate clearly with clients and the interactive nature of the Internet has led to increased sales.

#### ***Reasons for Making Use of the Internet***

The study found that the reason most people make use of the Internet is to search for *business related issues*. The results indicate that 89.9 percent of Internet users are looking for business solutions on the Internet. This therefore presents an ideal opportunity for RBIDZ to be present on the same platform in order to capitalise and attain mileage for brand visibility. Similar findings were cited by Mitra (2016), "according to the Industrial Buy Cycle survey of engineers and technical professionals conducted by IHS Engineering 360 (formally GlobalSpec), the top three most frequently used sources for searching for products and services to purchase are search engines, supplier websites, and online catalogues." The study established further that at the beginning of the Buying Cycle, namely the Needs Awareness and Research phases, industrial professionals/buyers use a variety of online sources of information while during the final procurement stage, the suppliers' websites and online catalogues form the most important sources of information. Today's industrial buyers have changed their buying journey to one in which they prefer to operate in a self-serve and self-select mode by using a variety of digital sources of information (Mitra 2016).

*Access to e-mails* (81%) and *online news and articles* (78%) was ranked second. Other types of Internet advertising involve e-mail and e-marketing, where RBIDZ can frequently communicate with current and potential subscribers via newsletters and information updates. Of noteworthy importance is approximately 62 percent of the respondents agreeing that they utilise the Internet to *access telephone listings*, so therefore it could greatly benefit RBIDZ to enlist their details with a host of search engines. *Watching videos and/or playing video games* ranked amongst the lowest (12.1%), which can be expected from the sample group that was studied. Most of the respondents indicated that they are not interested in using the Internet to simply "*view internet advertisements*"; this question in the questionnaire received the second lowest score (30.5%).

#### ***Effects of the Internet on Business***

The Likert Rating Scale was used. The mean scores for the five items analysed are above 3.00 (neutral) which implies that the respondents were mostly agreeing or strongly agreeing that the Internet will improve business awareness and marketshare.

Beginning with the reduction in operating costs, 51.9 percent of respondents believed that the Internet will cut advertising costs (with a mean of 3.46, that is between neutral (3.00) and agree (4.00)); this means that while there is general agreement that the Internet will reduce advertising costs there is some reservation about the cost-cutting capabilities of the Internet. The mean value in all the other questions is above

4.00 which is a stronger confirmation that Internet advertising will ensure a continual 24/7 global footprint for the company (4.29), will improve the catchment area (4.02), will ensure timely delivery of communication to the target audience (4.07) and will improve the management of the brand's reputation (4.02). Research scholars cited earlier have found benefits of the Internet in business with regard to engagement, brand awareness and to some degree, sales. Engineering 360's online survey found only 12 percent of engineering, technical, manufacturing and industrial companies could show how content marketing contributed to their sales (Mitra 2016).

***Recommendations on How Best to Utilise Internet Advertising to have a Positive Impact on the RBIDZ Brand***

*The Most Recommended Advertising Medium RBIDZ should use for Market Share Gain*

The results rank the company's website at number 1 (with the mean value of 4.51) which means that it is the most preferred type of advertising medium for achieving a bigger market share. After the company's website, the next best tools most recommended were Trade Shows and Exhibitions with the mean value of 4.43, followed by advertising in industrial magazines and advertising on news and professional websites with the mean value of 4.35 each. The least recommended were pop-up advertisements and blogging with a mean value of 2.98 and 3.00 respectively. Mitra (2016) advised that an industrial website design or re-design should not be a quick decision because the website is the very foundation of an online presence and offering. Careful thought should be put into the content for the medium and the suitable mediums to use. She also advised industrial marketers to produce engaging content for their digital platforms.

*The Most Preferred Advertising RBIDZ should use for Visibility/Brand Awareness*

The recommended tools to increase visibility or brand awareness were the company's website with a mean value of 4.67, followed closely by advertising on news and professional websites with the mean value of 4.49 and in industrial magazines with a 4.42 mean value. These tools,

whether Internet-based or non-Internet based, complement each other. Based on the findings of the study and that of Mitra (2016), marketers must ensure their website and content marketing advertising on various mediums has relevant and engaging content. Pop-up advertisements, blogging, banner advertisements and social networking sites scored below a mean value of 3.00.

The research found that newspaper advertising is the number one medium used to convey the profile of RBIDZ, followed by the referral of a colleague or friend which, confirming that word of mouth is also a trusted medium. Search engines were ranked as the second-least common medium from which respondents heard about RBIDZ, which indicates that the company still needs to put more effort in maximising this online platform. This analysis reveals that the respondents agree that RBIDZ is still not that visible on search engines or online platforms.

In addressing the objective of "the effectiveness of Internet advertising as a tool that RBIDZ may utilise", the analysis was made based on the most preferred medium that respondents used for business leads and the useful features of Internet advertising. The preferred medium, Internet search engines, were ranked second with 76.4 percent after referrals by colleagues/friends which were ranked first. This confirms the effectiveness of this platform and also indicates that people make use of the medium for business interaction or information research. Mitra (2016) and other research scholars cited earlier similar sentiments with regard to digital advertising. RBIDZ is not yet maximising advertising opportunities especially on Internet search engines where its clients and potential clients would prefer to look for business leads. It can be concluded by observation that the advertising platforms complement each other when studied and used appropriately. It is evident that not every product or service can be marketed on social media; the findings indicate that Twitter is the least preferred medium used for business leads with a rating of 0.0 percent. This is closely followed by Facebook which also ranks at the bottom of the scale.

Determining the impact of Internet advertising on the RBIDZ brand, based on the results presented, it can be concluded that RBIDZ can increase its visibility (brand awareness) and business leads (expand on market share) if the

Internet advertising division of the business was reinforced. This can be achieved by having an improved search engine optimised (SEO) company website that can also be accessed from different types of devices and being able to advertise on industry professional websites using relevant and engaging content. Most of the respondents indicated that they were searching for business related issues when they are online, which creates the opportunity for RBIDZ to positively position itself with the relevant audiences should they maximise their presence on interactive advertising platforms. It is worth noting that pop-up banners and social media tools should be used with caution as they are perceived negatively amongst online users. The evidence or findings of the empirical study regarding Facebook recommendations have proved to be very low, in line with the analysis conducted by Stewart (2014) who indicated that most South African Facebook pages are at just fewer than 2 percent engagements. Tomaselli (2012) also critiqued the bloggers/blogging and this has been confirmed by the empirical study as well. The empirical study has further showed that pop-ups and pop under advertising should not be recommended for use as they are often blocked due to their possible annoyance to online users. Thus, marketing communications will need to include strategies for creating online communities, generating leads from online environments while collaborating with customers to gain a better understanding of their needs if they wish to stay relevant (Weber 2009). Companies are further advised to focus on the customers' journey and produce content that is relevant and via the right channels (Edelman 2014).

According to the following literature surveyed by Foster (2005), Welling and White (2006), Mangold and Faulds (2009), Mulhern (2009), Kerrigan and Graham (2010), Michaelidou et al. (2011), Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) and Järvinen et al. (2012), the main areas of industrial marketing, now known as business-to-business marketing, strategies are: creating and maintaining effective communication with existing customers; sales support and providing an efficient sales process system; and brand building awareness among stakeholders.

Taking into account the areas listed above, marketers should also be cognisant of the myriad of methods in which Internet marketing can

be used to support the industrial marketing communication mix.

## CONCLUSION

This research study was undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of Internet advertising with a focus on social media as a channel for marketing and creating brand awareness to promote a governmental agency (RBIDZ) targeting industrial customers while assessing its current advertising strategies. The empirical study indicated that most respondents know about RBIDZ and its services. Internet advertising, namely, the company website and SEO have proved to be effective and will positively build the brand while social media advertising has been proven to be less effective.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Governmental organisations targeting industrial customers should not neglect traditional media, that is, newspapers, exhibitions, word-of-mouth as these platforms provide abundant target market exposure for the organisation. Thus, it is advised that the traditional advertising mediums be revisited and industrial magazines be reconsidered using engaging, relevant and creative content to help increase brand awareness and motivate buyers towards sales conversion.
2. The study showed that RBIDZ is not effectively making use of the broadcasting platform, for example television; this medium can be explored by targeting specific key slots and channels during broadcasting to increase brand awareness and strategically direct traffic to the company website.
3. The effectiveness of display advertising at the airport should be reassessed as it did not yield high effectiveness scores in the study.
4. Employing an appropriate advertising strategy for an organisation is important, whether it is an Internet advertising strategy or any other advertising strategy. The company website should be redesigned in order to ensure that it is trendy, relevant, easy to navigate, downloads information rapidly and is search engine optimised. Innovative and informative videos about

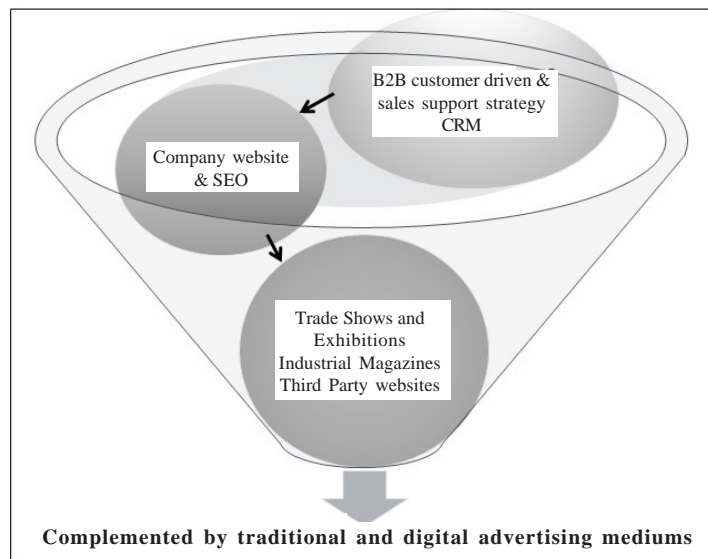
the company, its business initiatives and corporate social investment (CSI) activities, and articles or white papers on relevant topics pertaining to the industry and their prospective clients, should be found on the company website. Even though the results are less favourable for social media advertising, due to its interactive features and awareness creation abilities, it is worthwhile to selectively place a company's brand online with the aim of engaging with potential clients and understanding their behaviours. It should be a medium used to increase awareness and engagement and build customer knowledge.

5. It is recommended that the brand be promoted on relevant third party websites, professional association websites, trade directories/databases and search engines to direct traffic to the company's website.
6. It should also be noted that RBIDZ's potential clients have confidence in trade shows and exhibitions and therefore organisations should revise their trade stands by employing creative innovative techniques to create awareness. Informative marketing material and knowledgeable and approachable staff must be present to assist and initiate industry-related conversations. The correct positioning, layout

and ambience of a trade stand are vital. A marketing strategy related to the event should be deployed using targeted focused bulk emails in order to distribute electronic newsletters and customer magazines, send seminar information and invitations to trade shows and other events, including advertising the event on the company and other third party websites. In addition, organisations should create informative personalised newsletters and magazines for their existing and potential clients.

7. It is advised that organisations advertise in industrial and property leasing magazines. In addition, it will be advantageous to advertise in industry magazines that potential clients subscribe to and/or advertise in.
8. All advertising should be subjected to advertising testing (A/B Testing) by doing research to gauge the potential effectiveness of the proposed or current advertising content in the existing and/or potential target market(s).
9. Heightened sales support and a fluid sales process should be implemented both online and offline.

Taking into account the findings of the study and literature, a proposed framework (Fig. 1) has been created.



**Fig. 1. Framework for Marketing an Industrial Company/Governmental Agency**  
 Source: Illustration developed by Shamola Pramjeeth (2015)



### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Access to a larger sample size, finances and time were the main limitations to this study, which prevented a larger sample being drawn from companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Thus, it is recommended that further studies be conducted using a larger and more representative sample and a comparison between other IDZ's should be conducted.

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