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ENTRY PLAN FOR THE FINNISH DISC GOLF MARKET – CASE  
STUDY: ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS.

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**Title**

Entry Plan for the Finnish Disc Golf Market – Case Above Ground Level Discs.

**Commissioned by:**

Above Ground Level Discs

**Abstract**

This thesis was commissioned by an American disc golf company called Above Ground Level Discs. The thesis analyzes the Finnish disc golf market. The aim of the thesis is to find out whether it is worthwhile for the company to expand its business to Finland.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. The quantitative data consisted of conducting a web-based questionnaire and interviewing experts in the field of disc golf. The anonymous questionnaire accumulated 505 respondents. Secondary data was collected from sources such as business textbooks and websites.

With the help of tools such as a SWOT analysis and a PESTEL analysis, the questionnaire and the interviews, the company was given suggestions on how to enter the Finnish market.

Finnish disc golf players were interested in the Above Ground Level Discs' products. Indirect export was suggested as the primary option and strategic alliance as the secondary option to enter the Finnish market.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Disc Golf is a sport with the same basic principle as traditional golf. The aim is to get from the beginning to the end of the course with as few throws as possible, the player with the lowest score winning. Disc golf courses usually consist of 9 or 18 holes, and the lengths of the holes range from 50-300 meters. Discs are usually changed according to the distance or the shot shape. (Suomen Frisbeegolfliitto 2020.)

Disc Golf is still a relatively young sport but has a long and blurry history. There is no clear answer to the question “Who was the first to play disc golf?” However, an important person behind disc golf is Ed Headrick, who developed a more detailed version of the sport in 1964 and helped to shape the popularity of disc golf. Headrick also developed and patented the first baskets with metal chains. He has even participated in the funding of the International Frisbee Association and Professional Disc Golf Association. (PDGA 2020 a.)

Despite its history, disc golf has drawn more mainstream media attention since 2015 than in the past 20 years combined. Disc golf has been rather frequently featured on sports channels, and many disc golf videos have gone viral, thus boosting the visibility of the sport. (PDGA 2020 a.)

Finland was chosen as a target market for expansion as it is the second biggest disc golf market in the world. Finland has the second most courses after the United States, which is also the country where the sport was invented. An academic study made by the University of Jyväskylä discovered there are about 263,000 Finns playing disc golf at least once a year and an estimated 49,000 playing disc golf every week (Kalin 2019).

## 1.2 Thesis objectives and research questions

The purpose of the thesis is to determine whether it is worthwhile for Above Ground Level Discs, AGL in short, to expand its business to Finland. AGL does not have any current sales partners outside the United States, nor any presence in the European market. This makes Finland an attractive starting point for AGL to expand its business in Europe.

The thesis aims at answering to the following questions:

- Is there interest in another disc golf brand in Finland, and is it sensible to bring AGL discs to Finland?
- How is the Finnish disc golf market as a potential target for expansion?
- Are there competitive advantages, and if so, what are they?
- Which is an effective working framework for bringing AGL discs to Finland?

## 1.3 Research methods

Quantitative and qualitative research was used to find answers to the question “Is there interest in another disc golf brand in Finland?”. Quantitative research was used to gather primary data. Qualitative research was used to gather secondary data.

A quantitative research method is a research method in which information is examined numerically. This means that the matters to be studied and their properties are dealt with in general terms using numbers. Quantitative research methods answer questions on “how many?”, “how much?”, and “how often?” (Vilkka 2007, 14, 28.)

A questionnaire is a way of collecting data in which the format of the questions is standardized. Standardization means that all respondents are asked the same questions, in the same order and in the same way. In the questionnaire, the respondents read the questions and answers to them themselves. A questionnaire is suitable as

a way of collecting data when there are many respondents and they are scattered. (Vilkkä 2007, 14, 28.)

Our questionnaire (Appendix 3) was made for the Finnish disc golf players. The research focused on finding whether there is interest in the new products among Finnish players. The questionnaire was made online and distributed to Facebook groups related to disc golf.

Qualitative research is a methodological approach in scientific research that seeks to holistically understand the quality, properties, and meanings of an object. In practice, this often means giving space to the perspectives and experiences of the subjects and becoming acquainted with the thoughts, feelings and motives associated with the phenomenon under study. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2017, 144.) To collect qualitative data, disc golf business experts were interviewed to gather more in-depth information about the disc golf industry.

A PESTEL-analysis and a SWOT-analysis were used to analyze the possibilities of Above Ground Level Discs in Finland.

Both authors have studied three and a half years of International Business at Karelia University of Applied Sciences. Amadeus Sotiriou also has expertise in the disc golf industry as he has worked at a disc golf retailer since December 2019 and has played disc golf for more than five years. Expertise in both international business and specifically the disc golf industry are great assets in analyzing the questionnaire and for a better understanding of the disc golf industry.

#### **1.4 Thesis structure**

The content of the thesis consists of six main chapters, starting with the introduction and continuing with the case company, the market entry strategy, the disc golf market in Finland, the questionnaire and ending with the conclusions.

The introduction provides the reader the theoretical framework of the thesis and the importance of the research. The case company will be presented in the second chapter of the thesis. In this chapter the products of AGL will be presented.

The third chapter will focus on the market entry strategy. With the help of the SWOT-analysis the target company is reviewed. In this chapter different export modes will be presented and analyzed.

The fourth chapter introduces the Finnish disc golf market. A PEST-analysis is utilized for analyzing the factors of the Finnish business environment. In this chapter the competitors are analyzed.

To understand the Finnish disc golf market better, the data gathered from the questionnaire will be analyzed. The fifth chapter will introduce the questionnaire and analyze the answers gathered from the Finnish disc golf players.

The last chapter consists of a conclusion, suggestions for the company, the limitations of the study and the factors affecting them.

## **2 CASE COMPANY**

### **2.1 Company overview**

Above Ground Level Discs is an American disc golf company. It is based in San Jose, California. It is a family-based company making all its products in the USA. AGL strives to give its players the best and the most innovative products on the market. The main goal of the company is to provide the best customer service in the business and always take care of the player first (Jones 2021). AGL produces their discs in cooperation with Gateway Disc Sports, which is responsible for the manufacturing process of their discs.

Above Ground Level Discs has its own disc golf team competing from Pro to amateur levels in the sport. Sponsored players are ambassadors for the brand and share brand knowledge in their area, and there are currently over 60 team members on various sponsorship levels. Most of the sponsored players are from the United States, but there are also members from Canada, Finland, and Thailand. (AGL Discs 2021.)

The main products of Above Ground Level Discs are disc golf discs. They currently have nine different disc models, with eight of them in constant production. These eight active discs are manufactured in three different plastic categories: Premium, Base and Glow. These nine discs are approved by the Professional Disc Golf Association for competitive play in competitions under the PDGA banner. (PDGA 2020c.) AGL themed accessories and junior discs are also sold alongside golf discs.

AGL has direct exporting via its website (AGL Discs 2021). The amount of sales via their website to Europe/Finland is still low, as shipping overseas is expensive, and tariffs/VAT are added to the products (Posti 2020). This makes direct exporting an uncompetitive option for market entry, as shown in Table 1. At present, Above Ground Level disc products are sold in the United States via American retailers and the AGL website.



Example of buying four golf discs.	Value of goods	Shipping costs	Additional costs	TOTAL
USA (buying from agldiscs.com)	67.80€	18.75€	24% VAT + 2.90€ post office handling fee (20.77€ + 2.90€)	110.22€
Finland (buying from Powergrip.fi)	71.6€	6.9€	none	78.50€

Table 1. Example of cost structure for customer order from USA vs Finland (B2C) (Posti 2020 & Powergrip 2020).

## 2.2 Product offering

Above Ground Level Discs line-up consists of PDGA approved golf discs, Junior discs and other disc golf related accessories. Their main selling products are their PDGA approved golf discs. At the moment, AGL has nine PDGA approved models, eight of which are in production. The golf discs are produced by Gateway disc sports. AGL uses tree names as a theme for their disc names. They also sell branded accessories such as T-shirts, towels, pens, stickers, etc.

Their most unique product is a disc called Baobab. It has extraordinary flight characteristics and shape, and there is nothing similar to it on the Finnish market. In the USA the most sold disc is their putter, the Madrone (Jones 2021).

The eight golf discs in production are Cedar, Locust, Sycamore, Magnolia, Baobab, Manzanita, Madrone and Ponderosa. The only discontinued model is currently the Cypress. The discs are separated from each other by flight numbers telling the player how the disc is supposed to fly (Appendix 1). Cedar, Locust and Baobab are more focused on advanced players but can still be used by everyone. The rest of the line-up is more beginner friendly and suitable for all skill levels.

AGL also has different plastic blends for their discs, as can be seen in Figure 1. The plastic blends can be divided into three main categories: Premium blends, Basic blends, and Glow blends. Glow blends can be charged with a flashlight/UV light making them glow in the dark. Plastic blends also determine the cost of the product.

In 2021 AGL has planned to bring new discs to their line-up. For the 2021 season AGL has the goal to introduce four new disc models to the market. If this is not possible due to external factors, at least two new models will be introduced in 2021. According to Jones, the 2021 season will be the year of understable models that have been lacking from the current line-up. This will make AGL products even more competitive, as understable models are suitable for all levels of players.

The expansion plans of the company include bringing disc stamping in house. This means custom stamping will become a possibility and thus bring ad revenue from the service. In addition, this will speed up the availability of the products, as discs do not need to be stamped by a third-party company.



Figure 1. AGL plastic blends.

### 3 MARKET ENTRY

Expanding to different markets is never an easy task. It can have a huge impact on the already existing business, so it is important to determine whether the positive outcomes outweigh the risks. Especially for small businesses it is never uncomplicated to decide when to expand. (Porteous 2019.)

Disc golf is still a marginal sport in most countries where it is played. Expanding beyond national borders is therefore an important goal for many disc golf manufacturers. Brands like Prodiscus and RPM Discs are good examples of small companies with international activity. (Infinite Discs 2020 a,b.) Also, worth mentioning is Obsidian Discs, a micro brand from Finland sold in the United Kingdom and Estonia (Launch Disc Golf 2020 & Discgolfar 2020).

### **3.1 Market entry strategy**

Most disc golf products are sold online and by brick-and-mortar retailers. Finland is a unique market compared to the United States, as supermarkets/hypermarkets like Prisma and Kärkkäinen also sell a significant number of disc golf products. Some disc golf manufacturers/brands also have their own e-commerce sites to support sales. Good examples are Prodigy Disc Europe selling Prodigy products and Kiekkopiste with its Prodiscus products.

Finland has its fair share of disc golf only retailers. In terms of revenue, Powergrip is currently the biggest retailer in Finland. It has four brick and mortar stores and the biggest e-commerce site in Finland. It also has the biggest selection of brands and products. The second biggest retailer is Frisbeemarket with a brick and mortar store and an e-commerce site. Other notable Finnish retailers are par-anoid.fi, frisbeekauppa.fi and NBDG.

Chapters 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 will go through two different expansion strategies, one following the most common way of indirect exporting and another one a more laborious way of creating a strategic alliance.

#### **3.1.1 Indirect exporting**

Indirect exporting is usually the first way of expanding to new markets requiring neither any big investments from the company nor tangible investments in the target country. Marketing tools are in the hands of the retailer. (Långbacka 2018). In addition, indirect exporting involves the smallest risk compared to any other expansion strategy. (Kotler et al. 2013, 580.) The drawbacks of indirect exporting are smaller profit potential and having less control of the sales and the marketing of the products (Kotler et al. 2013, 579).

A good starting point is to start building up connections with Finnish retailers involved only in disc golf. Something as simple as an email showcasing AGL products can be an excellent starting point. Offering product samples for potential retailers with a comprehensive info package of AGL products can also be a good way of attracting potential business partners. The first steps in regards to establishing connections with Finnish retailers have already been started.

A noticeable portion of disc golf goods sales in Finland takes place in supermarkets (e.g. Prisma and Kärkkäinen), but sales via supermarket shelves do not fit with the current AGL brand image and ideology. AGL is a small family run business that thrives to be down to earth and has a strong bond with its customer base. Thus, supermarket shelves should not be taken into consideration at this stage.

According to Jukka-Ilmari Matula (2020), CEO of Frisbeemarket Oy, indirect exporting is the most common way of export for disc golf manufacturers. The products are usually imported directly by the manufacturer; examples of this are MVP disc sports and Discraft.

### **3.1.2 Expansion via strategic alliance**

Another option would be to find a strategic partner in Finland. Using a partner with knowledge about the target market would greatly benefit the expansion plans. Creating a partnership is also beneficial for smaller companies, as the need for investment is lower for example compared to creating a subsidiary. (Kenton 2020.)

The strategic partner could also focus on increasing sales of AGL products in the European Union free trade zone. This option would need more work, but it lowers the bar for existing retailers to buy products from AGL, as no product import would be needed for the retailers. The strategic partner could conduct customer sales (b2c) in Finland and European markets. Having an own point of sale can also bring better profits for both parties. Sharing company values via a company's own e-commerce

site is more viable. On the current scale, one person could take care of these actions without complications.

AGL's values and down to earth approach can be brought up with a strategic partner. As said by Joshua Jones (2021), it is important for the company to preserve and share its values to the customer. AGL wants to thrive with its excellent customer service and player-oriented approach. Sharing company values is much easier via a strategic partnership as the company has control over the marketing tools. Compared to indirect export the responsibility is in the hands of the retailer taking care of the product sales. This is a big reason for a strategic partner being a better option.

Marketing the brand in the target country will be important and could be done by the strategic partner. Raising brand awareness is one of the biggest key points for success. Sponsoring players and tournaments makes more people aware of the brand and leads to increased eagerness to try it themselves. Sponsored players with a strong social media presence can bring a great number of new customers to the brand. The importance of social media cannot be overseen. It is presently one of the cheapest but also one of the most powerful ways to raise awareness. (Medal 2018.)

The challenge lies in finding the correct partner. Without an appropriate person/company for the partnership, the venture will end up failing. Furthermore, it is important to be certain the two partners share the same end goals and values.

An example of a similar strategy by a disc golf manufacturer is Prodigy Disc Europe, a partner of the American disc golf manufacturer Prodigy Disc. Prodigy Disc Europe conducts wholesale, direct sales via its own website and also designs courses in Europe. (Matula 2020.)

### **3.2 SWOT analysis**

A SWOT analysis is also known as a four-field analysis or SWOT matrix. It is an inhouse analysis that identifies strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and

threats. It is a particularly important element when planning a business strategy, as it reveals potential bottlenecks at the very beginning of the idea as well as the potential for the success within the given parameters. The operating strategy of the company tells what is to be concretely done in each situation. A SWOT analysis, in turn, provides a framework for action, considering both its limitations and opportunities.

The analysis tells what is possible and what is not. SWOT is not any strategy creation, but a simple tool for analyzing the company's operations. It is primarily used to map the company itself and assess its place in relation to the external environment. For this reason, a SWOT analysis is sometimes also called an internal analysis. (Holvi 2021.)



Figure 2. SWOT-analysis.

## Strengths

Above Ground Level Discs uses a unique and clear way of naming their products, as all their products are named after trees. The brand image is clear, and the company has a down-to-earth approach with their customers. Finland is also well known for its forests, matching well with the AGL brand naming. They want to thrive as a company that wants to deliver the best and the most innovative products in the market. Importantly, AGL products also perform well in the cold Finnish winters.

From their current lineup the Baobab is the most unique model available. There is no similar product on the Finnish market yet. AGL should use the Baobab as an advantage when entering the already competitive market.

At present, disc golf is booming in Finland (Matula 2020). The most recent research results show a substantial growth in the player base. According to Matula (2020), the newest growing customer group consists of under twelve-year-old children who are still unfamiliar with the sport.

The 2020 season was a struggle for retailers, as they could not get enough products on their shelves, factories not being able to keep up with the demand. AGL products could be the answer to fill that empty space on retailer shelves.

As the first disc golf retailer enabling cryptocurrencies as a payment method, AGL has been a pioneer in the sport. Currently they support Bitcoin, Bitcoin Cash, Ethereum, Dai, and Litecoin. As AGL uses the same platform for bulk sales, this option is also available for retailers. (Facebook 2021a.)

AGL has a strong social media presence on Facebook and Instagram, which is one of the reasons the company has grown so fast. A strong social media presence makes new players find a brand much more easily. AGL's social media has the same number, or even more followers compared to many of its competitors of similar size (Table 3). It is important to note that Kastaplast and Prodiscus have been on the



market much longer than AGL. Kastaplast came out with its first model in 2013, and Prodiscus launched in 2010, whereas the first AGL model saw daylight in 2017.

	AGL	Kastaplast	Prodiscus	Viking Discs
Facebook likes	4,458	7,754	6,004	2,726
Instagram followers	9,196	6,900	853	1,037

Table 3. Likes among different disc golf manufacturers as of 12.2.2021.

### **Weaknesses**

Being a small manufacturer, responding to big and fast spikes of demand can be a struggle for AGL. If its products prove to be a huge success on the Finnish market, supplying enough products might become a problem.

AGL is still a new brand which Finns do not know well. If brand awareness is not raised, product sales will be negatively affected.

AGL products are not currently sold by any European or Finnish retailer. AGL does not have a framework of exporting to European countries. This might cause some growing pains at the start of the venture. Exporting to different countries is always a learning experience, and mistakes can happen.

According to Matula (2020), market entry for new small brands can be tough. The key need is brand awareness. Without this, a retailer will need to make an extra effort to get good sales figures. New brands always follow with the risk that the product will not move from the shelves quickly enough.

### **Opportunities**

Expanding to a new market is always an opportunity to increase a company's revenue. As Finland has the world's second most disc golf courses and players, it is a clear choice for expanding. Breaking through in Finland could bring significant cash flow to the company.

Expanding to Finland does not only open the opportunity to sell domestically, but to sell to every country in the European Union without tariffs. This brings the opportunity to expand to the whole of Europe with only one expansion. (European Commission 2018.)

The current shortage of products has been a huge problem for disc golf retailers. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a surge in players, but at the same time halted factories worldwide, meaning there was nothing to sell to the hungry customers. When interviewed in 2020, Matula said even smaller brands normally selling quite low numbers were selling well. This is a clear opportunity for AGL. The most popular brands and discs being sold out everywhere forces the customer to seek other opportunities.

For the 2021 season manufacturers are streamlining their production to include only their most popular discs. This has already been announced by four manufacturers, Latitude 64, Westside discs, Dynamic discs and Discmania. At the moment the demand is so high that it forces manufacturers to seek less than optimal solutions. This means the shelves of the retailers will not have the same depth as in previous years, thus bringing an opening for a newer brand to thrive in the competitive market. (Discmania 2021, Facebook 2021b, Facebook 2021c, Latitude 2021.)

The Covid-19 situation in Finland is at the time of writing one of the best in Europe (Yle 2020). Indoor sporting halls have been kept closed in many places around Finland making outside sports much more popular (Yle 2021). According to Matula (2020), he has never seen so many disc golf players in the winter. The freezing Finnish winter is usually a hiatus for disc golf retailers, but this has not been the case in the winter of 2020-2021.

## **Threats**

The biggest companies have a strong foothold in the Finnish market. Marketing efforts need to be made to raise interest towards AGL products. Without enough attention the products might stay on the shelves.

The Finnish disc golf market is still a fraction of the size of the US market and is the reason for Finnish disc golf stores not having the same selection of different brands and products. As the market is smaller, getting on the shelves of the biggest disc golf pro shops can be challenging.

The Finnish disc golf scene has been seasonal until recent years. Most players do not play during the cold winters making the seasonal aspect of the sport in Finland a clear threat.

Covid-19 has been a worldwide problem for 2020 and is still causing issues in 2021. The pandemic is something no one can predict in detail. A burst in Covid-19 cases in Finland could even cause the closure of disc golf courses. Some disc golf courses were in fact closed at the start of the pandemic (such as the ones in Turku) to fight against the spread of the virus (Facebook 2020). With the vaccination against the virus ongoing, the potential for a lockdown like in Great Britain is less likely to happen (CNN World 2021). It is still notable there is no information how fast the Finnish population can be protected against the virus, thus making it a threat in the future (THL 2021).

## 4 FINLAND AS A TARGET MARKET

Disc golf is experiencing a boom as a hobby in Finland. The Covid-19 pandemic has made people move around outside in nature as well as on all kinds of disc golf courses, as the sport is practiced outdoors and usually in small groups. Almost all of the disc golf courses in Finland are free to play. The sport can be practiced all year round and is suitable for anyone regardless of age. The starting threshold is small, as one can get acquainted with the sport at a very low cost and with a couple of discs. Competitions are possible in all age groups. (Reinman 2020.)

In 2018, the KIHU – Research Institute for Olympics Sports, LIKES – Research Centre for Physical Activity and Health and the Faculty of Sports Science of the University of Jyväskylä conducted a study on adult physical activity, volunteering, and participation. One of the changes highlighted in the study was the rise in the popularity of disc golf. According to the study, an estimated 263,000 Finns play disc golf at least once a year. An estimated 49,000 people play disc golf at least once a week. Disc golf is a popular sport especially among men. In the list of the most popular sports for men, disc golf ranks 11th on the list with a total of 169,000 enthusiasts. (KIHU 2019, 17-18.)

According to the study, the time spent playing disc golf is on average one hour and four minutes a week. The study estimates that 84% play disc golf independently on their own or in a group. (Suomen Frisbeegolfliitto 2019.)

### 4.1 PESTEL analysis

A PESTEL-analysis is a framework or tool that is used to analyze and monitor macro-environmental factors that may have an impact on an organization's performance. The tool is especially useful when starting a new business or when entering a foreign market. (B2U 2016.)

A PESTEL-analysis takes into account six groups of external factors having an effect on a business, namely political, economic, sociocultural, technological, environmental, and legal, as seen in Figure 3. (B2U 2016.)

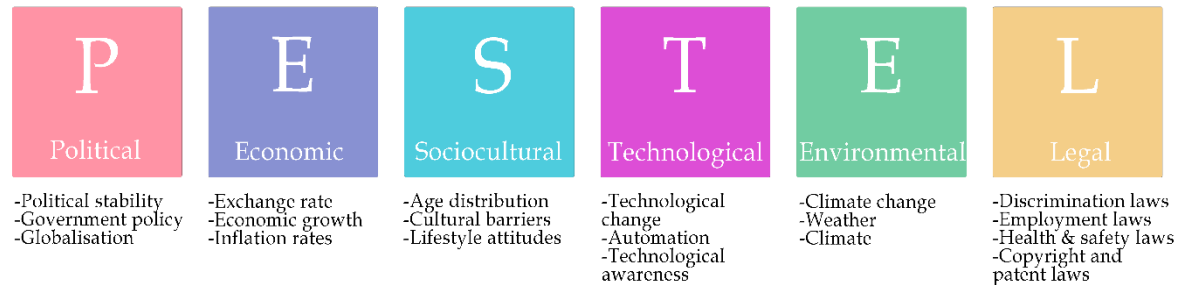


Figure 3. PESTEL-Analysis.

#### 4.1.1 Political factors

The Republic of Finland is a Nordic country located in northern Europe. Finland's neighboring countries are Russia in the east, Norway in the north, Sweden in the west and Estonia in the south. The area of Finland is 338,432 square kilometers, which includes the land and inland water areas. (InfoFinland.fi 2020a.)

Finland is a republic and a member of the European Union (EU). Finland is divided into 310 municipalities. Åland is an autonomous region that belongs to Finland. There are 5.5 million residents in Finland. There are two official languages: Finnish and Swedish. About 5% of Finns speak Swedish as their native language, whereas Sámi is the native language of about 1,900 people. Many Finns are also fluent in English. (This is Finland 2020.)

Upon entering the European Union in 1995 Finland became one of the first countries to adopt the use of the euro as their currency in 2002. Before the euro, the official currency was the Finnish *markka*. (InfoFinland.fi 2020d.)

The biggest city in Finland is its capital Helsinki. There are 653,835 people living there. Other big cities are Espoo, Tampere, Vantaa, Oulu, and Turku. There are nine cities with over 100,000 resident and 2.2 million people living in these cities. (Kuntaliitto 2019a.)

#### **4.1.2 Economic factors**

Finland is an advanced industrial economy with a GDP per capita of 43,485 euros in 2019 (The World Bank 2020).

According to the Ministry of Finance, the GDP is expected to contract by 3.3% in 2020 and then grow 2.5% in 2021. Economic recovery will begin when the uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic disappears within 2021. Accelerating growth towards the end of 2021 will also boost economic growth in 2022. (Valtiovarainministeriö 2020.)

The average exchange rate for 2020 for the currency of Finland, the euro, has been 1 euro = 1.14 US dollars. As of January 2021, the exchange rate has become even more beneficial for Europeans, with 1 euro equaling 1.23 dollars. (European Central Bank 2021.) As the euro is currently stronger than the dollar, European consumers and businesses get more for every euro they spend.



Figure 4. Exchange rate of 1 euro in US dollars (European Central Bank 2021).

### 4.1.3 Sociocultural factors

Equality and justice are important values in Finland. Everyone is equal and must be treated fairly in Finnish society. Men and women have the same rights under the Finnish law, and individualism is emphasized more in Finnish culture than in many others. Individual freedom is strongly reflected in Finnish legislation. (InfoFinland.fi 2020c.)

Comprehensive social security is a basic Finnish structure. The purpose of social security is to secure people with an adequate livelihood and care in all life situations. Social security consists of services and financial benefits that secure a livelihood.

Finnish social security usually covers people who live permanently in Finland or work there. (Kela 2019.)

The Finnish population includes various minorities with different languages, culture, or religion than most Finns, with Finno-Swedes, Sámi, Roma, Jews, and Tatars as traditional examples. In addition, immigrants have arrived in Finland from Russia, Estonia, the Balkans, Somalia, Iraq, and many other countries. (InfoFinland.fi 2020a.)

The most significant change in the age distribution in Finland and in Europe as a whole is the aging of the whole structure. As Figure 5 shows, the share of people of retirement ages in the population is growing strongly at the same time as the working age population is declining. The proportions of children and young people are declining, and no significant change in birth rates is expected. (Kuntaliitto 2019b.)

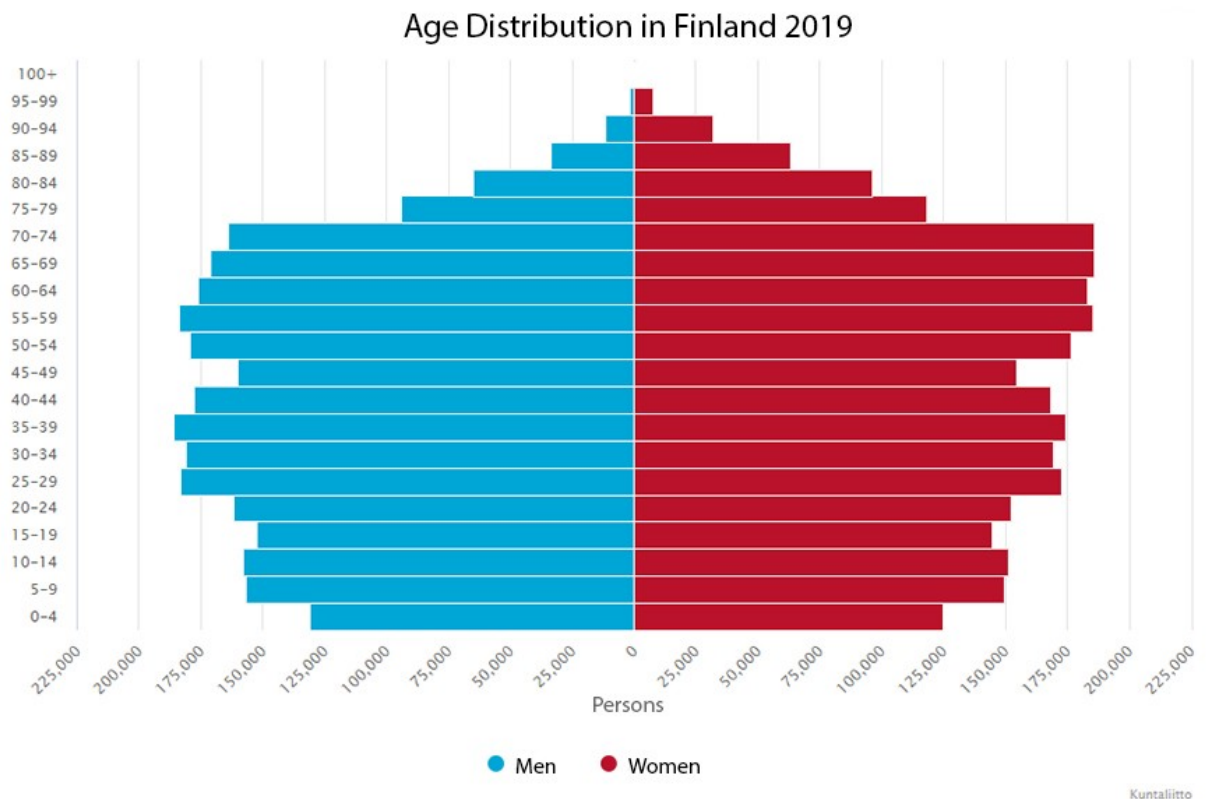


Figure 5. Age Distribution in Finland 2019 (Kuntaliitto 2019b).



#### **4.1.4 Technological factors**

The technology industry is both the largest export sector and the most significant industry in Finland. Technology companies provide sustainable solutions to human, environmental and social problems. Companies in the sector operate in the international market and bring income to Finland thus maintaining the Finnish welfare society.

Technology companies account for about 50 percent of both goods and services exported from Finland, the companies in the sector employing about 313,000 people. When taking into account all the spill-over effects of the industry on society, about 660,000 Finns have work thanks to the technology industry. (Teknologiaeollisuus 2020.)

#### **4.1.5 Environmental factors**

The climate in Finland is colder than in many other countries. However, the weather varies a lot throughout the year, and there are four distinctive seasons: winter, spring, summer, and autumn. Finland has a lot of nature, and it is easy to move there in all seasons. (InfoFinland.fi 2020b.) The four seasons and huge weather differences make many activities seasonal, such as skiing being a popular winter sport.

#### **4.1.6 Legal factors**

As a member of the European Union the laws and legislation in Finland are similar with the rest of the EU countries. As the laws in the union are unified, it means the consumer protection can be adapted to all the member countries.

In the recent past there have been some instances of disagreements on trade causing the USA and the EU to impose each other tariffs on international trade (Tulli 2020).

## 4.2 Competitors

When entering a new market, it is important to gather information about the competitors one's company will face. Knowing competitors and how to anticipate their actions will help in being able to find the best way for a company to succeed in the market. It will be easier to plan business, products, and marketing. (Kotler et al. 2013, 543.)

The competition in the Finnish market is tough, as the biggest brands have established their position in the market long ago. In a research conducted by Spin 18 Oy is notable that one-third of disc golf players favor Innova discs, and Discmania comes in a close second (Frisbeegolfradat.fi 2020).

If AGL is compared in terms of approved disc golf discs to any of the companies listed, Prodiscus and Viking discs are the closest ones. AGL has nine PDGA approved discs and Prodiscus and Viking Disc 13 PDGA approved discs. (PDGA 2020d.) Having a limited number of disc golf disc models is a challenge and makes fulfilling every customer's needs difficult. This will sometimes force the customer to seek other brands.

As seen in Figure 6, a notable portion of people (10.5%) do not have any kind of a favorite brand. The segment of people without a favorite brand is important, as they are probably more willing to try a new brand. The questionnaire had 3,982 respondents.

Dividing the retail locations of the listed brands makes the graphics more understandable: Innova, Discmania, Latitude 64, Prodigy, Discraft, Westside, Dynamic Discs and Viking discs can be found in ordinary sporting goods stores, disc golf only stores and

even in some supermarkets. Prodiscus and MVP are the only listed brands exclusively sold in disc golf shops. This shows that Finnish disc golf players favor brands that are more easily accessible, as there are merely a handful of disc golf only retailers in Finland. Viking discs is an oddity as it is mainly sold in supermarkets and sporting goods stores rather than in disc golf only retailers. According to the questionnaire conducted for the thesis, it was noted that 67.1% of the respondents mainly bought their new discs from Finnish disc golf only retailers, whereas supermarkets and sporting goods shops only got a share of 14.1%.

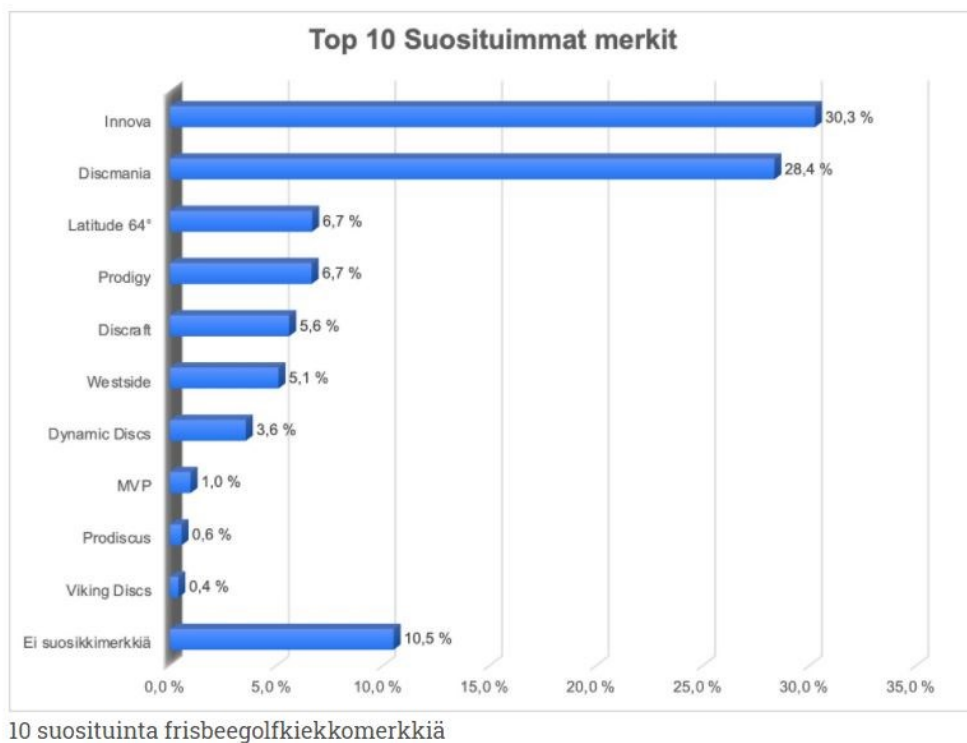


Figure 6. Top 10 most popular Disc Golf Brands in Finland (Frisbeegolfraadat.fi 2020).

Finland's biggest disc golf retailer Powergrip has currently 18 different disc golf brands in their catalog offering specifically disc golf discs. Brands outside the top ten listed in Figure 6 are: Axiom, Gateway, Hyzerbomb discs, Kastaplast, Legacy discs, Infinite Discs, Millennium and Streamline Discs. (Powergrip 2021.)

## 5 QUESTIONNAIRE

As mentioned in the first chapter, quantitative research was used to gather data in the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to gather data about Finnish players and their interest in the AGL brand and products. People answered the questionnaire anonymously, and no personal data was collected. The questionnaire was distributed to different Facebook groups related to disc golf. Altogether around 21,000 people were reached. The questionnaire was created on Google Forms and it was open 20-28 January 2021.

In quantitative research, the number of respondents is typically large. According to Vilkka (2007, 17), the recommended minimum number of observation units is 100 if a statistical method is used in the study.

The goal of the questionnaire was to gather at least 150 answers. The reception surpassed all expectations as 505 answers were gathered. The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions.

### 5.1 The results

The results of the questionnaire were analyzed with the help of Google Sheets. The research results are shown using bar and pie charts. Some of the questions were multiple choice answers, and some were open ended.

At the start the authors gathered some basic information about the players, such as their age and gender. As seen in the Figure 7, 174 responders were in the age category of 25-35 and second most respondents were from the age category of 18-24. Age category 36-45 was also quite popular with 97 answers. Fewer answers were gathered from the age categories of 13-17 (46), 46-55 (46), 56-65 (10) and +66 (1).

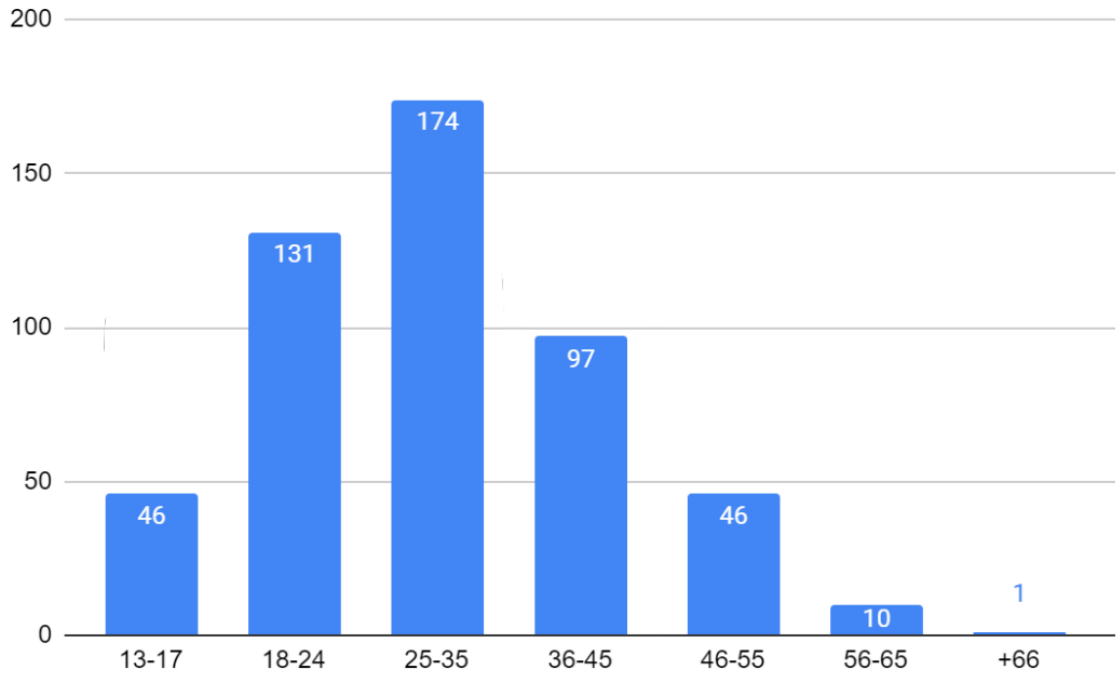


Figure 7. The age structure of the respondents.

Figure 8 shows that the majority of the respondents were male (481) and only 23 of the respondent's female.

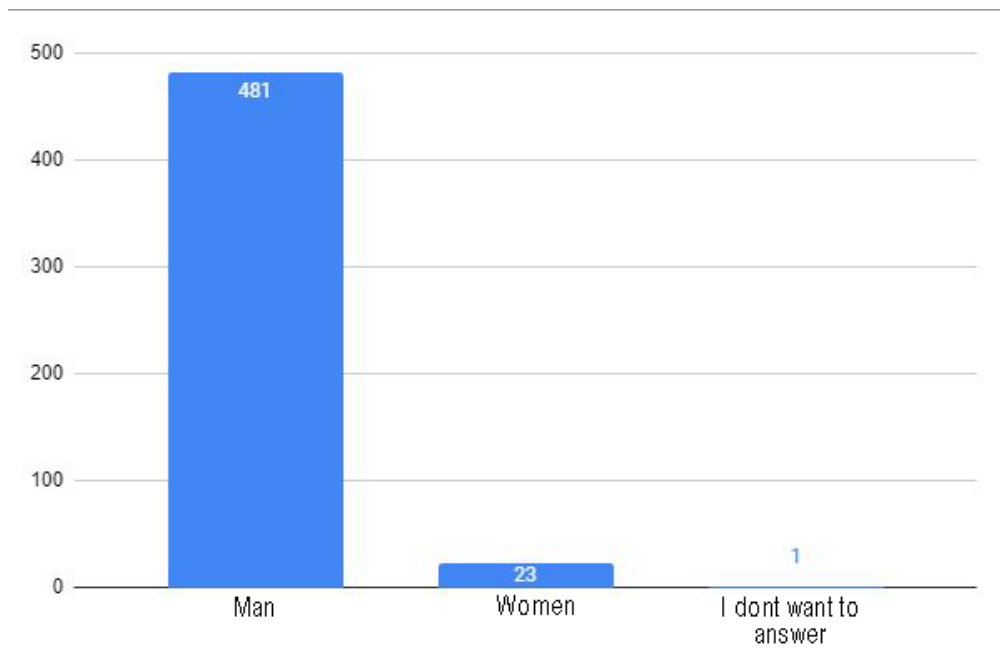


Figure 8. The gender of the respondents.

Next, the questionnaire wanted to find out how long the respondents have played disc golf and what kind of players they are, meaning whether they take part in competitions or if they just play for their own pleasure.

As Figure 9 indicates, the majority of the respondents were experienced players as they have played the sport for more than three years.

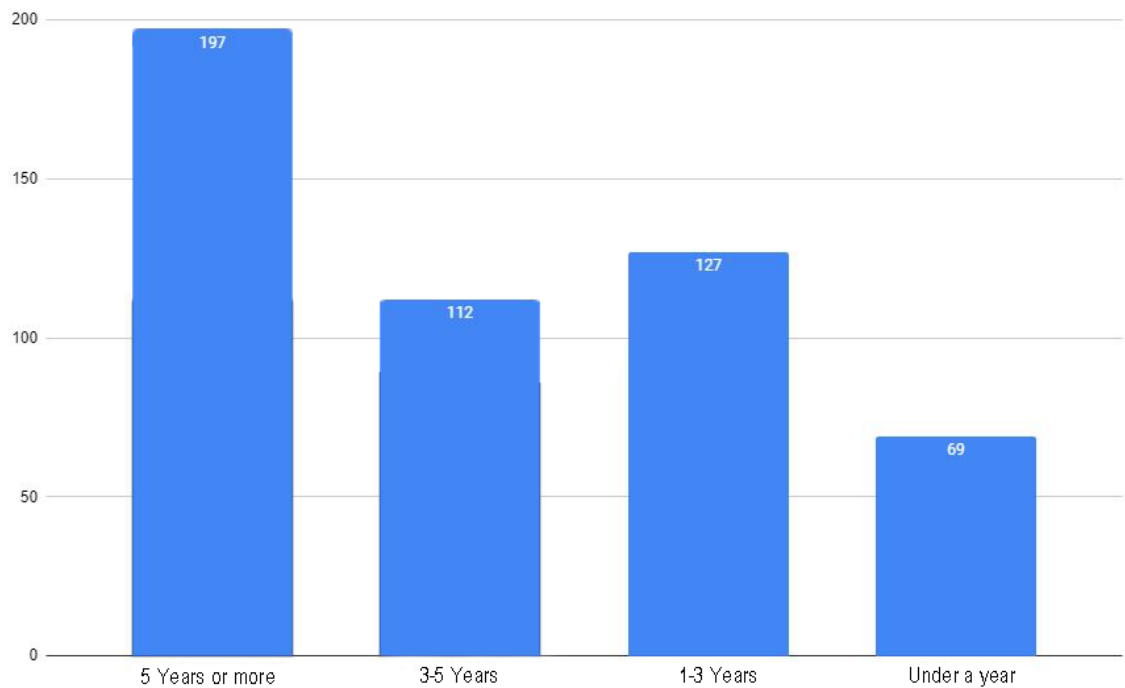


Figure 9. How many years have you played disc golf?

As shown in Figure 10, the option “I play disc golf for my own pleasure either by myself or with friends” gathered most of the answers with 217 responses. The second most answers came from the option “I’m a member of the PDGA and I take part in the PDGA sanctioned events”, with 150 responses. The least popular category was “I participate in the weekly unsanctioned competitions and take part in other license free competitions”, with 137 answers.

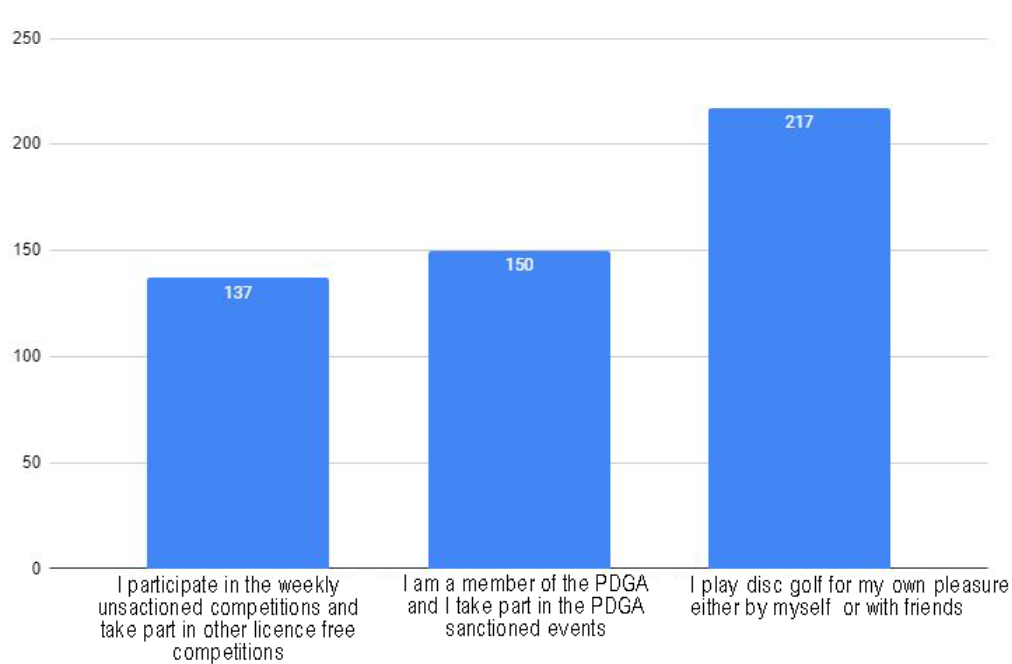


Figure 10. What kind of a disc golf player are you?

Figure 11 provided very valuable information about the buying behavior of Finnish disc golf players. The four main options were given along with an option for an open answer. The four main buying options were:

1. I buy from reputable Finnish disc golf only retailers.
2. I buy from reputable disc golf only retailers abroad.
3. I buy from supermarkets and sporting goods stores.
4. I buy directly from the manufacturers' e-commerce shops.

The options scored as follows:

1. I buy from reputable Finnish disc golf only retailers (337 responses)
2. I buy from supermarkets and sporting goods stores (72 responses)
3. I buy directly from the manufacturers' e-commerce shops (62 responses)
4. I buy from reputable abroad disc golf only retailers (8 responses)
5. Open answers (20 responses)

By analyzing the responses, it is clear that Finnish disc golfers favor buying their new discs from reputable Finnish disc golf only retailers. Supermarkets and sporting goods stores were almost even with the people buying directly from manufacturers' e-commerce shops.

The results show that a good starting point to spread the AGL brand would be through reputable disc golf only retailers. The downside is leaving the marketing and the brand image to the hands of the retailers.

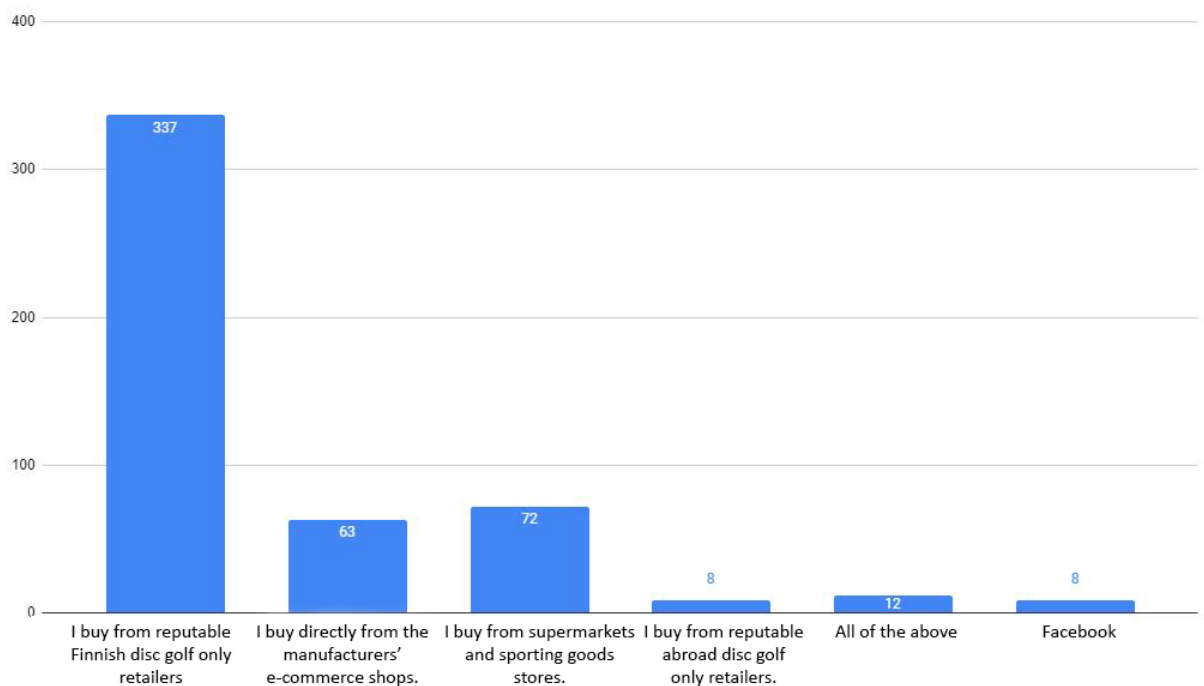


Figure 11. Where do you usually buy your new disc golf discs?

Figure 12 shows the Finnish disc golf scene is still rather unfamiliar with AGL, as only 83 of 505 respondents already knew the AGL brand. This means 422 did not know about it beforehand. This shows that entering the Finnish market would need considerable efforts in marketing the company.



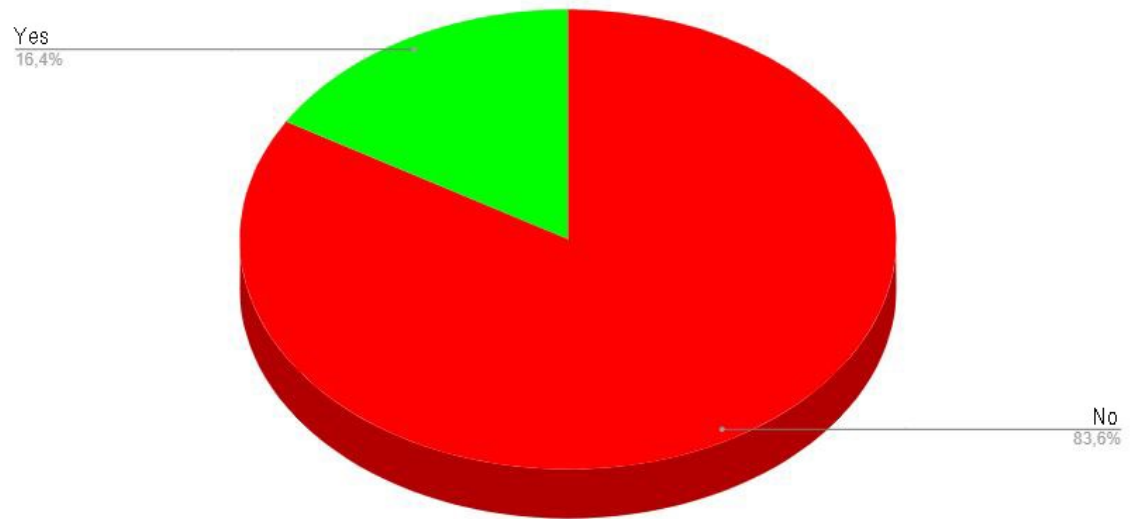


Figure 12. Have you heard about the AGL discs before?

It is clearly shown in Figure 13 that social media and team players have been the most effective way of spreading the AGL brand in Finland and would also be recommended to the company in the future.

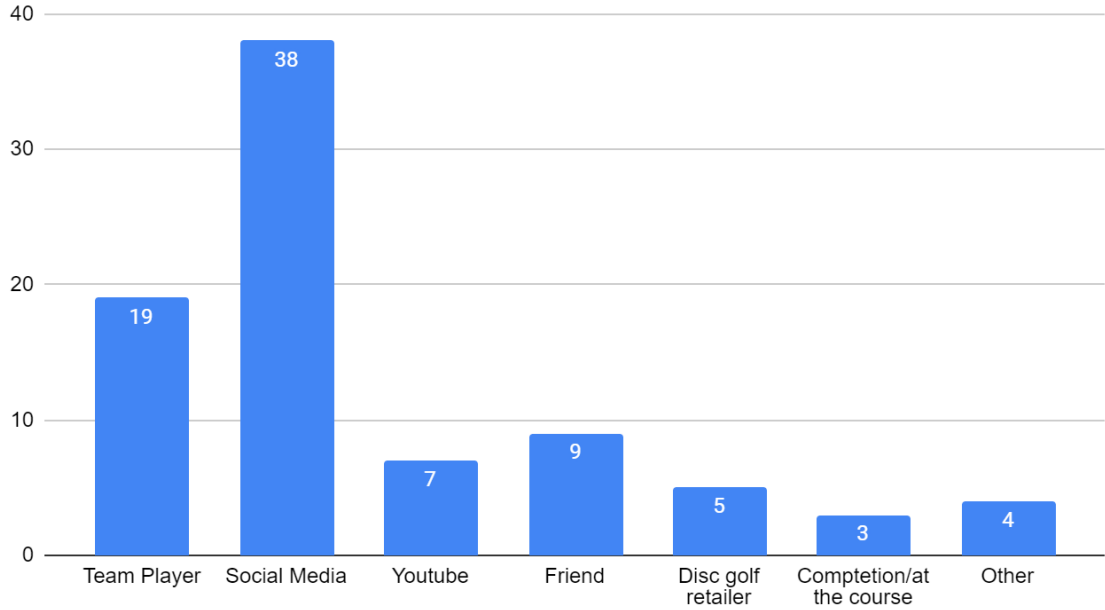


Figure 13. Where did you first hear about the AGL discs?

The response to the question “Did you find a disc you would like to try in the AGL discs lineup?” was better than expected. More than two out of three respondents found at least one disc they would like to try in the current lineup. This is a great result, as currently AGL only has eight PDGA approved models in their active lineup along with two junior discs.

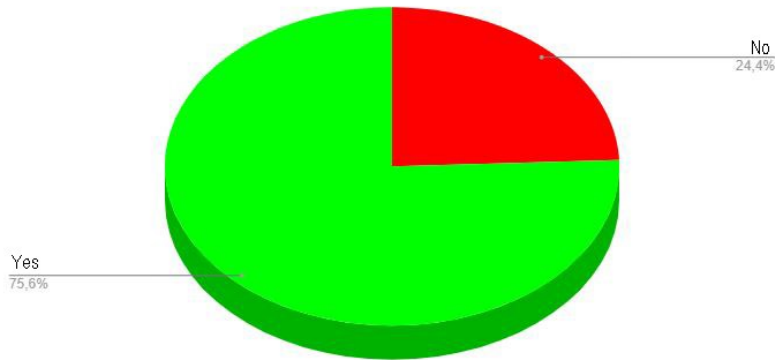


Figure 14. Did you find a disc you would like to try in the AGL discs lineup?

Regarding the question “What model(s) would you want to try the most?” in Figure 15, the clear winner was the Sycamore. A possible reason for the Sycamore being the most chosen disc is that it has neutral flying and is suitable for all skill levels of play. The second most answers came to the Locust and third was the most unique AGL disc, the Baobab. This was a difficult question to analyze, as people usually make their buying choices based on how the discs flies and how the discs could help their game.

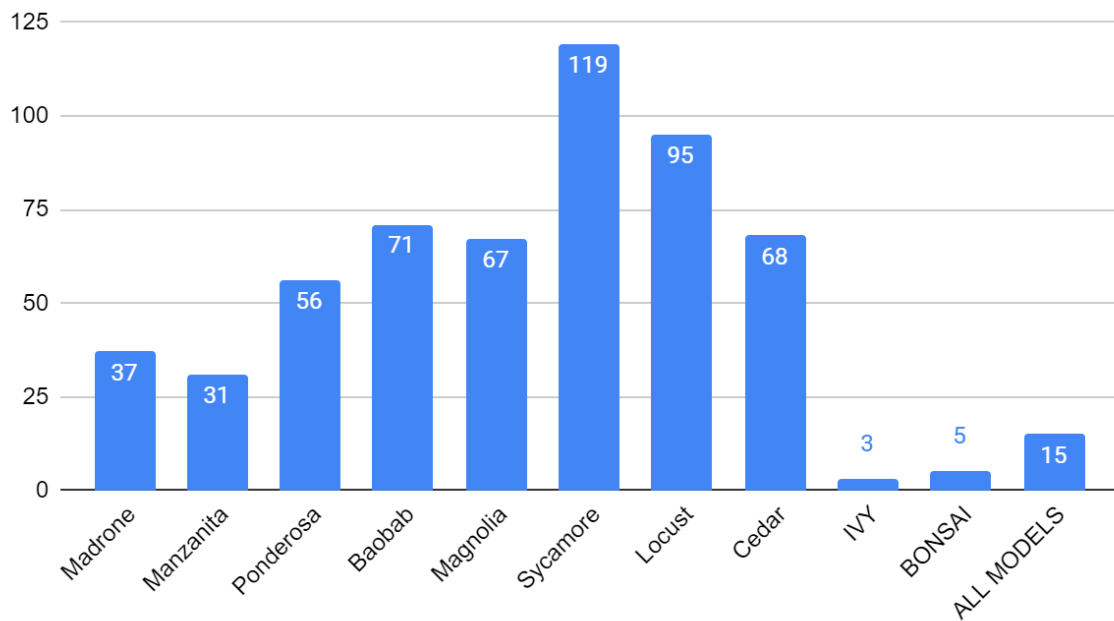


Figure 15. Which model(s) would you like to try the most?

The question “If AGL discs were available in the Finnish market, would you be interested in trying their products?” in Figure 16 also got a positive response. Only 35 responders said no to the question with 111 answering “I don’t know”. 359 respondents would be positive about trying AGL products if they were available in Finland. The results had a positive outcome showing there is interest towards AGL products in Finland.

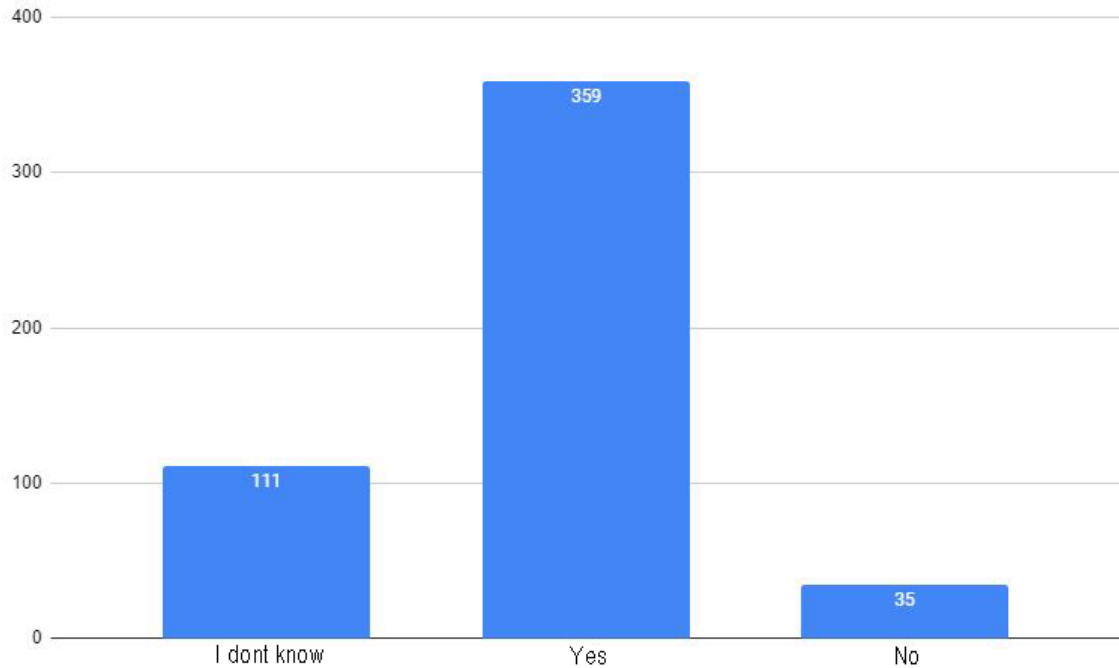


Figure 16. If AGL discs were available in the Finnish market, would you be interested in trying its products?

The last question “If AGL Discs were available in Finland, would you like to buy its products?” in Figure 17 shows a similar result as in Figure 11. Finnish people favor buying from reputable Finnish disc golf only retailers. Even if the respondents could choose as many answers as they wanted, the Finnish disc golf retailers were still their number one option.

This is another response which supports choosing indirect export as the entry mode to the Finnish disc golf market. It also shows that Finnish people have a lot of trust in the disc golf only retailers.

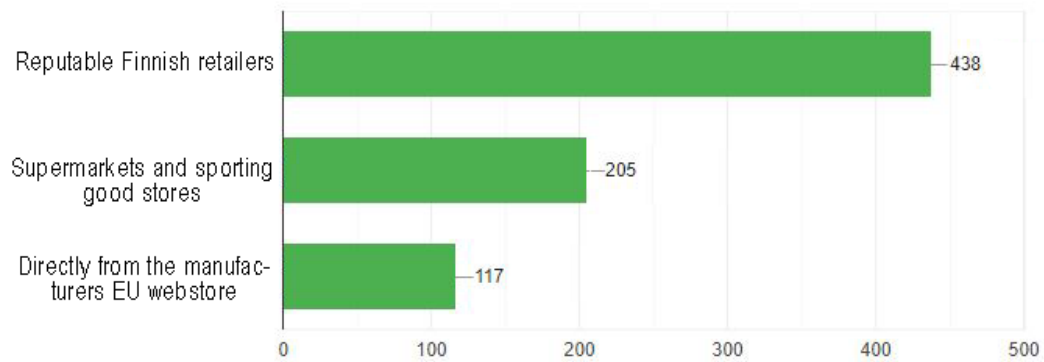


Figure 17. If AG L Discs were available in Finland, where would you like to buy its products?

## 6 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an overview of the study by presenting the findings of the research. Recommendations for further research are introduced to the case company.

### 6.1 Conclusions

The purpose of the thesis was to determine whether it is worthwhile for AG L to expand its business to Finland. The aims of the thesis were to study the Finnish disc golf market, suggest a market entry strategy for the company and to find out the interest in AG L's products in Finland. The research questions that the thesis aimed to answer were:

- Is there interest in another disc golf brand in Finland, and is it sensible to bring AGL discs to Finland?
- How is the Finnish disc golf market as a potential target for expansion?
- How about the competitive advantage?
- Which is an effective working framework for bringing AGL discs to Finland?

The answers to the first research question clearly show there is an interest in the brand in Finland, as 359 out of 505 respondents were interested in the brand if it was available in Finland, whereas 111 were not sure. Three hundred eighty-two respondents would also be interested in trying the products. It was found in the questionnaire that there is obvious interest in AGL's products.

As for the second question, disc golf has been experiencing a boom in Finland. It ranks as the 11<sup>th</sup> most popular sport for men in Finland, and it is estimated that about 263,000 Finns play disc golf at least once a year. Finland is a great target market as it is the second biggest market in the disc golf industry, right behind the USA. Finns also have a good buying power. When entering the Finnish market there is potential to grow in the European markets as a whole.

The third question aimed to find the competitive advantage of AGL. There is a current global shortage of disc golf discs meaning that consumers are more interested in newer brands and products. AGL has a unique mold, the Baobab, and there is nothing similar in the Finnish market.

The last question revealed that indirect export should be the first option of expanding, as both the research and the questionnaire supported it: it is cheap, simple, and painless for the company. The secondary option, a strategic alliance, should not be forgotten as it could be an excellent option if the right partner would be found. Getting on the Finnish retailer shelves could also be easier if a partner would be found. Also having an own point of sale (e-commerce) via a strategic partner can bring more revenue stream and better profits for both parties.

## **6.2 Suggestions for the company**

Based on the research and in the case of expansion, we warmly suggest the company to expand its businesses to Finland. There is a clear interest in the products among Finnish disc golf players. In case of expansion, we suggest starting the process for finding potential Finnish disc golf only retailers and connecting with them. In the case of a strategic alliance, AGL should focus on the people they already have connections with, for example team players with a knowledge of business and the Finnish disc golf market.

If expanding, it would be important to acquire more team players from Finland, as they are an important part of spreading the brand. Team members with strong social media presence should be a priority.

## **6.3 Limitations of the study**

As disc golf is a new sport, finding academic papers on the sport was difficult. The number of academic papers was scarce. Studies have been made by retailers/manufacturers, but they are not public, so the studies could not be used in the thesis.

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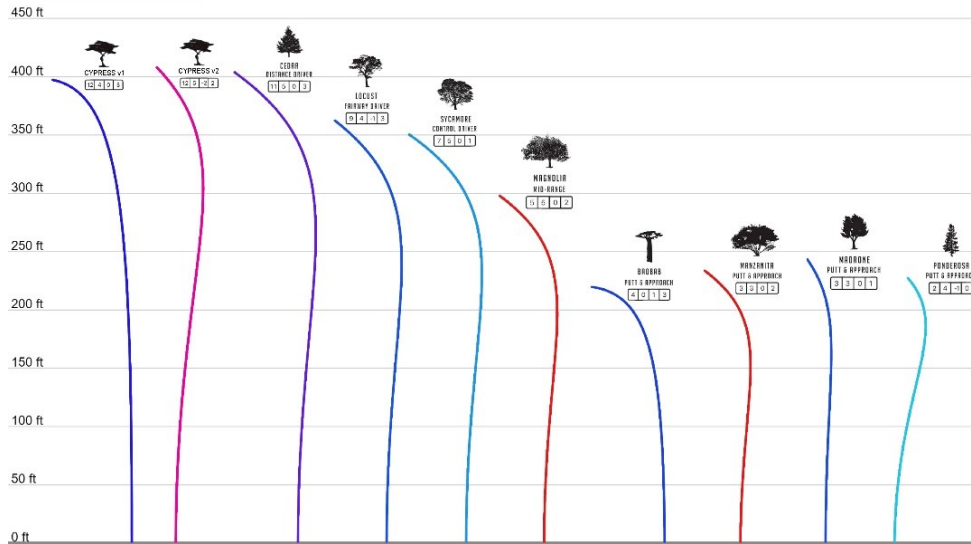


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# Flight Chart



**FLIGHT NUMBERS**  
 3 3 0 2  
 SPEED|GLIDE|TURN|FADE

**AGL**  
 WWW.AGLDISCS.COM

**PLASTICS** Premium Blends

- ALPINE**  
Supreme durability and grip
- TUNDRA**  
Maximum durability with added nylon polymers
- ALPINE HEMP**  
Supreme durability with maximum grip
- ALPINE GLOW**  
Premium glow blend for play in low light

Baseline Blends

- WOODLAND**  
Baseline plastic with moderate durability. Can be found in soft, medium and firm configurations
- WOODLAND HEMP**  
Premium baseline plastic with maximum grip. Can be found in soft, medium and firm configurations
- WOODLAND GLOW**  
Premium baseline plastic with added glow effect. Added grip versus regular woodland

@AGLDISCS  
 FACEBOOK & INSTAGRAM

**ABBREVIATIONS**

AGL	Above Ground Level
Backhand	A grip and throw where the back of the player's grip hand is generally facing the basket until the disc leaves the thrower's hand.
B2B	Business to business sale
B2C	Business to consumer sale
Flight numbers	Disc golf discs use flight numbers to describe the flight characteristics of that disc model
Golf Discs	PDGA approved disc golf disc
Mold	Model of the disc golf disc
PDGA	Professional Disc Golf Association
Unsanctioned	A disc golf competition that is not under the PDGA license.
Understable	A disc that will turn to the right when thrown hard, when thrown by a right-handed player backhand

## QUESTIONNAIRE

## Above Ground Level Discs - Kysely

Above Ground Level Discs on yhdysvaltalainen frisbeegolfkiekkojen valmistaja. AGL on perheyritys, joka sijaitsee San Josen alueella Kaliforniassa. Kaikki sen tuotteet on nimetty puiden mukaan ja kiekot valmistettu Yhdysvalloissa. Yrityksen motto on tuoda markkinoille laadukkaita ja kilpailukykyisiä tuotteita. Tällä hetkellä AGL:n kiekkoja ei myydä Euroopassa ollenkaan. Tämän kyselyn avulla kartoitetaan, onko Suomen markkinoilla kiinnostusta AGL:n kiekkoja kohtaan.

Kysely on osa ammattikorkeakoulun opinnäytetyötäni.

Emme kerää henkilökohtaisia tietoja, eikä vastauksia ole mahdollista yhdistää vastaajaan. Kaikki vastaukset kerätään anonyymisti.

Kyselyn lopusta löydät alennuskoodin AGL:n verkkokauppaan.

\*Pakollinen

AGL kotisivut: <https://www.agldiscs.com/>

The logo for Above Ground Level Discs (AGL) features the letters 'AGL' in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below 'AGL', the word 'DISCS' is written in a smaller, bold, black sans-serif font, with each letter spaced out. A small, stylized leaf-like graphic is positioned between the 'A' and 'G' of 'AGL'.

Minkä ikäinen olet? \*

- 13-17
- 18-24
- 25-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- +66

Sukupuoli? \*

- Mies
- Nainen
- Muu
- En halua vastata

Montako vuotta olet harrastanut Frisbeegolfia? \*

- Alle vuoden
- 1-3 vuotta
- 3-5 vuotta
- 5 vuotta tai enemmän

Millainen frisbeegolffaja olet? (valitse parhaiten itseäsi kuvaava vaihtoehto)? \*

- Pelaan vain omaksi ilokseni, yksin tai kavereiden kanssa
- Käyn viikkokisoissa ja muissa lisenssivapaissa kisoissa
- Olen PDGA:n jäsen ja käyn PDGA:n alaisissa kisoissa

Mistä ostat yleisesti UUDET frisbeegolf kiekkoasi? \*

- Suomalaisista frisbeegolferikoisliikkeistä (esim: Powergrip, Frisbeemarket)
- Ulkomaalaisista frisbeegolferikoisliikkeistä (esim: Discsport, Infinite Discs, OTB)
- Supermarketeista tai urheiluliikkeistä (esim: Citymarket, Prisma, XXL, Intersport)
- Suoraan valmistajan verkkokaupasta (esim: prodigy europe, Innovastore, kiekkopiste)
- Muu: \_\_\_\_\_

Oletko aikaisemmin kuullut Above Ground Level Discs (AGL) valmistajasta? \*

- Kyllä
- Ei











Jos AGL on sinulle tuttu valmistaja, mistä kuulit siitä ensimmäisen kerran? (Jos AGL ei ole sinulle tuttu, jätä tämä kysymys välistä.)

Oma vastauksesi \_\_\_\_\_



Ohessa AGL:n tämän hetkinen kiekkotarjonta. Kaikki kiekot ovat PDGA - hyväksytyjä kilpailukäyttöön paitsi Bonsai ja Ivy, jotka ovat juniorikiekkoja ja sopivat perheen pienimmille tai kopitteluun. (Lisätietoa kiekkoista:

<https://www.agldiscs.com/collections.>)

 BALDERN AGL ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS PDGA APPROVED PUTT & APPROACH 4 0 1 3	 SYCAMORE AGL ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS PDGA APPROVED CONTROL DRIVER 7 5 0 1	 CEDAR AGL ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS PDGA APPROVED DISTANCE DRIVER 11 5 0 3	 BONSAI AGL ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS PDGA APPROVED THROW & CATCH JUNIOR PUTT & APPROACH 2 4 -1 2	 IVY AGL ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS PDGA APPROVED DRIVE & KNEEL JUNIOR DRIVER/MID 4 5 0 2
 LOCUST AGL ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS PDGA APPROVED FAIRWAY DRIVER 9 4 -1 3	 MADRONE AGL ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS PDGA APPROVED PUTT & APPROACH 3 3 0 1	 MAGNOLIA AGL ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS PDGA APPROVED MID-RANGE 5 5 0 2	 MANZANITA AGL ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS PDGA APPROVED PUTT & APPROACH 3 3 0 2	 PONDEROSA AGL ABOVE GROUND LEVEL DISCS PDGA APPROVED PUTT & APPROACH 3 4 -1 0

#### Above Ground Level Disc:in tarjoamat muovilaadut:

Woodland: Kova "perusmuovi" puttereihin ja midareihin.

Woodland Hemp: Pehmeämpi ja gripikkäämpi premium putterimuovi.

Woodland Glow: Perusmuoviseos joka hohtaa pimeässä.

Alpine: AGL:n alkuperäinen premiumseos. Kestävä ja pitävä.

Alpine Hemp: Samea premium muoviseos johon lisätty Hemp muovia tuomaan entistä enemmän pitoa.

Alpine Glow: Alpine premiumseos joka hohtaa pimeässä.

Tundra: Premiumseos johon on lisätty Nylon polymeerejä maksimaalisen pidon saamiseksi.

Löysitkö AGL:n mallistosta kiekkoa, jota haluaisit kokeilla? \*

Kyllä

Ei

Jos löysit kiinnostavan/kiinnostavia kiekkomalleja, kirjoita ne tähän:

Oma vastauksesi

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Olisitko kiinnostunut kokeilemaan AGL:n tuotteita, jos niitä olisi Suomessa saatavilla? \*

- Kyllä
- Ei
- En osaa sanoa

Jos Above Ground Level Discs -kiekot tulisivat Suomen markkinoille myyntiin, mistä haluaisit ostaa niitä? (Voit valita myös useamman vaihtoehdon.)

- Tunnetuilta suomalaisilta frisbeegolfjälleenmyyjiltä (esim: powergrip, Frisbeemarket)
- Supermarketeista tai urheiluliikkeistä
- Suoraan valmistajan Euroopan verkkosivuilta (jos AGL-Europe olisi olemassa)

