



# **OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL MARKETING OF FINNISH DESIGN**

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## ABSTRACT

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The thesis was conducted for Arctic Design Society that promotes and sells Koli lightings that are manufactured in Finland and represent clear Scandinavian design. Due to the small domestic market for design lightings, it is clear that the company aims to the foreign markets. Research was conducted to gather useful information of small, but international Scandinavian design furniture companies and map different opportunities that there are to create awareness and internationalize the business. It was also significant to find out what are the roles of networking, trade fairs and other events in the process and on the other hand what can be done online to increase the awareness and begin internationalization.

As the role of marketing communications is significant in the introduction of a new brand and in the process of increasing awareness, different marketing communication tools and techniques were studied. In addition to marketing communication, the theoretical framework considers different internationalization strategies and branding.

The research was done using case study strategy and the selected case companies were Secto Design Oy and One Nordic Europe Oy Ab. The qualitative research data was collected by using desk research and interview methods. In the interpreting and analyzing process the aim was to find common or conflicting themes in the data and develop good comparisons between different case companies.

Based on the findings of the case study there are many opportunities for Finnish design companies to increase awareness and raise interest internationally. Even though the technological development enables internationalization and entering new markets online, a blend of online and offline marketing seems like a good combination for newcomers. Events like trade fairs seem to have a significant role for the case companies in the process of increasing awareness and internationalization. In addition there are many useful inexpensive online tools to utilize and it seems that event-based and online marketing together with PR and brand management form a good tool kit for design furniture companies to increase awareness and raise interest internationally.

As the case study focused on just two case companies the results of the research are rather limited and therefore cannot be generalized. However, combining desk research and interview methods in data collection allowed studying the case companies in detail and in depth and moreover helped in critical analysis.

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Key words: internationalization, awareness, marketing communication tools, brand, design, furniture

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Current affairs in Finnish design

Internationalization of Finnish design is quite topical after a year lasting World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 program. Even after the turn of the year, the program will carry on, but as reported on World Design Capital Helsinki 2012 official website ([www.wdchelsinki2012.fi](http://www.wdchelsinki2012.fi)) the project was successful and design understanding and utilization has increased in Finland in many ways. The project gained wide international media attention and Finnish design is more well-known than ever before and therefore the time is ideal for design companies to start further internationalization planning and development. Many public projects show support for this type of development, for instance, Finnish national trade organization Finpro has launched Design Goes Global program that offers training sessions for strengthening Finnish design companies export and internationalization skills (Finpro 2012).

Moreover Finnish design has been experiencing rising exports to the United States and both public and private export activities are steadily increasing according to a design report conducted by Finnish Cultural Institute in New York and Consulate General of Finland in New York in cooperation of Wevolve strategy and design agency (Designia maailmalle 2012, 3). The report talks about future direction of Finnish design exports and event in the US in 2012 and gives good information for internationalization of Finnish design.

Design industry is naturally involved in the rapid change of the world and it is clear that new ideas and practices are needed in the internationalization of Finnish design, but what are the new opportunities that the small companies in the small industry of the small country could utilize in the internationalization?

### 1.2 Arctic Design Society and Koli

Arctic Design Society is a marketing name established to promote and sell Koli lighting collection and is the commissioner of the thesis. Koli lighting was developed in cooperation of Puutyö Mika Vihavainen and Mottowasabi design agency. The product de-

sign started in 2011 and the product development still carries on in 2013. Currently Koli collection includes ceiling, table and floor lamps with white, black or natural pinewood lampshades.

Idea of the lighting is to bring wood into home décor in a modern way. The collection emphasizes natural materials and traditional Finnish design. The simple inner surface and the repetition of wooden parts in outer surface create an exciting contrast. An innovative solution to use fabric in interlocking the wooden parts gives the lamp freshness and lightness. Koli lightings are made of high quality materials and assembled by talented craftsmen. Sustainable development is highly valued in all solutions of manufacturing and distribution. The prices of the products vary from 500.00 euros up to 900.00 euros depending on the type and material used.



PICTURE 1. Koli floor lamp (Arctic Design Society)

Prototypes of Koli lightings have been exhibited in the Finnish Institute in France, where they raised interest among a local importer. In addition the lightings have been part of Helsinki Design Capital 2012 project's Design House exhibition in Suvilahti and EcoDesign show at Habitare 2012 design fair. Both of the shows were curated and all selected products represented high quality. The first production pieces can be also seen at the showroom of Butterfly interior design office in Savonlinna, Finland.

In terms of design, the lightings are modern and represent a clear line of Scandinavian design. The Scandinavian style has been characterized by straightforwardness and un-

pretentious simplicity. Design shops specialized in Scandinavian interior design can be found in many European countries and its demand has been increasing for some time. Traditionally, the typical consumers of the design have been middle-aged women, but increasingly the consumers can also be urban residents younger than 40 years old, women or men. Arctic Design Society has defined two target groups for its products; consumers and project sales customers such as design architects and companies.

Arctic Design Society's mission is to bring value to the customers with its clear Scandinavian design and natural materials. The short term focus is on organizing the operations, refining graphic materials and the brand identity to build the widest possible visibility and make the prospective customers aware of the company. The aim is also implement e-commerce, to make the business significantly more profitable with reduced intermediaries.

It is clear that the company is interested in foreign markets due to the small domestic market for design furniture. Increasing the attractiveness of the lighting collection by supplementing the collection with new products, developing international sales and marketing, refining the operation models and the distribution network, as well as searching for complementary skills to the marketing team are part of the long term marketing strategy. After several years of operations the vision is to be known internationally at least among the project sales customers as a new and interesting actor that manufactures and markets youthful, innovative and high-quality interior design products.

### **1.3 Objectives and research question**

Before refining the strategic plans and allocating resources, more information and analysis of different opportunities is needed. Arctic Design Society wanted objective ideas and suggestions of how to gain awareness and how to get started with the internationalization process. Identifying good marketing communication practices and key success factors was thought to be essential in the process of planning Koli lightings international marketing.

It was thought to be valuable for the new company to learn from successful Finnish design furniture companies and investigate what they have in common and what are the

good practicalities they have implemented and then possibly apply this knowledge in own operations and way of doing business. The commissioner was also interested to know more about the design market in North America as the team was thought to have more experience of European and Asian markets already. Therefore opportunities in the USA have been emphasized in the study and the research question became to be:

What opportunities are there for small Finnish design furniture company to create awareness and raise interest internationally and more precisely in the United States of America (later the USA).

### **1.3.1 Sub-questions**

Traditionally design furniture businesses have started marketing new products by participating trade shows and using personal selling method. Some have argued trade shows to be old fashioned way of marketing new products. It became significant to find out what are the roles of networking, trade fairs and other events in the process of increasing awareness of design furniture company and the products in today's context.

Digital technology develops all the time and therefore marketing also becomes more and more complicated and exciting. There are so many tools and opportunities available that only the most essential should be used with the limited time available. Online tools offer also inexpensive solutions for marketing. Therefore some of the sub-questions to answer we specified to be:

What are the key success factors in internationalization of Finnish design?

What kind of marketing communication practices could be established?

What is the role of trade fairs and other events in the process of internationalization and increasing awareness and on the other hand what can be done online?

What kind of online presence should be built and how to exploit digital tools when building awareness?



## **2 METHODOLOGY**

When considering the form of the research questions in this thesis, it became obvious that the nature of the questions is exploratory. The research was carried out using case study strategy with two data collection methods: desk research and semi-structured, so-called theme interviews. The data was collected and analysed using qualitative approach.

### **2.1 Case study**

Robson (1995, 4) divides research strategies into three main categories that are experiments, surveys and case studies (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 134). Survey and experiment methods did not seem ideal since many concepts and variables would have been impossible to quantify. Case studies are defined to often give detailed and intensive information of a certain case or phenomenon (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 134). Moreover, Marschan-Piekkari and Welch (2004, 109) describe case study to be a process of learning about the case that advances understanding of the research phenomenon. Case study is described to be a quite flexible approach and can be both quantitative and qualitative and is suitable when the area of research is not well known.

Due to the fact that the opportunities and techniques to raise awareness of Finnish design furniture in a foreign market is a relatively less known topic, case study seemed to be the most relevant approach in this thesis to find out about the opportunities that Arctic Design Society could make of use in their internationalization process.

### **2.2 Data collection**

Case analyses can be performed in several ways and data may be collected by multiple ways; by observing and doing desk research of documents and interviewing (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch 2004, 109-110). Observation was not thought to be suitable for this research so the data was collected by using the two remaining suitable methods; doing desk research and interviewing.

### 2.2.1 Desk research

Nowadays there is wide variety of secondary data available for researchers in multiple sources (Hague, Hague & Morgan 2004, 45). Desk research is a very practical approach and generally refers to research which deals with secondary data and can be conducted without fieldwork. However, the term is used loosely and sometimes widened to even include all sources of information that do not involve field survey. It is a very suitable method especially in the starting point of market research when more information of the topic is needed in general.

Desk research means, for instance, searching published reports, statistics, libraries and the Internet, but the term can also be widened to include interviews with experts and speaking to trade association representatives for instance (Hague et al. 2004, 46). Desk research was suitable for this research because investigating online opportunities is naturally easy to do from your desk.

Many articles and reports can be accessed via the Internet, since there are numerous web sites that offer archive material, such as newspaper sites. Nowadays company web sites provide lots of information of company's products, distributors, histories, press releases and financial background. The information available online tend to be more current than printed material and can be accessed very easily (Hague et al. 2004, 51). Financial data of Finnish public companies and also limited information of smaller companies are listed for instance at Kauppalehti ([www.kauppalehti.fi](http://www.kauppalehti.fi)) data base. Studying Finnish design companies' web sites provides lot of benchmarking information for the commissioner. Also organizations and event web sites provide useful information for the research.

Direct contact with experts of the field was one of the data sources used in this research. This sort of data is not considered as a desk research in the strictest sense and is therefore presented as another data collection method, interviewing.

### **2.2.2 Interviewing**

Interviewing is one of the most used information collection methods, because of its flexible nature. The interview method allows asking about interviewees' opinions and is used to understand the experience of interviewees. Some of the interview method's benefits include that it allows new questions to be brought during the process and gives an opportunity to deepen the answer by giving reasoning and making further supplementary questions on demand (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 35-36.)

There are multiple forms of research interviews. The differences are defined mainly based on how formalized the interview is; structured interview has a limited set of questions whereas unstructured interview are similar to conversations and allows questions to be changed. In the middle ground of these two types of interviews there is a semi-structured interview that may have particular theme to explore, but adjustment of questioning is more open. Moreover, Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008) have given a name for this type semi-structured interviews that share a central theme and call it a theme interview.

This type of semi-structured theme interview was suitable for this research, because all the interviews discuss internationalization of Finnish design companies and opportunities in the U.S. market and online. However, the interviewees had different backgrounds and viewpoints to the topic. Combining the different data collection methods allowed studying the topic widely and resulted in variety of opportunities to be discovered and observed.

### **2.3 Selecting cases**

Selected cases need to fit together with the theoretical framework. Some of the problems related to conducting case studies are often practical such as time management and personal contacts. When selecting individuals for the study, the best ones in theoretical terms may not always be accessible or simple refuse to attend the study (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch 2004, 113.)

The criterion was to gather useful information of small, but international Finnish or Scandinavian design furniture companies, that Arctic Design Society could possibly learn from. Finally two interesting companies that also seemed different from each other were picked for the case study. The selected case companies are Secto Design Oy (later Secto Design) and One Nordic Europe Oy Ab (later One Nordic).

Secto Design was chosen due to its products' similarity to Arctic Design Society's products, wooden Finnish design lightings. The company was founded 1995 and Secto lightings' popularity is constantly growing globally and the company is expanding. Notable annual net income of 639 000 euros in 2012, fiscal growth of 22,4% from 2011 ([www.kauppalehti.fi](http://www.kauppalehti.fi) 2013) and several design awards show that the company represents successful new Finnish design and excellent continuous profitability. However, the company is still considerably small employing directly 4-6 people and product range limited to design lightings which made it appealing to study for this thesis. Export manager of Secto Design, Emma Frenzel was interviewed face to face for the study. In addition, desk research information of Secto Design was gathered mainly online, most important resources being company website and various online articles.

Another selected case company One Nordic was founded just in 2011 by Joel Roos and approximately 3 people work for the company currently. The company produces rather minimalistic Scandinavian style furniture designed by Nordic designers and is thought to be interesting for the study due to its main competencies; strong online existence, online store being main distribution channel, and assembly furniture that are easily shipped. The company seems to heavily utilize networks, social media marketing and PR and has moved forward quite fast. Representatives of One Nordic did not want to give an interview or other additional information for the study due to the fact that the commissioner of this thesis was another design furniture company. However there was a lot of information available online, many formerly published interviews and articles of the company and the products for desk research so the company was chosen for the study.

For instance studying perhaps the most famous and biggest Finnish design companies like Marimekko, Artek, Iittala or Vallila Interior that have been in business for decades were not thought to provide as much applicable information for the study due to their long history and different business models. Those companies have started their aware-

ness creation and internationalization long ago and it was thought that smaller and fresher design companies would provide more applicable information to benchmark. Also other fresh and interesting Scandinavian design furniture companies such as Hay, Muuto or Design House Stockholm could have provided much of useful information for the study, but as there was much better accessibility to the information of the selected case companies the study became limited to companies established in Finland.

Additionally, discussions with Finpro consultants Saku-Juhani Koskinen and Maria Mäkelä and Optimus Consulting's Lena Hartikainen gave information about the U.S. market, Finnish design start-ups and related public organization and project that support Finnish firms and design in internationalization.

## **2.4 Data analysis**

According to Marschan-Piekkari & Welch (2004, 118-119) interpreting and analyzing qualitative data is one of the most challenging parts of a case study research. It is important not just understand the people's experiences, but to be able to understand the data in the context that it has been produced. During the research the data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously to make sure that the theory developed alongside the growing data.

The first stage of analyzing the case study data was so called story telling process where histories of the case companies and simple narrative of each interview are constructed. Even though it is a good idea to transcribe the full interview into written form, it turned out to be a too labor-intensive task and finally the interviews were audio recorded and cut into shorter audio clips, in addition notes were written down during and after the interviews. Desk research data such as reports and other online data were printed out to be easily accessible when interpreting and writing the analysis.

In the second stage the data is rearranged from rather chronological order and put into more conceptual form. This type of conceptualizing was used in interpreting process. The aim was to find either common or conflicting themes in the data, develop good comparisons between different cases. It was assumed that different cases might tell different stories or consider different topics, but finding systematic pattern or key success

factors would be important. Finally, it was important to link and integrate the finding into the framework.

### **3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Internationalization**

Jorma Kananen (PK-yritysten kansainvälistyminen, 2010, 24) lists requirements that companies should fulfill before starting internationalization and exporting. Translated into English this check list includes reliability of delivery, product readiness, finance, human resources and strategy.

According to Kananen (2010, 24-27) it is important to ensure adequate capacity to be able to meet the demand of new foreign customers. He has noticed that many small or medium sized companies struggle fulfilling this requirement as it is not easy to estimate and make changes to the operations. Also the product needs to be suitable for the foreign market as sometimes the standards, requirements and expectations for the product are different than in the domestic market and adjustment and ability to develop are essential. Usually internationalization also requires significant financial inputs and expertise and certain skills from the workforce. Export activities need to be in line with the company's overall strategy and maximal dedication and commitment is necessary.

##### **3.1.1 Uppsala model**

Blomstermo and Sharma (2003, 261-264) talk about the Uppsala internationalization process model written by Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) and Johanson & Vahlne (1977). The model proposes that firms first operate in the domestic market before internationalization and relies on experimental knowledge. The key idea of the model is increasing involvement in international operations step by step. After gaining experience of the operations in the domestic market the firms start internationalization and move to foreign countries that are most similar to the domestic market culturally or geographically and which the company can easily understand. After gaining experience in the similar countries the firms move gradually to more distant countries.

The model also proposes that the internationalization starts with traditional exports rather than with more intensive operation models like sales subsidiaries or manufacturing

in foreign country. The firm does not increase the commitment and change operations models before gaining enough experience of the foreign market. In the beginning the exports might be occasional but the gradually increases in the process and become regular export activities. (Blomstermo and Sharma 2003, 261.)

The model seems still valid today, but also has its limitations and critics as the model does not apply on service companies as well as on companies selling products. In addition the new technologies, increased amount of information and globalization have an effect to the new market environment.

### **3.1.2 Born global model**

In born global model the companies address the needs of global markets from the inception. “This (born global) approach provides an attractive alternative to the conventional staged approach to internationalization whereby a start-up first operates in its home market and then enters one or more foreign markets sequentially” (Poole, 2012, 1).

Nowadays companies can virtually have access to multiple foreign markets by simply launching a website. Blomstermo and Sharma (2003, 263-264) write that according to Aspenlund and Moen (2001) “niche focus, technological competitiveness and strong international customer-orientation” are some of the typical competitive strengths and key features of born global firms. Blomstermo and Sharma continue (2003, 264) that quite often there seems to be successful networking or already established networks and expertise on the background.

Moreover, born global companies seem to rely often to the manager’s characteristics and skills. Global mindset and international and industry experience and contacts enable faster internationalization than in the more traditional and experimental knowledge as per Uppsala model (Blomstermo and Sharma, 2003, 261). However, especially in the early years of operations the born global companies resources might be very limited. Partnerships often bring more resources and skills that enable moving fast forward (Blomstermo and Sharma, 2003, 263).



### 3.2 Raising awareness

Buyers need to often pass six stages (figure 1) before adoption and actual purchase of a product. Traditionally first step is to make target customers aware of the product (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012, 416). Considering these stages is useful before deciding on marketing communication objectives. When entering new markets or launching new products the buyers may not even be aware of the brand and products and the first goal should therefore be raising awareness.



FIGURE 1. Buyer-readiness stages (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 416)

### 3.3 Marketing communication tools

According to Kotler and Armstrong the main marketing communication tools are advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations and direct marketing (2008, 68). Marketing communication's role is significant in the introduction of a new brand (Shimp 2010, 62). Shimp describes that word-of-mouth, personal selling and trade shows for instance are often utilized in the beginning of adaption process to make the target customers familiar with the brand.

#### 3.3.1 Personal selling and trade fairs

Personal selling is interaction between company representative and one or more prospective customers (Keller 2008, 266). This communication option's advantage is detailed, customized message to the customer. The sales personnel can have a pitch for the brand and work as a relationship builder between the brand and customer. Trade shows or trade fairs are industry specific exhibitions or events used to introduce new brands and products and examine market trends. In the traditional marketing mix they would go either under personal selling or public relations tools depending on the objectives of the event. Especially in B2B marketing combination of tradeshows and personal selling is invaluable method to make customers aware of the new brand and product.

### **3.3.2 Public relations**

Public relations (PR) may have a strong impact on awareness and can be a powerful brand building tool. According to Shimp (2010, 536), some argue that creative and powerful public relations act an important role in introduction of new products and need of advertising can be minimal. However, all new products cannot rely on publicity for successful introduction, only some products with high uniqueness and visibility capture the imagination of the media.

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2012, 455) the impacts of successful PR can be similar to massive advertising if the company launches and interesting event or story and picks up the interest of media. Interesting news, speeches, special events, written and audio visual material and public service activities may all capture the interest of the media. In addition, positive PR often gives more credible image of the company than advertising and has therefore many advantage compares to paid advertising.

Shimp divides PR into proactive and reactive PR. Publicity is strongly related to proactive PR and aims to facilitate brand awareness by increasing recognition and recall and augment brand image by forging strong and favourable association of the brand in people's minds (Shimp, 2010, 537). Product releases, executive-statement releases and feature articles are some of the most common forms of publicity and proactive PR. Information about new product can be shared on press releases or online via website and social media. Whereas product releases focus on new modified products, executive-statement releases concentrate on company representatives' opinions and statements about the industry development and trends for instance. Featured articles contain information of new products and companies that may interest the magazine's or newspaper's readers.

### **3.3.3 Word-of-mouth**

PR and word-of-mouth (WOM) share an intention to influence the conversation about products and brands. Internet and other digital devices have made opinion sharing very easy and in addition to face-to-face interaction the conversation takes place in social media, blogs and in other web sites and online communities (Shimp 2010, 547). This

electronically happening word-of-mouth (eWOM) is increasing all the time. Definition of eWOM is “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via Internet” (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler 2004, 39).

eWOM can be divided into organic and amplified eWOM. According to Word of Mouth Marketing Association (2011) naturally occurring organic eWOM happens when a person tells about the experiences with a product or a company without direct intervention of the firm. Amplified eWOM is marketer influenced or encouraged speak or conversation about the product or company. Marketer may launch a campaign to accelerate WOM (Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2013, 21).

Shimp also states that new and established brands need positive WOM communication and marketing communicators should be active in the process as the process can be affected by systematically creating buzz and encouraging people to talk favourably about the brand (2010, 547). Negative eWOM occurs as well and companies should try to prevent negative WOM by responding to the complaints and showing customers positive attitude and encouraging them to give constructive feedback (Shimp 2010, 549).

### **3.3.4 Web site**

A company's own web site works as an advertisement and offers a venue for communication between the organization and the customers. Nowadays web site has an important role when consumers want to learn about the company or a brand. Web sites are often visited for this reason specifically and it is important that the web site is attractive, provides the acquired information and possibly entertaining value and therefore fulfils the consumers' needs (Shimp, 2010, 397). Web site is the center of the online marketing communication and it is useless to drive traffic to an unattractive or untrustworthy web site.

### **3.3.5 Social media**

Today social media exists in numerous forms and there are many great platforms and tools for marketing and creating eWOM, but individual platforms' popularity raise and fall and technology evolves all the time. As Newson, Houghton and Patten sum up (2009,51) companies simply do not have time to use every type on social media, even not all of those that could be relevant.

Adamson (2008, 260) emphasizes the importance of identifying where the targeted consumers spend their time and which form of digital technology they use to get entertainment, news and purchase-related information. When choosing channels, it is also necessary to consider whether the channel is appropriate for the specific brand. Taking advantage of search technology is highly recommend in this process to find out what people are looking for online and where.

Weblogs or informally blogs are just one form of social media, in addition there are networking sites, Internet forums, contents sharing platforms and so on. There are also many different types of blogs; some blogs contain commentary or news on particular topic and some discuss different products and enable participation of others by leaving comments. Many companies have their own blogs established, but discussion of different brands and products also takes place in many blogs that individuals create. (Shimp, 2010, 401)

### **3.4 Brand in marketing communication**

As raising awareness is the most important objective for a new company and its marketing communication, it is also important to talk about brand awareness. According to Keller (2008, 51) brand awareness refers to consumer's familiarity with the brand. Creating brand awareness then means increasing the ability to identify the brand. When consumers are repeatedly exposed to the brand their familiarity with it increases. When considering high end product like design lightings the importance of a good brand is vital. Therefore marketing communication should not only affect the brand awareness, but also enhance the consumer attitudes towards the brand.

Adamson (2008) emphasizes the importance of branding in acceptance of new ideas and products. According to Adamson when starting to build a strong brand the first thing is not to create awareness, more important is to determine the specific difference that brand aims to represent to the customers compared to the competitors (Adamson 2008, 16). It seems that if the long term goal of a company is to build strong brand it is not possible to only focus on creating awareness, but also consider brand aspects since the very beginning. It is important to deliver clear and consistent message through the different communication channels. Mixed communication from various channels may result in unclear brand message. By adopting integrated marketing communication strategy and coordinating all chosen marketing communication tools to deliver positive and consistent message, companies can ensure the delivery of clear brand message (Kotler & Armstrong 2012, 412-413).

Adamson also explains (2008, 109-111) that when building a brand and relationship with customers, it is essential to develop a brand personality that has certain tone and manners defined. According to Adamson the attitude and spirit of the brand voice must be shown in all advertising, customer support and retail environments. Company website and social media accounts should also “talk the same talk” and share same graphic standards. In conclusion, one of the critical success factors is not only utilizing the different marketing communication tools, but also expressing the brand consistently by using the different tools.

## 4 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH RELATED TO INTERNATIONALIZATION

### 4.1 Reasons for internationalization

Report *Designia maailmalle* (Designia maailmalle 2012, 3) describes a widely known fact that Finnish market for design products is limited and there is often more potential in the foreign markets. However, the report underlines critical thinking and reasoning as essential starting point for internationalization. In the report, it is recommended to consider why Finnish design or company should go global and what can be done abroad. These questions should be answered before starting internationalization. Seems that the case companies have considered these questions and had quite clear vision of their internationalization and reasons for it.

According to Frenzel from Secto Design, due to the nature of the business and small domestic market, it was clear since the early years of the company that they were interested in foreign markets. Frenzel also explains that when the company started internationalization in the late 1990's, there were no similar wooden lighting products in the market. They considered the products to be unique and therefore thought they could offer something new and interesting to public spaces and home décor in Finland and in other countries worldwide.

The founder of One Nordic Joel Roos tells that he thought that the furniture industry had not changed very much during the last decades and did not answer the demand of modern consumers that are willing to buy furniture online (Fairs 2013). He grew up in a family which business was design furniture retailing in Finland and established his own company One Nordic in 2011. The company aims to sell high-quality furniture online and also deliver them smartly internationally. Many of the products' design solutions enable assembly and unassembled and can therefore be shipped in smaller packages. This reduces costs and is better for the environment, as Roos explains in the interview (Fairs 2013).

## 4.2 Key success factors in internationalization

Many sources of the research talked about the importance of proper groundwork and operational preconditions before starting internationalization. In the theoretical framework Kananen (2010, 24) also talked about the preconditions and listed important things to check before starting exports. Topics discussed by Kananen, such as reliability of delivery, human resources, strategic planning and financing distinguished also in the research, but importance of good networks and partners in the internationalization process were also emphasized.

Frenzel describes that for Secto Design, some of the most important things to focus in the process of internationalization have been finding the right clientele and networks. Frenzel tells that they choose the partners very carefully and want to be absolutely sure that the partner is suitable for them. She also thinks that in design business it is especially important that the business runs smoothly, for instance developing the logistics flow and finding the smooth path to managing the growth takes time.

*Designia maailmalle* (Designia maailmalle, 2012, 23-27) presents a model of how Finnish design could be internationalized based on the interviews of conducted of many Finnish design actors. Finding a strong substance, constant networking and co-operation were thought be part of the necessary groundwork. Moreover many interviewees talked about the social networks and partners that need to be chosen thoroughly which is in parallel to Frenzel's opinion. In addition, according to the report, knowledge of the market, business culture and legislative issues is naturally required.

In the report (Designia maailmalle, 2012, 10) Esa Vesmanen, curator of Playful New Finnish Design event, brings out an opinion that small design companies cannot expand or grow because they are only managed by the designers themselves. According to the report and interviewed experts lack of international business and general business management expertise and marketing and branding skills are some of the common reasons why there are not so many successful Finnish design companies out there in the world.

Finnpro business consultant Saku Koskinen has also noticed that limited financial and human resources are some of the typical factors preventing Finnish design companies

from internationalization. Koskinen adds that companies looking for international success need to have bright brand and refined plan (Kauppalehti, 18.10.2012).

#### **4.2.1 Secto Design and Uppsala model**

It seems that internationalization process of Secto Design has progressed in a way that is very typical to Scandinavian companies. It seems that the process has more or less followed the Uppsala model, also known as a stage model. The strategy has been entering new markets sequentially, according to the perceived proximity. In addition, seems that in some of the new markets the company has first experienced occasional exports and then moved to more close co-operation with their partners as per Uppsala model (Blomstermo and Sharma 2003, 261). Frenzel describes that due to small size of the company the internationalization has been very systematic. One of the principles has been approaching foreign markets one by one so that the growth has been well controlled and adjustments in production and logistics have been smooth.

Secto Design first gained experience of the operations in the domestic market and the internationalization process started in Scandinavia 1990's. Frenzel describes that the first steps in internationalization were mostly networking and learning trips. The first place to go outside domestic market was Sweden where the business environment and culture was thought to be the most similar to Finland. The process continued with expansion to culturally and geographically further to the rest of the Europe and after that to other continents, with only few exceptions in the process. One example of these exceptions was starting co-operation with their Spanish agent in a relatively early stage when the focus was still on Central Europe rather than in Southern. The reason for these exceptions has been an extraordinary opportunity to co-operate with promising partners. Secto Design has now representatives 35 countries and the products are exported to about 45 different countries around the world. At the moment about 80% of the sales come from exports.

However, based on the interview with Frenzel and company website information ([www.sectodesign.fi](http://www.sectodesign.fi)), seems that Secto Design has not moved to the last steps of the stage model which include establishment of a foreign sales subsidiary and foreign production manufacturing (Blomstermo and Sharma 2003, 261). The company still uses



direct export method through partners, which include agents in European markets and importers in other continents. In addition indirect exporting method applies with their online retailer that also ships abroad. Production takes place only in Finland, but for North American and some Asian markets the assembly of lightings' electrical wire and other electrical work related to the products is done in the foreign country.

#### **4.2.2 One Nordic and born global model**

It seems like One Nordic does not share the same internationalization strategy with Sec-to Design, in fact, One Nordic seems to have more characteristics of a born global firm as it was founded only two years ago and has already expanded internationally through its main distribution channel, online store. After two years of operation, One Nordic's products can already be shipped to dozens of European countries. In addition, the company has been present in many design fairs and events all over the world within last two years ([www.onenordic.com/journal](http://www.onenordic.com/journal)). According to Roos, the international breakthrough came after the Stockholm furniture fair 2013 where one of the company's lighting products won the best new product award of the year. Roos tells that the company has had sales to Dubai, Singapore and the USA for instance (Rantanen, 2013). Therefore this company of 3 employees seems to be very fast moving.

One reason that has made this possible can be the strong online presence and innovativeness in that field, utilization of new technology. This is very typical to born global firms as Blomstermo and Sharma (2003, 261-264) have written. Another reason can be the earlier gained expertise and networks, which the born global firms tend to utilize as well. The founder's family business is design furniture retailer in Finland and he has worked for the company too (Jensen, 2010). In addition Roos is highly educated as he has two university degrees from Hanken School of Economics and University of Helsinki and he has graduated from Chicago University Law School as well (Jensen, 2010). Therefore it seems like Roos has gained expertise and network on the design field earlier and has international experience and knowledge, too.

## **5 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH RELATED TO EVENTS**

### **5.1 Events provide many opportunities**

According to *Designia maailmalle* (Designia maailmalle, 2012, 22), based on experiences of Finnish design thinkers and doers, successful internationalization is naturally a combination of many contributing factors. There are multiple activities and things that build up the successful internationalization process. Events are the visible peaks in this process and seem to be maybe the best individual opportunities to bring new cooperation and also increase the awareness of the companies to the international audience.

In addition to gaining awareness and getting coverage, event participation can increase participants' experience of the local business culture and market and given an idea how their product could fit to the local context. New collaboration can also be a result of participation in an event. The new partnership may then lead to commercial success if the collaboration will results in new sales at the foreign market.

However, the event in itself is still only part of the process and what is done before and after and not only during the event, is important. Successful exports are never the result of one single event participation and going to a new market requires perseverance, financial investments, travelling and meetings and idling away sometime before the work will show promising results.

### **5.2 Trade fairs versus other events**

As mentioned earlier a trade show or a trade fair is one of the traditional marketing communication tool used when introducing a new brand (Shimp 2010, 62). Trade fairs have been often used tool in design furniture business, the most important fairs taking place in Europe and showing the newest trends and products and gathering together everyone interested in furniture design.

Most of the interviewed experts of the report thought that the traditional design furniture fairs and exhibitions are somewhat old fashioned and thought that bolder and more creative ways of implementing design events would be necessary in order to contribute internationalization of Finnish design (Designia maailmalle 2012, 29). They thought that in the future designers should be shaping the events themselves and creating significant contents rather than just presenting their products. Workshops, lectures, pop-up stores and PechaKucha format were mentioned to provide more active and social approach to events. PechaKucha format refers to gathering in different cities around the world where people can share their works in 20 slides show photos and talk about each photo about 20 seconds ([www.pechakucha.org/faq](http://www.pechakucha.org/faq)).

This mutual opinion of the experts must be related to the finding that exporting products in its particular meaning is becoming less relevant method for internationalization of design. One of the significant findings of the report is that the role and definition of design is expanding, design is nowadays also other things than furniture (Designia maailmalle 2012, 6). At the same time when the design industry is changing, should the traditional Finnish export thinking and marketing tools such as furniture fairs be left behind and try to exchange and import new ideas and find new ways of implementing the design events.

Frenzel's opinion about design fairs differs from the interviewed design people. According to her trade fairs are maybe the most important marketing channel for Secto Design still today and they seem relevant for their lighting product business. Furniture and lighting fairs have been important places where they have often had the first contacts with their retailers, agents and other partners and gained awareness among the international audience. "There is a reason why these furniture fairs still exist and companies go there" as Frenzel says.

Secto Design participates also exhibitions, more commercial events like design markets and other "cool events" in the city as Frenzel describes them. She thinks those events are also useful tools related to branding and creating awareness. However they have noticed that those events do not seem to bring so much tangible benefits or the benefits are harder to measure. Trade fairs are the best place for doing business and making contacts in Frenzel's opinion. She thinks that bad economic situation might even emphasize the significance of traditional fairs as companies are cutting off from all extra.

What is interesting is that One Nordic that is considered new and modern actor on the field seems to attend also the traditional furniture fairs such as Stockholm furniture fair and Habitare in Helsinki and Maison & Objet in Paris having own stands there. One Nordic's products have also been shown in the main events of Milan and Cologne fairs through co-operation projects. In addition to the biggest fairs there are also many other events taking place in the city simultaneously. One Nordic was part of exhibition called Juice during Milan design week 2013 instead of attending the main event so therefore it seems that they participate multiple kind of events ([www.facebook.com/OneNordicDesign](http://www.facebook.com/OneNordicDesign)).

### 5.3 Focused events

Even though Secto Design participates multiple events annually, they have also tried to focus more on events targeted to more specific audience and therefore clearer goals. For instance, Frenzel thinks that one of the benefits of Stockholm furniture fair is the orientation to only Scandinavian design. Therefore it has been a good place for launching new products and get publicity as the audience is narrowed to those particularly interested in Scandinavian design. In Sweden they already have well-functioning partnerships established so the objectives of this event are stronger related to PR and gaining visibility in media rather than finding new partnerships.

Another example of design event with even more narrow focus is Architec@Work in Marseille, France. The event is targeted only to professional architects who actually form one of Secto Design's segments as well. The event is an opportunity for niche marketing and informing the customers about the newest products and things. Based on the interviews of the report *Designia maailmalle* (Designia maailmalle 2012, 27-28) many of the interviewees also thought that when the focus of the event is more narrow and clear, the better achievements are in that area.

## 5.4 Design events in the USA

The largest design event in the USA is considered to be New York Design week held annually on May. During that time there are many individual events taking place around New York City, the biggest one being International Contemporary Furniture Fair (later ICFF) which had about 29000 attendees in the 25<sup>th</sup> annual fair in 2013. Seems that at least Finnish furniture company Artek has been presented at ICFF recently ([www.icff.com](http://www.icff.com)).

The most significant design events of the country are held mostly in the big cities, but Emma Frenzel from Secto Design has noticed that even though North America is such a huge market, the most important design events still take place in Europe and therefore big American design actors tend to attend events and fairs in Europe as well. In fact, Secto Design's first contact with American importer was in trade fair in Berlin, Germany. Therefore she indicates that contacts with key partners of the market can be made also elsewhere than in the target country if you raise enough interest.

### 5.4.1 New Finnish Design events

Finnish Cultural Institute in New York and Consulate General of Finland in New York have worked many years together with a third organization called Design Forum Finland to contribute internationalization of Finnish design in the USA. Between years 2007 and 2011 events named *New Finnish Design* have taken place during annual New York Design week on May. The events have been organized in Meatpacking District of New York City and all together over 200 Finnish design actors (including designers, design agencies and companies of all sizes) have been presented in those 5 annual events (Designia maailmalle, 2012, 19).

According to *Designia maailmalle*, smaller companies, individual designers and internationally inexperienced participants seemed to expect international awareness, creation of new contacts and practical experience of the U.S. market, partner organizations or consumers. These expectations seemed to be naturally modest compared to the bigger companies with commercial objectives, because small design firms or individual de-

signers did not have as goal-oriented plans or immediate resources for commercial internationalization, or their products were not yet in the manufacture or production method did not enable rapid production scalability (Designia maailmalle, 2012, 20).

Overall feedback of the companies that participated in New Finnish Design events showed that they experienced success in several ways. Making contacts with local actors and getting publicity and coverage in print and blogs was mentioned many times. Some participants also thought that the events and the whole project had increased their international experience and market understanding, for example how to manage public relations, how to make contacts and how to follow up and act afterwards. In addition, participants felt that participation increased experience of local business practices and understanding of how their own activities or products relates to the local context.

In some cases the events also enabled new co-operation and brought therefore support for interesting internationalization opportunities. Commercial success seemed to be dependent of the participants and the companies' own activity, and resources as successful export activities are never results of a single event or exhibition, but requires continuity, large financial investment, travelling and meetings (Designia maailmalle, 2012, 21).

In contrast to previous years, in 2012 New Finnish Design CITY was a 10 month long project including several events. The project emphasized more immaterial design rather than material objects, but there was still support for internationalization of design furniture as well. The New Finnish Design CITY lounge was one section at Wanted Design fair during New York Design week presenting both material and immaterial Finnish design.

Interestingly both of the research case companies Secto Design and One Nordic were presented at Wanted design fair in the New Finnish Design CITY lounge and also in 2013 purely with own section and inputs. In 2013 Finnish Cultural Institute in New York and Consulate General of Finland in New York did not organize any projects similar to earlier years and according to the website ([www.newfinnishdesign.net](http://www.newfinnishdesign.net)) there are no upcoming projects announced for 2014 either.

### 5.4.2 Wanted Design

Wanted Design is a fair organized annually during New York Design week around the same time as ICFF. This is a relatively new event that debuted in 2011 and aims to be an alternative smaller fair to be presented at during the time that design people gather in NYC. In addition to installations and exhibitions the event organizers have tried to bring other activities and functions to the event as well, such as workshops, pop-up store, conversation series and presentations to make the smaller event unique and attractive. Many Finnish design actors have participated in this event, for instance as mentioned earlier, in 2012 New Finnish Design project brought a lounge or exhibition section of various Finnish designs at the fair. (Wanted Design 2013.)

According to Frenzel Secto Design wanted to be part of the New Finnish Design CITY lounge at Wanted Design Fair in 2012, because the timing was good for them as the Seto Design had just started partnering with their American importer. The fair seemed to be a good opportunity to be presented at the market for the first time and introduce the new partnership. Frenzel told that they had not set very specific goals or expectations for the 2012 event as there were only few of their lightings presented at the same exhibition space with other Finnish design. Frenzel thinks that their brand might not have stand out very clearly in the section of other Finnish brands.

It was also the first visit to the USA for One Nordic that presented its Bento chair and table at the Finnish co-operation project at Wanted Design fair in 2012. According to Roos, attending the event showed that their concept was relevant for the U.S. market and resulted in new contacts. Still American consumers cannot order One Nordic products online so the starting point was different than for Secto Design that already had representatives in the market ([www.onenordic.com/journal](http://www.onenordic.com/journal)).

In 2013 Secto Design and One Nordic co-operated at Wanted Design sharing an exhibition section together. Frenzel told in the interview in March 2013 that Secto Design has bigger ambitions for this year as they are attending the event for the second time. They were expecting to be noted better as they represented their own brand more clearly this year. The aim was to gain awareness at the market and be really noticed.

### 5.4.3 Nordic Cool

Related to Scandinavian design, there is also a month long culture festival called Nordic Cool held annually in Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. The festival features about 700 hundred artists from Scandinavia and dozens of events that include dance, music, art and also design. Embassy of Finland has been actively involved in organizing the event (Embassy of Finland, Washington 2013). In 2013 as part of the event, there was a design exhibitions illustrating contemporary Nordic design in its all forms, for instance Ivana Helsinki design were seen on the exhibitions but, the design furniture and lightings were from Nordic countries other than Finland. This seems to be an opportunity that other Scandinavian design companies have utilized better the companies from Finland.

### 5.5 Participating events

According to the report (Designia maailmalle 2012, 28-29) continuity was also thought to be important in everything in doing business, also event participation would be a good plan in the long term, for at least two years at a time. Frenzel also emphasizes the importance of continuity. She has realized that the company might be noted after attending event successfully for one time, but the prospective partners only become truly interested after having seen you there several times. “It makes them understand that we are dedicated and serious about what we do”.

Frenzel adds that after many years of internationalization efforts Secto Design has reduced the number of trade fairs that they attend in those markets that the business seems to be on good track already. As an example she uses their German market which they have worked hard for many years and it seems to bear fruit now. Secto Design did not attend the big IMM Cologne furniture fair in 2013 as Secto lightings are part of the permanent exhibition of Design Post showroom in Cologne nowadays. This has given them more resources to focus on other markets and events that still need significantly more efforts.



## **6 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH RELATED TO OTHER MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOLS**

### **6.1 Marketing communication tools for creating awareness**

As Shimp says (2010, 62), marketing communication's role is significant in the process of introducing a new brand and creating awareness. Earlier discussed tradeshows and other events that are much used marketing communication tools in the field and belongs either to personal selling or public relations categories in the classical marketing communication mix (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012, 437). In addition to events, case companies seem to utilize also many public relations tools such as press releases and sponsorships. Online marketing, which can be considered as one type of direct marketing, seems to also provide many opportunities for marketing design furniture and building the relationship with customers.

Out of the traditional five marketing communication mix alternatives, advertising and sales promotion do not seem to be the most often used marketing communication tools of small design furniture companies, nor are they used by the case companies.

### **6.2 Public relations**

As summarized earlier, public relations can have a strong impact on public awareness at a much lower cost than advertising. Proactive PR seems to be very important tool for both Secto Design and One Nordic to facilitate brand awareness and increase recognition.

It seems like One Nordic has benefited of PR in the introduction of the new brand and products. As Shimp says (2010, 537) not all companies can rely on the media and publicity in the introduction, only unique and interesting companies and products capture the attention of the media and enable utilization of PR. Numerous articles of One Nordic and its founder and product show that One Nordic has definitely captured the media interest. The factors that have enabled this are not as simple to explain. Formerly established connections to the media representatives through the family furniture business

Skanno certainly helped, but clearly there would not be publications without an interesting, newsworthy story.

One Nordic's story might be interesting due to its abnormality. The founder grew up in the home where design furniture was strongly present. However he chose a career path quite far from design and creative field and earned three degrees and became a lawyer by education and worked in the USA. The dramatic events of 2008 and start of the global financial crisis are linked to the story. Roos came back to Finland to help his family and got into the furniture business and realised the industry has not picked up the new online opportunities like many other industries had and decides to establish furniture company that aims at that niche (Jensen 2010; Rantanen 2013).

Also the innovative business concept of assembly furniture with easy assembly and availability online and promises to sell high quality with lower prices seems to attract not only design crowd, but also mainstream and therefore guarantee publicity. One Nordic's claims to the press that it is not one of those furniture brands "that are terrible at selling online" (Fairs 2013). The comments seem deliberate and powerful as the online articles make people leave comments and create a public discussion. In addition, the company feeds the publicity by offering good demos of the assembly products, photo and audio-visual materials and gives interviews.

PR is strongly related to the earlier discussed events that attract also media and is a good opportunity to communicate with the prospective customers and the press and gain exposure. For both Secto Design and One Nordic, being present at certain trade fairs has resulted in getting publicity, for instance in magazine and web articles or blog postings that present the companies' products. Both Secto Design and One Nordic also make press releases and arrange press conferences of latest news or products as new things always interest media and people. Press releases, photos and latest news of the company are available for the media on the company web sites and also press conferences often take place during events.

For instance, Secto Design's press release for Stockholm furniture fair 2013 considered information about their newest lamps Aspiro, telling about the new LED technology and design and also proactively told shortly about the whole lighting collection. In addition the release informed about the concern related copies and discusses the protection of the

products and design and communicates that the company acts against these copiers. This seems to be a reaction to things happening around the company and is therefore reactive PR ([www.sectodesig.fi](http://www.sectodesig.fi)). Frenzel tells that in addition to press releases and media conferences, Secto Design co-operates with media representatives borrowing lightings for photo shoots, TV programmes and therefore establishes sponsorships and utilizes product placements.

Roos tells that One Nordic started to really raise interest among the international audience after their new Levels lamp won the best new product title at Stockholm furniture fair 2013 (Rantanen, 2013). Another product of One Nordic, Hai armchair was also a nominee for the best armchair of the year at the same fair. The awards seemed to give much of positive PR to the product and the company and ever since the fair Levels lamp has been displayed in almost 100 different design publications. The same lamp in different colors has also become the bestselling product of One Nordic (Huusko 2013). Naturally One Nordic has wanted to communicate about this success to their followers and prospective customers to utilize the recognition and therefore develop the positive company image. For instance One Nordic journal and Twitter account informed about the recognitions (One Nordic 2013). The award was also related to the specific event and without participation the award winning and positive PR would not have taken place.

### **6.3 Word-of-mouth**

At the same time that eWOM communication is increasing in general there is lot of conversation going on about the design products online as well. Simply by using search engine one can find numerous online community and blog contents related to Secto lightings. According to Frenzel, Secto Design does not systematically encourage people talk about their products online. Many of the eWOM contents seem like naturally happening organic eWOM as people like to share their pictures and experiences with their Secto lighting products.

In Frenzel's opinion there are roughly two types of strategies related to the design of the furniture, either try to be a trendsetter or then offer more classical and timeless pieces. The trendy companies tend to get more involved in the buzz creation and amplified

WOM than the classic furniture companies. This makes sense as the trendy companies also launch new product more often and want them to be elegant right now. Frenzel describes that they want Secto lightings to be long lasting and classic and still interesting after ten years and therefore try to avoid hype. Moreover, the company does not sell the products themselves but focuses on B2B sales and therefore building relationship with consumers is not the primary focus.

One Nordic seems to be more active in buzz creation as they post actively news, photos and other contents online. The current online contents seem to be much of B2C messages from the company, but there are also numerous marks of the products in blogs and other online communities, however with a quick search, no C2C conversation of One Nordic can be found at the moment. Interestingly many of the blog contents related to One Nordic or its products seem to be presented with informative tone in web site or company blogs rather than in consumer blogs that tell about the experiences with the products. This could be perhaps partly explained with the novelty of the company and still rather low sales volumes.

#### **6.4 Secto Design and online presence**

The website is the core of Secto Design's online presence as it happens to be for most of the companies and latest news is being updated regularly to the company website. The website has been built to have a simple and quite classic look where one can browse the company and designer and representatives' information, product catalogue, few reference picture and latest news. For the press image and press releases it is necessary to get first a password from the company. It is noteworthy that the more or less similar contents of the website have been built in total five different languages including Japanese. In addition to the website the company has recently started to utilize email marketing by sending e-newsletters to all willing to subscribe.

It is noteworthy that Secto Design has not started up any social media accounts and according to Frenzel it has been a conscious decision, due to the strategy and different priorities and nature of business where the marketing focus is on B2B customers. Nor have they ever had any paid advertisements online or offline. However Frenzel agrees that if Secto Design was a newly established unknown company now in 2013 they

would certainly use as many of free online tools as possible to gain visibility and awareness. Frenzel tells that she is very pleased with their agents and retailers that are active in marketing Secto Design's products online. For instance, their American agent does great job at promoting the brand online on their blog and on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. Pictures, written material and videos of the lightings and the company can be found in many websites, forums, and blogs, all over in social media.

The message of Secto Design brand and ideology seem to be expressed quite consistently even though there are many retailers and agents participating in creation of the message and introducing the brand on their own websites. Things such as simplicity, soft luminosity, natural wooden material, handcraft, and environmental friendliness come across in the communication of the brand and the characteristics. The designer Seppo Koho and his design ideology have been introduced in many of the marketing communication messages of Secto Design. Seems like the company is expressing the Secto brand consistently the same way just like Kotler and Armstrong suggest (2012,412-413.)

## **6.5 One Nordic and online presence**

One Nordic seems to have built online presence, much more intentionally than Secto Design. This natural as the company core value includes strong online presence and web store is the main distribution channel. The website provides extensive information of the brand and products. There are also lot of information for media provided with easy access. The website is built in English which is one demonstration of the company's global mindset. Like Secto Design, One Nordic also offers a possibility to subscribe to email newsletter receiver.

Website journal includes stories similar to blog postings that provide information about the industry such as interviews with designers or event organizers, guides to best design destinations or other places to visit, stories behind products and so on. This content marketing, sharing useful information on the mutual interest in design seems like a good way to build relationship between the brand and customers and might even increase the brand credibility and trust in people's eyes. Journal also gathers smartly together all

contents of the company social media accounts and all the latest news can be easily read despite the original posting platform.

One Nordic has accounts at least in Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Vimeo and Instagram. Many of the accounts are nicely tied together to synchronize with each other and with the website. As the platforms are different from each other and aim for different things, the contents shared by same company also vary a lot between the different communities and sites. However seems that all of the communication is in line with the brand and values. Therefore the different platforms seem to “talk the same talk” just as Adamson guides to do it, when to building up the brand and relationship with customers (2008, 109-111).

LinkedIn is the most popular business-to-business networking site at the moment and relevant in design and furniture industries as for any industry (Newson, Houghton & Patten, 2009, 53). It is a great way of maintaining list of professional contacts. LinkedIn is offering all the time more contents for organizations as well. One Nordic also uses LinkedIn and shares information of the company at the site. Recently the company has also used the site for human resource purposes and it has announced that it is hiring and given the job description.

One Nordic’s Vimeo video sharing account then for instance contains demonstration videos how to assemble the furniture and communicate about the easiness of the process. There is also a story telling video of how certain products were developed and this is communication about the brand identity.

On social networking site Facebook and on micro blogging site Twitter One Nordic post updates of event participations, product launches, featured articles and other things related to what is going on with the company at the moment. Facebook remains one of the most popular social networking sites, but might not be compulsory site to be seen on anymore. For One Nordic, Facebook seems like a relevant platform as the company reaches more people through Facebook than through other platforms. One Nordic has about 2000 thousand users liking the company on Facebook on September 2013. Micro blogging site Twitter is a very popular platform globally even though it might not be so popular in Finland. As blogging or writing online journal is quite time consuming, Twit-

ter and sending tweet provides often a much quicker version of telling the same information much shortly, but still keeping the followers up to date.

In addition to the website and Facebook the company also posts photos on photo and video sharing community Instagram with a mobile application that allows adding different filters to the pictures to give them more interesting tone. The photos can be then shared in Instagram and simultaneously in other platforms such as Facebook and Twitter if wanted. The company has about 860 followers on Instagram.

One Nordic's Pinterest profile also contains photos of the products. Posting photos to the site can be considered as visual marketing as well as Instagram and Facebook photo sharing. However the company does not seem to use it as actively as some other platforms. Pinterest, however, has millions of users and it is popular especially in America where it seems to attract especially female user base. Pinterest is often used for shopping inspiration and has much of potential for companies in increasing awareness. One Nordic seems to have realised this as well and getting involved in the site.

Visual marketing seems like an increasing trend in general and the photo sharing sites have said to be some of the fastest growing social networking platforms. One Nordic's shared photos vary on different platforms but many of them show the products in different environments and demonstrate the assembly features. Seems that many of the photos aim to the same as many interior decoration magazine articles and photos, showing the examples how the products look like in different interiors and giving ideas for the viewers and prospective customers. By sharing customers' photos, One Nordic also wants to communicate about product sales and therefore about the reliability perhaps. By posting the customer pictures at their sites they also let customers participate in the brand creation process.

## 7 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH RELATED TO COLLABORATION

### 7.1 Collaboration and networks key success factors

According to *Designia maailmalle* (Designia maailmalle 2012, 24) perhaps the most important prerequisite for internationalization is an extensive social network that consists of various actors. The network creates an opportunity to bring business to a new level as new channels and cooperation models may take the business to even surprisingly positive direction.

Finpro business consultant Saku Koskinen also emphasizes the importance of cooperation. Koskinen has been in contact with approximately hundred Finnish design companies and discussions with them have shown that many of them struggle with similar problems that prevent successful internationalization. The companies have limited financial and human resources, but they are unwilling to work together. In Finland, there are many small promising companies, but they work scattered. However, in internationalization, often it is the collaboration and partnering that makes the success.

Frenzel tells that maybe a single most significant thing that helped Secto Design in the internationalization was finding their first international partner. The exports started when they first made a contract with the Swedish agent. They also co-operate with other design companies, even with companies that are also considered their competitors, like One Nordic. The companies have shared exhibition sections at fairs to cut the costs for instance and cooperated in new markets where both companies have been looking for business partners and used consultant services jointly to get contacts for both of the companies.

Frenzel says that Secto Design collaborates a lot with other companies, but in her opinion, the more the better. Just like Koskinen and the interviewees of the report *Designia maailmalle*, Frenzel would also like to deepen the collaboration between small Finnish design companies. “It is much better to cooperate than compete with each other”.

In fact, several organizations and public project show support for internationalization of design and encourage companies to cooperate. Ministry of Employment and the Econ-



omy (later MEE) encourage enterprises operating in the domestic market to internationalization. MEE provides aid to for companies doing joint export promotion projects, like participation in exhibitions (Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2013). For instance Secto Design together with other Finnish design companies has received financial aid for participating design fairs and the aid has been remarkable for the companies and highly appreciated. One of the criteria has been participating together.

Also relatively new Finpro's program called *Design Goes Global* has been out to support internationalization of design. The program has been implemented twice so far, in 2012 and in 2013. The goal of the half a year lasting program is to make a roadmap for the participating companies and by following this plan or roadmap the companies should get more power for exports and foreign operations.

The program includes training in areas such as planning the international growth and allocating resources, clarifying business concept, finding the suitable markets and making the business appealing to business angels. The participating companies have travelled to an agreed target market as part of the training, met representatives from the prospective financiers and had an opportunity to learn from each other during the program. There has been plenty of companies interested of the program and the most suitable ones have been chosen for the program after application process. Attending the subsidized program requires approximately 2000 euros investment from each of the companies, but is actually worth of 12000 euros and therefore definitely very attractive opportunity for small and medium sized design companies.

## **7.2 Collaboration in the USA**

Public support of Embassy of Finland, Consulate General, Finnish Cultural Institute for Finnish design in the USA have been brought up earlier related to event organizing and commissioning report. Also Finpro and several Finnish-American Chambers of Commerce provide business consultancy and help with networking for Finnish companies aiming to the U.S. market, but not particularly focused in the field of design. Naturally there are countless collaboration possibilities depending on the budget. On the private sector for instance creative and branding agency Kokoro & Moi that operates in Helsin-

ki and New York City works with Finnish companies entering to the USA and has notable experience working with art and design organizations (Kokoro & Moi 2013).

Consultancy with legislative matters might be more important in the USA than in any other market. For instance, in the European Economic Area certain products such as electrical devices need CE marking to confirm that the product meets the requirements of the applicable EU legislations to enable the free movement of the products within the European market ([ec.europa.eu/CEmarking](http://ec.europa.eu/CEmarking)). In North America the electrical system and laws are different than in Europe and therefore requirements are different as well. In the USA getting products UL listed by organization called Underwriters Laboratories, is one possibility when wanting to sell lighting products in the market ([www.ul.com](http://www.ul.com)). The UL listed mark is applied to products that comply with UL requirements. However, due to the complex system partners with experience about the system and process are needed.

Secto Design has an importer in their North American market like in all markets outside Europe. The importer does the electrical wiring of lighting products in the USA under a UL follow-up service program. The contracts have been made so that manufacturer's responsibilities are rather minimal regarding legal disputes, which can be a very harmful and serious issue when doing business in the USA compared to Europe for instance. The partner also has an extensive insurance plan. Frezel thinks this could have been much harder to arrange from Finland and be a barrier for profitable business. Juridical consultancy with matters such as sales contract and product liability matters were needed and again partner with knowledge of both Finnish and American legislation was needed and required much of financial resources.

All in all going to the U.S. market requires much of resources and networks that small design companies might not have. For instance Secto Design's products have raised interest among the American audience for several years, but only around in 2012, after many years of operation and internationalization, the company was prepared enough to approach the market in earnest. The other case company One Nordic and its web store does not provide shipping to destinations outside Europe, but according to Roos, One Nordic has seen sales to the USA already, but he does not shed the light more on that matter (Rantanen, 2013).

Building good networks in the USA which possibly lead later to further collaboration needs much of determinacy and systematic efforts. As Maria Mäkelä (2013) from Finpro USA says in the interview, entering the U.S. market especially requires continuity and making an appearance and contacts over and over again. According to *Designia maailmalle* (Designia maailmalle 2012, 10) Linda Liukas from Aalto Entrepreneurship Society also thinks that only regular communication and presence is the key that leads into co-operation with the established contacts.

## 8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Successful internationalization seems to start with proper ground work and gathering resources. Clear vision and well-functioning operations and good human and financial resources are required. Developing extensive networks is important in the process as established partnerships and collaboration will take the business forward. Finally simultaneous efforts to create brand awareness with multiple marketing communication activities and tools are some of the key success factors in the process.

Based on the finding of the case study there are many relevant opportunities for Finnish design companies to increase awareness and raise interest internationally and the overall company strategy defines which opportunities that should and can be utilized. Even though the technological development enables internationalization and entering new markets online, a blend of online and offline marketing seems like a good combination for newcomers.

Events like trade fairs seem to have a significant role in the process of increasing awareness and internationalizing. They provide opportunities to gain awareness among the design crowd, visibility in media, new business contacts and practical experience of the market. However successful internationalization is never the result of single event participation, what is done well in advance and after the event is significant also. Whether it is the USA or any other market, entering a new market and raising interest there requires continuity, persistence and regular communication and presence in addition to good business concept.

New York is a strategic gateway to the North American design market and one of the places where increasing awareness is logical to start. Scandinavian functionality and simplicity have been somewhat increasing trends in interior design, but a product does not raise interest just because it represents Scandinavian or Finnish design.

In addition to events there are many useful online marketing tools that are cost effective and can be utilized in developing brand awareness and raising international interest. The case companies have utilized interactive website, content marketing, social media marketing and email marketing for instance. Also PR tools such as press releases and sponsorships are used in the process. However it is not easy to categorise the different tools

that case companies use to increase awareness and raise interest as PR management is closely related to event and online marketing. Therefore it can be said that event-based and online marketing together with public relations seem to form a good tool kit for design furniture companies to increase awareness and raise interest internationally.

Also, especially when marketing products that aim to represent good design and quality, building unique image of the brand into the customers' minds is inevitable. Branding should be important also in the beginning when creating awareness and the brand identity should be integrated to the marketing communication and the message should be consistent through the many communication channels that the company uses. The case companies seem to utilize storytelling technique when communicating and building relationship with their customers.

### **8.1 Suggestions for Arctic Design Society**

While gathering necessary resources for internationalization the company could already start active networking and online marketing keeping the brand driven strategy in mind. Out of the two case companies one acts very actively online using numerous platforms, trying to amplify eWOM and another one little less actively, but still having website and products sold in web stores. For Arctic Design Society it would probably be the best to build an interactive website with rich contents and consider starting up accounts in online communities such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Vimeo similarly to One Nordic. Also company's representatives could start growing their professional networks in LinkedIn for instance. Frenzel from Secto Design thinks that it is smart for start-ups to utilize these online tools even though they haven't started up any of those accounts at Secto Design. Moreover she says that if the company was established now in 2013 they would likely use different strategy and utilize those online tools for networking and marketing purposes.

Attending trade promotion programs such as Finpro's programs tailored for the specific field could be something to consider when the company is ready to make a full commitment to internationalize. Thanks to the public support some of the programs like *Design Goes Global* are actually worth more than the required financial inputs of each participating company.

As pointed out in the research, design fairs seem still relevant for the field, but there are nowadays also other events to participate and promote the brand at. Again the company strategy determines which ones to attend as they often depend on the market that the company currently wants to focus on. However, when starting the internationalization, it is practically easier to start in markets similar to the home market and then gradually move further. From this point of view it would be wise to first go to fairs in Europe and then later on move to other continents for instance. Attending events in countries nearby Finland is also more affordable. The event attendance and budget should be planned at least for three consecutive years at time. Based on the estimations of Frenzel from Secto Design, if a design furniture company would attend a fair in Stockholm together with other Finnish companies and get public aid for the project, the single event participation would cost about 10,000.00 euros at minimum for a company.

Based on the research it is suggested to try to enter the U.S market later on when the company is more mature and already present in other international markets as the U.S market seems attractive, but very challenging for newcomers. When the time comes the single opportunities and events might have changed, but it is clear that New York remains as the design capital of the continent and a gateway to the North American design market.

## **8.2 Limitations and future research**

As the case study focused on just two case companies the results of the research are rather limited and therefore cannot be generalized. Things and working methods that seem suitable for one company may not be as suitable for another. The case companies were chosen mainly due to their similarity to the commissioner and they also matched with the theoretical framework. However, perhaps it would be beneficial to learn from companies dedicated to other than design furniture and companies not based in Finland to get a different perspective to the topic.

Combining desk research and interview methods in data collection allowed studying the case companies in detail and in depth and moreover helped in critical analysis. Nevertheless qualitative research is always affected by the human experience and the context that the research has been produced in. Interviewee biases may also affect the results.

The analysis of Secto Design is based on interview and desk research data and the analysis of One Nordic is based on secondary data meaning articles and interviews conducted by others and other desk research data given mainly by the case company online. Interview of One Nordic representative would probably have provided additional interesting information for the research, but naturally all the best individuals may not be available for the study. On the other hand, even the volume of the research data that excluded an interview of One Nordic, already made the analysis and interpretation time consuming.

In the future it would be interesting to continue researching the internationalization of Finnish design companies, but focus perhaps on other than the U.S. market as there seems to be demand for Scandinavian design globally. Also, it would be interesting to continue the research related to Finnish design in the U.S market but instead of researching marketing communication focus on studying the distribution and different e-commerce and brick-and-mortar opportunities and sales channels.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Base for interview with export manager Emma Frenzel, Secto Design Oy.  
15.4.2013. Interviewer Erika Sillanaukee.

### Taustasta:

Kuinka kauan olet ollut tehtävässäsi?

Millainen tausta sinulla on?

Miten tehtävät sinun ja toimitusjohtaja Tuula Juseliuksen kanssa jakautuvat?

### Kansainvälistymisestä:

Miksi ja kuinka vientiä lähdettiin alkujaan käynnistämään?

Mitkä asiat työllistivät eniten viennin alkuvaiheessa?

Missä asioissa onnistuminen muodostui keskeiseksi?

Mitkä ovat tärkeimmät valmiudet sisustustuotteiden viennin aloittamisessa?

Oliko alkuvaiheessa merkittäviä kustannuskynnyksiä?

### Yhdysvaltojen markkinoista:

Miten luonnehtisit yrityksen vientiä Pohjois-Amerikan markkinoille?

Ovatko tuotevastuukysymykset vaikeita Yhdysvalloissa?

Secto Design osallistuu toukokuussa toista kertaa Wanted Design NYC tapahtumaan, minkälaisia odotuksia ja tavoitteita teillä on tapahtumaosallistumisen suhteen?

Vuonna 2012 Secto Design oli osa New Finnish Design CITY loungea ja tänä vuonna oma messuosasto. Miten luulet tämänvuotisen osallistumisen eroavan viime vuodesta?

Oletko kuullut Nordic Cool tapahtumasta Washington D.C:ssä?

Mitä hyötyä tapahtumista on ollut Secto Designille markkinalla?

Mitä Yhdysvalloissa on pitänyt tehdä toisinkin Euroopassa?

Kattolamput eivät amerikkalaisittain perinteisiä valaisimia, miten tämä pitää ottaa markkinalla huomioon?

Miten olette kontaktoineet Yhdysvalloissa?

Secto Designing agentti Pohjois-Amerikassa on Global Lighting. Miten yhteistyö alkoi?

Kehen muuhun kuin agenttiin nojataan markkinalla?

Messuista ja tapahtumista tarkemmin:

Minkälaisia resursseja tapahtumiin osallistuminen vaatii?

Mitkä tapahtumat ja messut ovat teille keskeisimpiä?

Kertoisitko lisää osallistumisestanne messuille, esim. Pariisin, Helsingin, Dubain, Kölnin, Milanon tai Tukholman messuille?

Sanotaan ettei designin kansainvälistyminen ole enää tuoli ja lamppunäyttelyissä. Mitä muuta Secto Design tekee?

Muusta markkinoinnista:

Tällä hetkellä Secto Design ei myy itse tuotteitaan?

Mitä kanavia hyödynnettiin alkuaikoina?

Onko nykyisin enemmän myynti- ja markkinointi väyliä?

Mitä kanavia hyödynnetään?

Kuinka osallistutte kuluttajamarkkinointiin?

Miten hallitsette PR:ää?

Internetistä löytyy merkintöjä Secto Designista ja sen tuotteista mm. sosiaalisessa mediassa. Kuinka yrityksenä osallistutte tähän?

Miten tarkkailette verkossa tapahtuvaa keskustelua yrityksestä?

Onko tietoinen valinta että vain yrityksellä nettisivut, mutta ei verkkotilejä?

Miten yhteistyötahot osallistuvat Secto Designing tuotteiden markkinointiin verkossa?

Miten uuden valaisimen lanseeraus on sujunut?

Mitä seuraavaksi, miten näet että ala kehittyy?