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Abstract	<p>Aim: Vätternrundan is one of three cycling rides organised yearly in Motala, Sweden. It is one of the world's largest cycling events in number of participants, but staying at the top requires constant reinvention and reconfiguration.</p> <p>The purpose of this study is to formulate a strategic marketing plan for the business unit Vätternrunda answering the following questions for effective marketing management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How can competitive advantage be achieved? - What is the holistic current situation of the business? - What marketing strategy can and should be used? <p>Method: The work of formulating a plan is a creative process involving analysis of internal data, supplemented by market research. Empirical data has been collected from secondary sources such as existing documents and earlier studies complemented by the researchers observations, experiences and interviews with key actors.</p> <p>Result & Conclusions: The results show a growing potential market, provided that it is properly targeted. The strategies possible are brand strengthening, product development and differentiation. Of great importance is also internal marketing and partner relationship development. The key to effective implementation is the organizational capabilities and core competence.</p> <p>Suggestions for future research: How to amplify the efficiency of an organization where social and profit-making objectives meet.</p> <p>Contribution of the thesis: The study brings strategic guidance to the company being studied but also additional knowledge of the market for other similar events as well as being a case study of possible interest to fellow academics.</p>
Keywords	marketing strategy, situation analysis, sport, event, cycling, Vätternrundan

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1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the reader to the background of the study, leading to its purpose and the questions that the study aims to answer.

1.1. Background

Every summer lots of cyclists gather in Motala, Sweden to take part in the recreational cycling rides of Vätternrundan according to the company website and statistics (Vätternrundan, 2007). They can be groups of co-workers from a company nearby or cycling enthusiasts that have travelled here from different parts of the world. They pay the start fee in advance, invest in a new bike and train hundreds of kilometres in order to be well prepared for the task as they expect the experience to be worth the effort. Possible alternatives are events with other sports on the program or simply sport tourism.

Vätternrundan is a recreational cycling ride that has been organised since 1966 by Motala AIF Sport Alliance according to the company website. Since then, three more now existing complementing alternatives have been introduced; Tjejvättern (1991), Minivättern (1994) and Halvvättern (2007). It has steadily grown to be a profitable business and is now one of the largest recreational events with cycling on the program. In 2007 approximately 26 000 cyclists entered in Vätternrundan 300 km, Tjejvättern 90 km, Halvvättern 150 km or Minivättern 1-2 km for kids, a number that has been fairly steady for the last ten years. 15 000 registered in Vätternrundan alone was passed in 1985 (Vätternrundan, 2007). Being around for a long time creates traditions and customised ways of working that in comparison to younger organisations might seem institutionalised and old fashioned. Also when being the market leader there is always the risk of attacks from followers and imitators. Business literature provides several examples of that staying at the top require constant reinvention and reconfiguration (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

Vätternrundan was first initiated by a professor who wanted to start a healthier lifestyle for himself but also do physiological tests related to exercise as part of his research. A local sports club saw the potential in the concept and supported his idea. The serious but yet bold idea was given great attention and in combination with the organisational capabilities of the non-profit sports club the event eventually became profitable. It is still owned by the non-profit organisation Motala AIF but an office with employees and a general manager have

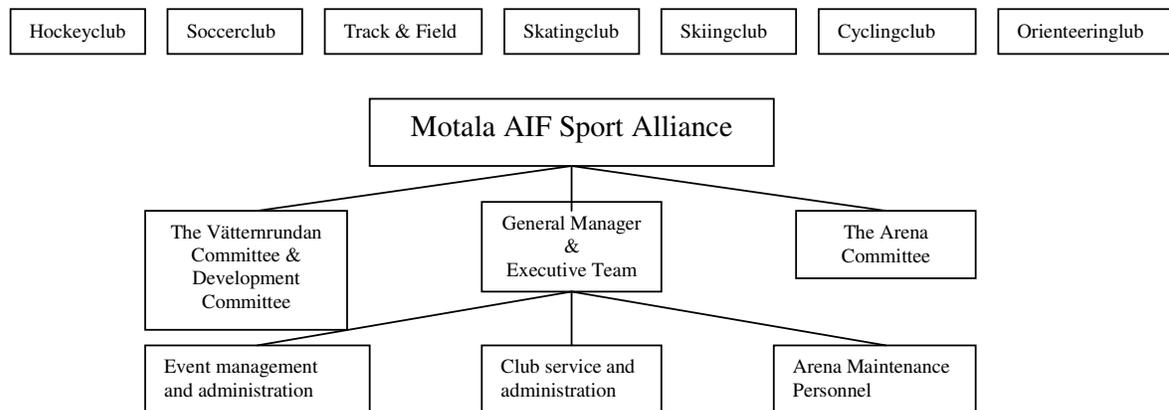
taken over the daily work. During the days of the events additional 3500 volunteers help out representing 40 organisations with which there are signed contracts.

The Vätternrundan history presented at the company website also report of varying weather conditions, the voices and experiences of individual participants and a few tragically accidents involving cyclists. A couple with mortal outcome caused of tired cyclists falling a sleep driving their car, too soon after finishing. This has resulted in temporarily much media publicity, safety precautions and a written obligation to rest at least six hours after finish before driving a car. (Vätternrundan, 2007).

The sports club was in the late 90's reorganised into Motala AIF Sport Alliance consisting of seven sport clubs (*Figure 1*). Represented by a board of trustees, the Sport Alliance own and run a sports arena, the events of Vätternrundan and is the employer of the in all fourteen employees. Four years ago the head employee since 30 years retired and was replaced. Along with the new general manager an executive team was installed.

Sports Clubs in Sweden represented and described by Riksidrottsförbundet (RF, 2007), traditionally have a culture and an organisation built on voluntarism, social motives and simplified business rules, and so does Motala AIF. The Alliance Board consists of representatives of seven sport clubs, sharing the profit of the events. The board members are elected based on the individual Sports Clubs interest by its members according to the regulation of the organisation (Motala AIF, 2007).

Figure 1. The organisation of Motala AIF Sports Alliance and the office.



Source: Own model based on information from Motala AIF website.

Leisure activities are by nature not strategically planned, but with increased result claims or more people involved, there is a growing need for structure and clear planning. Compare a short spontaneous jog around the block to the schedule of an athlete training for the marathon at the Olympics. In Sweden there are government-funded organisations with the task to assist the development and work of the non-profit organised sports. (RF, 2007) Non-profit work based on idealism is valued high, free enthusiasm is able to do the potential work of charged professionalism. The strength and structure of the non-profit organisations in Sweden is quite unique according to Wijkström (2004). Seeing tourism, sport and events as profit making business is rather new and the segment has only recently been added to the supported areas of the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. (Nutek, 2007) The changed situation is also illustrated by the increasing examples of uncertain adaptability of the existing tax rules. (Svensk Idrott, 2007)

The Sports Industry as well as the Industry of experiences and sport tourism is having a positive development in general. Exercise is an important activity in order to stay healthy and the fitness ideal seems to be more and more prominent in our society. This could make anything that has to do with sport and exercise a potential flourishing market. Organised sport activities such as events can be arranged for competition between athletes with the purpose to select a winner or as a goal and jointly experience among people interested in recreation and exercise. To the organiser the event can be a profitable business and to a sponsor, a marketing tool. (Mulin, et.al. 2007) Schools and non-profit clubs traditionally play a great role in offering sport facilities and support, as sport is believed to socialise young people and develop top performing competitors in championships. The booming industry of sports as an recreational activity to adults has opened up for commercialised alternatives, flourishing on the health and fitness trend. (Beitz, 1996)

In this case the consumer is the participant and not a spectator and the event is an experience offered, co-produced by the participant. It is more of a group exercise activity than a competition as there is no winner or point in finishing first. This brings the concepts of sport, exercise, events and tourism together into one product, testing the traditional definitions and perspectives as well as the management. With increasing possibilities comes increasing competition and as it is now, the objective of the business is also to increase the number of participants with 15%. It is a new situation to both the managers and the organisation,

confronted with new complex marketplace problems requiring strategic marketing management.

The number of active recreational sport participants in Sweden (at least once a week, minimum 20 minutes at a time) was approximately 50% in 2006. Conducted at least once a month, walking is by far the most common activity done 3,7 million, followed by aerobics, jogging/running and weight lifting with approx. 1,3 million each, and cycling with 1,1 million participants. Active cyclists however decreased by 14,9% between 1998 and 2006. The fastest growing popular activities between 1998 and 2006 were horse riding, weight lifting, and snowboarding. Recreational sport activities are making up approx. 40 % of the activities offered by the non-profit sport associations in Sweden. (RF, 2007)

Some of the largest players in Sweden (in number of participants) offering organised programs of the popular gym disciplines are SATS (200 000 members), Friskis&Svettis (330 000 members) and Nautilus (110 000 members) according to an article in ICAKuriren by Schröder (2005). Some of the largest recreational events in Sweden today are Stockholm Marathon (18 000 runners), Göteborgsvarvet (35 000 runners), Lidingöloppet (30 000 runners), Vasaloppet (50 000 cross-country skiers), Vätternrundan (total 25 000 cyclists), Tjejmilan (22 000 runners) and Tjejruset (18 local events with a total of 143 000 runners) based on information found on their individual web sites (Dec, 2007).

There are 121 sanctioned recreational cycling rides open for all registered at the website of the Swedish Cycling Association's Exercise Committee (SCF Motion, 2008) and a total of 300 being organised nationally (Appendix VII). The largest events apart from the Vätternrundan events in Sweden are organised in late May/early June with a distance and size comparable to Tjejvättern and Halvvättern. In the rest of Europe these kind of organised rides go under the name Cycling for all, which are long distance, organised, mass-participation cycling events, some quite large (Appendix VII).

In an effort of the new executives of Vätternrundan to get a picture of the situation and management supporting tools, loose efforts of business analysis have been taken during the last years, but no summarising or holistic initiative. There is marketing information being collected but the results have not been analysed nor have a marketing plan been formulated which makes this study demanded.

The initial point of doing business is the mission and objectives of the business unit. (Kotler & Keller, 2006) In the single paged Vätternrundans Annual plan of 2008 approximately the following lines can be found in Swedish:

We shall be the best in the world in organising recreational cycling rides by constantly improving us in order to attract even more cyclists.

Our work and the events shall be unique, characterised by high quality, service and level of safety.

The goal is 30 000 participants in 2010 and a profit no less than 20% of the annual turnover, going back to the Sports Clubs.

The question to the marketing manager of the business unit is how. In 2007 the total number of participants were 26 200 and the profit rate 15%.

1.2. Motivation of the study and Key study questions

Marketing management is the art and science of securing sustainable competitive advantage. Even staying at the top requires constant reinvention and reconfiguration. The strategic marketing management process includes planning, execution and control. The work of the manager is well guided by a marketing plan as it helps to direct and co-ordinate the marketing effort provided it is given the appropriate resources and organisational support. The marketing plan is also a helpful tool in communicating the direction and co-ordinating the work through out the organisation (Kotler & Keller, 2006). As in this case there are many decisive people remotely involved and different actions that need to be correlated, explained and motivated. Possibly typical for the organisational structure.

With an exploratory case study of a recreational sport event, the purpose of this study is to formulate a strategic marketing plan for the business unit Vätternrunda answering the following fundamental questions for effective marketing management:

How can competitive advantage be achieved?

What is the holistic current situation of the business?

What marketing strategy can and should be used?

The marketing plan operates at two levels: strategic and tactical. The strategic marketing plan lays out the target markets and the value proposition that will be offered. The tactical marketing plan specifies the marketing tactics such as distribution, promotion and pricing.

Marketing plans can be more or less formal depending on the company size and be covering one or several years. The work of formulating a plan is a creative process involving internal co-operation and analysis of internal data, supplemented by research. The planned content guides and structures the process of decisions into several steps.

The first step is a description of the present situation, what the market, interaction and organisation looks like today. The second is an analysis of the future opportunities and changed alternatives. Then comes the selection of objectives and strategy before the final more action oriented decisions. (Kotler & Keller, 2006)

1.3. Limitations

The focus of this research is to develop a strategic marketing plan. There are other services of the Motala AIF IA organisation directed towards the members and active of the different individual sport clubs as well as the management of the arena, those areas will not be covered by this business unit analysis of Vätternrundan. Also the focus of the marketing plan will be the experience offered to the participants more than the marketing activities of the event towards the sponsors.

This research is limited to one case as it is done with the support of the organisation and within my task as the marketing manager of Vätternrundan. Since the theoretical framework and process of developing a marketing plan is central in any marketing it is my belief though that this study can be of interest to both my fellow students taken the MBA in Marketing Management program and colleagues within similar businesses. It can also be considered an example of an experience business strategy development.

1.4. Disposition

In this first chapter the background of the study, its purpose and research questions, its limitations, and its disposition is outlined. The following chapter is of the theoretical framework with key concepts and theories important in the formulating of a marketing plan and marketing management execution along with already documented knowledge of the issue. Then follows the methodological chapter presenting the structure of the research process and how the data will be gathered along with other methodological aspects of the research determined by its purpose and the paradigm of the researcher.

The chapter of empirical data consists of a case presentation built on information found in existing consumer surveys, company reports, documents and the company website along with

observations and interviews, complementing the researchers pre-understanding and existing knowledge of the marketing mix of today.

Theory and empirical data is then all coming together in the chapter of analysis, including the specified objectives and actions. Since marketing plan implementation is a process of decisions involving the entire organisation the company executives will be included in the process. Final reflections and results are found in the concluding chapter, answering to the purpose and research questions of the study.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study and the key concepts in formulating a marketing plan; the product characteristics and the important customer as well as the fundamental aspects of marketing planning and successful strategies.

2.1. Sport as a product

The decline in physical demands and increased passive lifestyle has created the demand for compensating leisure activities with organised sports on the program. For many years now, health-preventing research has been recommending regular physical activity, a minimum 30 minutes a day (Dubbert, 2002). The negative effects of inactivity are proven severe and costly resulting in massive governmental campaigns and initiatives of a flexible sport concept and a clear public sport policy. (Beitz, 1996; Schreeder, et.al. 2005) Cycling is one of the activities that show positive health effects with little physical stress. (Frobese, 2004)

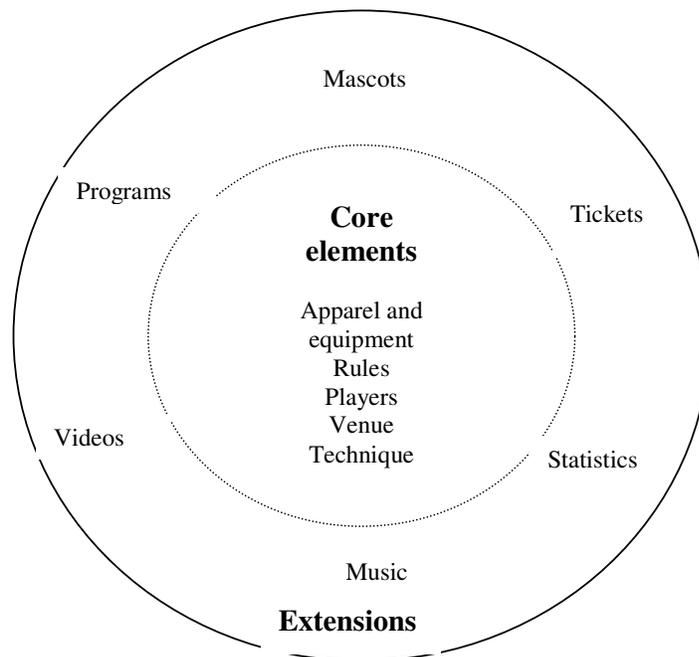
One definition of a sport product presented by Mulin, et.al. (2007) is that it offers the consumer basic benefit such as health, entertainment, socialisation or achievement. Sport is often associated with competition and games with specific rules and techniques. Further they stress that the sport product is unique compared to other products, having elements reflecting its service and experience nature:

- *“An intangible, ephemeral, experiential, and subjective nature”.*
- *“Strong personal and emotional identification”.*
- *“Simultaneous production and consumption”.* Events are often *“...pre sold, and there are seldom inventories”.*
- *“Dependence on social facilitation”* (if the sport is a function of interaction with other people).
- *“Inconsistency and unpredictability...”* created by *“...factors such as weather, injuries, momentum, rivalries, and crowd response”.* (Mulin, et.al. 2007; p. 18)
- *“Core-product control beyond marketer’s hand...”* due to the co-production of the consumer who is in control of the final experience. (Mulin, et.al. 2007; p. 19)
- *“The sport product is inconsistent from consumption to consumption”.* *“...every event is a unique mix of touch, smell, taste, sight and sound”.*

- “The ‘core game’ or event with its rules and players is just one element of a larger ensemble”. “ The ‘sport experience’ includes the atmosphere of the venue, the equipment, the apparel, the music and the concessions...” (Mulin, et.al. 2007; p. 149)
- The ‘event experience’ may also include an abundance of supplements such as memorabilia, “...a product component that enhances the value (and often the price) of an event experience”. Any product component can also become a product extension such as printed materials, “...with a life (and sales) beyond an event”. (Mulin, et.al. 2007; p. 150)

The elements of the sport experience can be divided into core elements and supplements/extensions (Figure 3). At the core is the game with its rules/techniques, the participant, the equipment and apparel, and the venue or track. Supplements or extensions are extended elements such as ceremonies, printed material, memorabilia, etc., with the objective to enhance and broaden the event’s appeal.

Figure 2. Core elements of the sport product and a sample of extensions.



Source: Mulin, et.al. 2007, p. 150

The elements of the sport product should contribute to a coherent image communicated to the consumer. Any of these elements can be used as basis of development or differentiation

(Mulin, et. al. 2007). Kotler & Keller (2006) also present the general service product as made up of several elements; the primary service package is what the customer expects and the secondary service features is what the provider can add. Applied to the service elements of the sport product this can enable additional differential possibilities.

2.3. Importance of a customer

Knowing the customer is the key to successful marketing as the idea is to create, deliver and communicate superior value. The offer should answer to the needs and demands of the customers. Personal and group distinctive differences create segments. (Kotler & Keller, 2006)

“Believing in the value of physical activity, perceiving fewer barriers, and having higher self-efficacy for physical activity participation are important psychosocial determinants (consistent predictors) of activity in adults of all ages.” (Dubbart, 2002, p.530)

Andersen & Cychosz (1998) emphasises having the image of oneself as a sport active person and/or having a history of activity in ones youth as a predetermining factor, explaining the maintenance and expansion of physical activity among physically active grown-ups. An image that often is reinforced by sporty attributes and symbols, as the consumer seeks to determine and manifest his identity through means of “emotional tribes”. (Ferrand & Pages, 1999) Creating a lifestyle rich in experiences and meaning affects one self image as there is a relationship between one’s self image and one’s image of a service or a product. Role identities arise and evolve out of social interaction. Social support and having a companion for physical activity are also potential determinants of physical activity. (Wendel-Vos, et.al, 2007)

Events are primarily advertised as hedonic consumption according to Green (2001) and the elements of fulfilment are typically secondary although there is much that speaks for participation in sport events as a form of symbolic consumption as it encompass a set of meanings for the participant. The meaning comes from the expression of values associated with particular sport subcultures and the demonstration of personal identity that participation enables. People are socialised into subcultures through the interaction with others. When being committed to the subculture a sense of identification with the activity and incorporation of the activity into the self-concept is done, the self-identity. Identity also takes on the element of social identity, the degree to which the participants perceive that others identify

him with the activity. Within any subculture there are variations in degree of subculture identification that themselves are subtle forms of segmentation possible to target. For example those who choose longer distances compared to shorter. Traditions are important to manifest the culture. (Bull, 2006; Green, 2001)

A comparative study between elite vs. amateur sport event participant's show that athlete skill level is one factor that can influence event participant expectations.

"...lower skilled players indeed place greater emphasis on peripheral event service dimensions than do higher skilled players. However, lower skilled players did not place less emphasis on play-related event service dimensions than did higher skilled players".

(Bernthal & Sawyer, nd.)

Studies reviewed by SCB (2007) and Schreeder, et.al. (2005) conclude that age, gender and social class are other important factors influencing sport involvement among adults. Younger adults and upper class locations are more likely to be involved in active sports. Men and women as well as different age groups and different social classes participate in different sport activities, although the differences are slowly diminishing. Males are more involved in competitive sports and team sports than females. Females are more involved in lifetime sports than men. Outdoor sports and non-organisational sports remain fortress of upper class participants. (SCB, 2007; Schreeder, et. al., 2005) Swedish consumer studies show that recreational sport is performed in order to keep in shape, have fun and generally feel good as expressed by the participants (RF, 2007).

In general the common lifestyle characteristics and value system is shared within the generation into which one is born. The generation born 1943-1960, which is the market force of today, is more financially stable and less driven by technology than the market force of tomorrow, born after 1960. This affect their media preferences and patterns of collecting information. There is a general increased focus on experiences, personally tailored products and leisure activities and behind them are the general value shifts of increased individualism, self-fulfilment, the importance of social networks (a counter movement to the increased individualism), the health & fitness trend/youthfulness, leisure & balance, polarisation & differentiation (reflecting the greater social differences) and focus on environmentalism in developed western economies (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Nordin, 2005). The amount of free time varies between age groups. Younger and elderly have generally more time than the

ambitious middle Ages who also have a family situation with more responsibility to others, although there is a growing group of singles, regardless of age. (Nordin, 2005)

Apart from the social-cultural forces described above, the natural movement supports cycling as an environmental friendly as well as healthy alternative. The matter of cycling is now a political issue as the environment needs to be preserved and the habitants to stay healthy in order to not cost money in the long run. Low levels of cycling, especially in cities, are often correlated with transport policies that pay little attention to the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. On average, 5% of all trips in the European Union countries in 1995 were made by cycling. The general recommendation is to improve the conditions for the cyclists, as it is both a healthy and environmental friendly transportation alternative. (Davis, 2005; Schantz, 2007)

Another trend is the growing number of sport tourists who attend or participate in sport activities far away from home on holidays. Gibson (1998) defines sport tourism as *“leisure based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home to participate in physical activities, to watch physical activities, or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities”*. (p.49)

A sport tourist can be a spectator to an event or participant in an activity, a continuum from incidental to committed, varying in interest and participation.

Studies of serious sport tourists show that when travelling to take part in cycle rides the actual quality of the ride environment as well as spending time with family and friends is more important than the venue of the event. (Bull, 2006)

Koucky (2007) study of cycling tourism in Europe has come to the conclusion that Sweden is today a modestly visited destination that is believed to have the right position and natural environment to grow in number of visitors. The largest potential market can be found among the Germans. In 2004, 2.45 million Germans had cycling as the main program on their vacation. In all the cycling tourism in Europe is expected to have doubled in 2015. The majority of the cycling tourists are above 40, independent, with middle to high level of incomes and a rather high level of culture. A popular destination is the Netherlands who successfully has established themselves within cycling tourism. They have developed an infrastructure of high quality and attractive sites. Their marketing communication is centralised and there is a great variety of packages. The co-operation with the public transportation is well developed, so is the cycling logistics, rental system and track signs.

2.4. Marketing

Marketing planning usually starts at the mission statement and objectives of the company. The mission of a company answers to its purpose of being. Within the broader company mission, each business unit might need a defined specific mission for it self. The more detailed objectives may involve profit, volume, quality, efficiency, etc. and can be either short or long termed. Good objectives are characterised by being measurable (quantitative and specific), challenging, attainable/realistic and consistent. (Kotler & Keller, 2006)

Amongst the essence of the company is also its core competence, often-special technical and production expertise that are hard for competitors to imitate. Along with the company capacity, production limits and resources, this is what makes up the company profile. The company organisation consists of its structures, policies and the corporate culture, its shared experiences, beliefs and norms. All are determining factors in the strategic decisions being taken. (Eriksson, et.al. 2004; Kotler & Keller, 2006)

The marketing plan is formulated to provide the organisation with directions for its marketing decisions and activities. One of the first steps of the marketing plan is the situation analysis, which focuses on market definition and the current capability of the company to serve the market. It describes market size, needs, growth, and trends to identify target able segments. A deeper customer analysis considering the strength in various customer relations may also be useful, if the customer is just trying the product or is a steady partner. Common in the following process of analysis is often an evaluation of the company internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats, called a SWOT Analysis. The external environment analysis involves monitoring key macro environment forces (demographic-economic, natural, technological, political-legal, and social-cultural) and significant microenvironment actors (customers, competitors, suppliers, distributors and dealers) in the search for new opportunities. The internal environment analysis can also reveal areas that needs and can be improved in the organisation, process, logistics, finance, etc. (Kotler & Keller, 2006)

Based upon the company objectives and a profound understanding of the competitive environment through analyse and objective appraisal of resources, a successful strategy may be built. The competitive strategy of a business answers to how to compete. (Grant, 2005) All

marketing strategy is built on STP - Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning according to Kotler & Keller (2006). Segmentation involves the analysis of the existing groups of buyers who have distinctive demographic, psychographic and behavioural differences and thereby also vary in preference and requirements. Each such group is a segment and the one presenting the greatest opportunity is the targeted market for which the offer is designed. Key issues in sport product strategy are differentiation (positioning the product in the mind of the customer as different from the competitors), product development, product position, brands, and often product and brand cycles (Mulin, et.al, 2007). Strategic perspectives believed to contribute to management of sport in general are also stakeholder management, resource management and image management. (Wolfe, et.al. 2005)

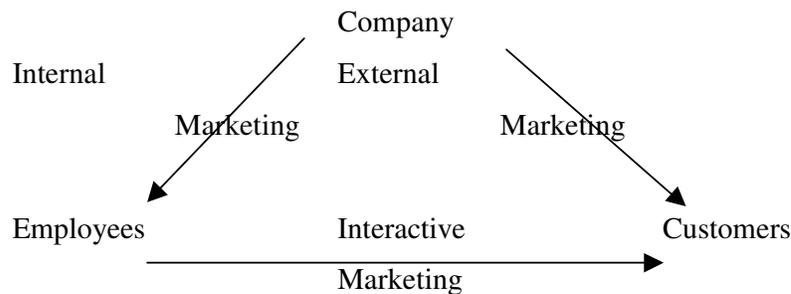
The decisions of interaction to be concerned in business marketing regard the products, messages, distribution channels and revenue sources, the so-called Marketing Mix. The Marketing Mix is a strategic combination of the four P's: Product Mix, Price Span, Place/distribution and Promotion. In service and experience products additional P's can be used such as the performance of personnel and process, inextricably linked to the sport product according to Mulin, et.al. (2007), who also adds public relations separately (otherwise included in promotion) because of the massive media attention in many sports. In services and experiences it is otherwise noted that it is the people and their ability to form arenas of value delivering networks that are especially important. (Almquist, et.al. 1999, Boye & Sandberg, 2005).

Promotion includes the marketing activities of advertising, personal selling, public relations, publicity and sales promotion. More or less planned, the interaction also involves word of mouth. Mulin, et.al. (2007) recommend sport organisations to develop a public relation program as it full fill a variety of roles, including image shaping and enhancement, educational efforts, business development, recruiting, coping with crises, and community relations. A consistent communication is important in order to not blur the image and to project in coherent product positions. The key to controlling the marketing mix lies in the ability to set a clear direction throughout the entire organisation.

Kotler & Keller (2006) recommend service marketing to be done holistically as it calls for both external, internal and interactive marketing (*Figure 2*). External marketing is directed

towards the customers. Internal marketing is the training and motivating of personnel to serve customers well. Interactive marketing describes the personnel's skill in serving the client.

Figure 3. Three Types of Marketing in Service Industries.



Source: Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 412

The quality of an experience is judged by the actual experience in comparison to the expected. The role of personnel in a service company is key as it is them that deliver the service and encounter the customer, creating a need of internal marketing as well as external. Every encounter counts and the information prior to the experience need to be attractive but yet true in order to build up the correct expectations. Performing the service right the first time is to be a top priority. Personnel are to demonstrate to customer that the company value them. Exceeding customers' expectations is an opportunity of the process that personnel should be encouraged to take. (Kotler & Keller, 2006)

To any service provided and to the experience of a product, image differentiation is especially important as the value perceived does not depend exclusively on the tangible aspects of the offering. Organisational associations for example has an image dimension potential of holding credibility, perceived expertise, and like ability (Grant, 2005; Mulin, et.al. 2007) A sport organisation, as a social representation, has a high emotional content and potential image capital. (Ferrand & Page, 1999)

A product may be differentiated from the competitors by a brand:

“a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.” (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 274)

The idea of developing the brand image is to develop unique, strong and favourable brand associations. Brands can thereby add value to the product. A strong brand can be used to introduce a new product, s c brand extension with the objective to enhance the acceptance of the new product, or to strengthen another brand, so called co-branding. (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Mulin, et.al. 2007) In sport branding, being experiential and emotional can give the sport product advantage as it stays in your memory long after the experience. (Mulin, et.al. 2007).

Of increasing importance are also partnerships, alliances and the creation of value generating networks. This has proven especially important to smaller companies with limited resources. Sponsorships are one such alliance common in sports. For the sponsor the wanted outcome of the partnership is generally media/exposure, sales opportunities, image enhancement, and communication with the target market, hospitality opportunities, and brand positioning. In order for it to be a win-win partnership, it must be based on well-fitted organisational objectives, priorities and images of the involved brands. (Mullin, et.al, 2007).

Seeing the networks as unique company assets is the focus in the concept of relationship marketing. Relationship marketing has strong support amongst the marketing community, particularly in the service-marketing field where sport is considered a sub-set. In customer relationship marketing the focus is on keeping and improving existing customer relationships. Kotler & Keller (2006) define relationship marketing as:

“Relationship marketing has the aim to building mutually satisfying long-term relationships with key parties – customers, suppliers, distributors, and other marketing partners – in order to earn and retain their business”. (p.17)

2.5. Summary

The theoretical framework tells us that in order to make strategic decisions one must know the present situation of the company, competition, customer and offer (or the Marketing Mix) and that a marketing plan can help and direct ones strategic decisions. The product in this case is an experience and service with unique characteristics. And as with other products with few tangible aspects, image is especially important. Elements of the Marketing Mix are for example also Promotion, Personnel, Process and Place.

The competitors and customers are two actors of the market. The defined market consists of customer segments with differences that need to be considered of. The market size is believed

to grow with a growing number of potential customers as well as competitors. There is in general a growing focus in society on experiences, individualism and health creating a demand for recreational sport products. The segment most likely to be physically active does identify them selves with the image of the product, supported by their social environment and subculture.

The strategic decision being taken or not taken depends on the organisational characteristics including company mission and objectives. Among the strategies proven successful in other studies is relationship marketing including building networks, and internal- and interactive marketing. Others are product development (of both core elements and extensions), product differentiation, and branding. These are all aspects that should be considered in the following case analysis.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological aspects of the study such as the role of the researcher and how the data is being collected, analysed and presented.

3.1. The study and the researcher

An individual company or specific research project can be studied as a case. Case study research is a scientific tool that can be used on several cases or as in this study on a single case. Case study can be exploratory, descriptive and explanatory and is often used in past tense studies to obtain a holistic view of a specific research project. (Eriksson, L.T. & Wiedersheim-Paul, F., 2006; Gummesson, 1988). The present study can be regarded as an explorative case study because it provides basic knowledge and understanding of the topic at hand.

The methods in hand for the researcher in case study research depend on the role-played and relation to the case; how involved one is in the case. Useful research methods in case studies are among others qualitative (informal) interviews and observation or participant observation. Action science is a step even further into the case with the goal of both solving a problem for the client and contributes to science. In action science the researcher is also a consultant and actively participates in the ongoing process of change and development. (Gummesson, 1988). In this study the researcher is also an employee, which has some similarities to the role of the action researcher in that one finds oneself surrounded by a continuous flow of data and is always part of the system, the subjective understanding of the situation is unavoidable.

In such situations conflicts may occur regarding ones identity and the loyalty to the research vs. the company. Most important however is to have an awareness of ones paradigm, selective perception and ones own personal defence mechanisms if needed to change. Lacking access and pre-understanding are other problems that often confront researchers in case studies. But as this is not a problem in this study, case study research is a suitable scientific tool.

Pre-understanding is the researchers or consultants previously required insights into a specific problem and social environment. It is made up by knowledge of theories, models, techniques, institutional knowledge/case conditions, social patterns and personal attributes. As an employee the access and institutional knowledge is not that a big issue, instead issues of

company integrity and subjectivity must be considered in the study and outcome of the research. (Gummesson, 1988)

Scientific research generally generates knowledge that is able to generalise to some extent beyond the case. Generalisation from case studies is often not recommended, but is more to be seen as examples. Another qualitative aspect is validity. Validity is the extent to which the method used actually studies what is intended, in this case the situation of the business and the strategic alternatives, again strengthened by the researchers pre-understanding. Yet another qualitative aspect is reliability, the extent to which someone else would reach the same results as the researcher when studying the same case. (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 2006; Gummesson, 1988). Possible limited by the researchers unique access in this case.

Eriksson & Wiedersheim (2006) states that there is no easy way to judge the credibility of a secondary source but than to take a generally critical position. Using multiple sources generally increases the quality of a case study. This study will use multiple sources and be presented to key actors of the organisation, to ensure that the case presentation is correct and acceptable.

The lack of co-operation and crossbreeding between different perspectives and disciplines is revealed when existing research is compiled. (Gibson, 1998) Or as noted by Wijkström (2004), the frameworks and terminology is not easily transferable from one culture to another. The amount of other similar case examples and earlier studies with comparable customers and products have seen limited and rather hard to find.

3.2. Data collection

The theory states that the process of the marketing plan formulation goes through several steps. The first analytical step is where internal and external data are collected to support the situation analysis. Useful information may be gathered from relevant literature, other case studies, internal documents and company website, website of competitors, and interviews with key actors including SWOT analysis. The following step involves identifying and carrying out the choices of strategy and action program. Highly a creative team effort. (Eriksson, et.al, 2004)

In this case the decisions will primarily be made based on the situation at hand and the theoretical framework. The mind mapping approach of business analysis used in the MIO

framework¹ by Eriksson, et.al. (2004), recommends varying and complementary data gathering methods and creative techniques. Data may be found in secondary sources such as literature, journals, archives, Internet and other media, but also primary sources such as interviews, observations, group discussions, focus groups, surveys, experiments, thoughts and reflections. Finding opportunities is a creative process that takes “out of the box”-thinking and information-gathering from all kinds of sources. (Eriksson, et.al, 2004) Each source contributing to a holistic view of the case regardless of the method being quantitative or qualitative (Gummesson, 1988).

Complementing the secondary source data, primary source data is being gathered with interviews and observations, both common methods in fieldwork. It generally takes a natural lack of knowledge of the case in order for a researcher to act as observatory and for the questions to awake. Playing the part of the interested and knowledge seeking researcher is also fundamental in performing interviews. The use of secondary sources is less personal. However the usability and quality of secondary sources can be uncertain, as the information has been gathered with a different purpose. (Gibson, 1998; Gummesson, 1988)

As much information on the case can be found in already existing but unanalysed material, this is where this study starts, with a case presentation built on various information sources, for example consumer surveys, company reports, documents, the company website and the marketing mix of today:

At Vätternrundan a research company conducts a consumer survey each year. A random sample is asked to answer a questionnaire online a week after the events. The result of the survey of 2007 will be analysed as well as the brand and company analysis performed earlier by external consultants (Appendix 1-3). The past company analysis however covered the entire office and all employees, and not the business unit Vätternrundan explicitly.

Information will also be looked for in other company reports, documents and the website as well as through observations and structured interviews with a couple of key actors. The idea is to by using multiple sources come up with a holistic view of the situation and possible strategic alternatives as recommended by Eriksson, et.al. (2004).

¹ MIO stands för Market – Interaction - Organisation

Observations are done by three company employees at cycling expos in Sweden and Germany, covering who visited and how, as examples of the cyclist arenas. (Appendix I) Other sources of information are the annual film of the events, the information given to the participants and the topics discussed among the participants at the company website forum. Registration is made of appearance, equipment, questions asked, and interest shown. The individual observations are being documented by taking short notes after the event/occasion has been taken place and then put together.

The interviews are done with the chairman of the Swedish Cycling Association Exercise Committee (who also is an enthusiastic cyclist), and the C.E.O. of the case company (who also takes part in cycling group activities regularly in her free time). The questions asked concerned their view of the situation of the sport, the events, and who the general cyclist is. (Appendix II) The questions were written down and e-mailed to them in Swedish. The answers were also given in Swedish, partly in a replying e-mail and partly in a follow up interview less formal, with the chairman over the phone and with the C.E.O. face to face. Each interview took approximately half an hour and the essence was written down. Their answers are summarised and translated into English.

The strategic decisions of the business unit Vätternrundan are made by the Executive Team of the Vätternrundan office (consisting of the C.E.O., the Economic Manager and the Marketing Manager) and the Vätternrundan Development Committee (consisting of two members of the Vätternrundan Committee, the C.E.O. and the Marketing Manager), within the limits given by the Alliance Board. Both the Executive Team and the Development Committee have been asked to reflect on the results of the situation analysis and to take part in the creative process as recommended by Eriksson, et.al. (2004). Evaluation of the reasonability and acceptability of the result is necessary in order to attain supporting organisational resources and will contribute to the quality of the study and implementation of the marketing plan. The Development Committee met and reflected on a number of statements based on the study results. Their opinion and comments were written down and presented in Appendix VIII. The involvement of the Executive Team has been more random as they continuously have been asked to read the text and confirm the case presentation and observations.

The differently collected data, which is presented in the following chapter, is then analysed by being related to the key concepts of the marketing theory with a focus on the most important

aspects and successful strategies according to the theoretical framework. According to Kotler & Keller (2006), the usual content of a marketing plan is a market summary and analysis of company as well as competitors and offerings leading up to a marketing strategy, including specified objectives as a base for future action planning, in this study determining the structure of the analysis and result presentation. The different data in this case is also partly compared with each other in order to find contradictions or support, which would strengthen the validity of the result and add to the holistic view, as the different data is to complement each other. The result of the analysis is finally being discussed in relation to the purpose and research questions of the study.

4. EMPIRICAL DATA

Beginning with a case presentation of the Vätternrundan organisation and product, this chapter then covers the results of earlier studies of the brand, company and customers. Finally the results of the interviews and observations are presented, followed by a concluding statement.

4.1. The events of Vätternrundan

Significant for both Vätternrundan, Tjejvättern, Minivättern and Halvvättern are that they are not competitive cycling events and that the participants pay a fee to enter. The obligatory equipment is a bicycle and a helmet. The events take part in mid June each year with start and finish in Motala, Sweden. Many travel far to take part according to the Vätternrundan statistics. There is no winner and the individual time is only presented to the cyclist, which is the rule set by the Swedish Cycling Association (Svenska Cykelförbundet, 2007) in order to be allowed to have a cycling ride on an open public road and charge a fee of choice. Vätternrundan is certified by Håll Sverige Rent (Environment-NGO) and has been granted the Olympic flag.

Vätternrundan reaches 300 km around lake Vättern and has 9 rest stops. It takes the cycling riders between 8 and 27 hours to complete the ride. The 17 500 starts have for the last years been fully booked four months in advance. The 17 500 participant limit gives an amount of cyclists on the road that does not interfere severely with the ordinary car traffic, an agreement done with the local police in the late nineties. The placement of the start, making the participants crossing the area of the finish on their way out of town, as well as the infrastructure of the host city are also limiting factors.

In 2007 34 different nations were represented, dominated by Swedes and Germans according to the participant registration program. 85 % of the participants were male and the average age is 43, the youngest is 18 and the oldest is in his eighties. Vätternrundan is a component of the series *En Svensk Klassiker* (four disciplines in one year) and *Skandinavialoppet* (cycling rides in Scandinavia). The cyclists who have attended the event more than 25 times have formed a Vätternrundan's veteran club and are given a cycling shirt and discounts. (Vätternrundan, 2007)

Tjejevättern reaches 90 km in the region of Östergötland and has five rest stops. The all female participants take between 3 to 9 hours to finish. The number of participants is approximately 5 000 and it has never been fully booked, the peak so far was in 2004 with 7526 registered. No more than 100 are from foreign countries, the rest comes from all parts of Sweden. Again the average age is 43, the youngest is 15 and the oldest is approximately 80 years old. Tjejevättern is a component of the series *Tjejklassikern* (four disciplines in one year) and *Scandinavian Lady Tours* (cycling rides in Scandinavia).

Halvvättern reaches 150 km on the east side of lake Vättern and has four rest stops. In 2007 the number of pioneers was approximately 2 500. Almost all of the participants were from Sweden. The average age is 44, the youngest is 15 and the oldest is again approximately 80 years old. Halvvättern is a component of the series *Klassikerhalvan* (four disciplines in one year, half the length of *En Svensk Klassiker*).

The propaganda event Minivättern covers a 1,3—2,6 km track in central Motala and the riders are children between 6 and 10 years old. It has been organised since 1993 and has approximately 500 mainly local participants each year.

The tracks follow public roads around Vättern and the area around Motala. Rest stops are placed evenly along the way where there are suitable areas. In Motala facilities are placed in sport halls, schools, the Town Square, private areas and local parks, all temporarily borrowed areas. An Expo Marquee where the sponsors exhibit their goods is combined with the hand out of number bibs at the town square. The event marketing possibilities are open to suppliers and sponsors. The local Music School entertains at start, at a couple of rest stops and at the finish during Vätternrundan. Prior to start in Tjejevättern there is an aerobic instructor warming up the start groups. Simple accommodation in Motala is offered at a low cost but there is no transportation to and from Motala organised by Vätternrundan.

There are six employed people working all year around with the rides and any extensions such as the Expo organised in Motala during the event week. Answering to the Alliance Board there is a group of ten chief volunteers; the Vätternrundan Committee, co-ordinating the work of the volunteers. (Vätternrundan, 2007)

By observing the marketing mix of Vätternrundan, the following can be registered:

The core products sold are the cycling events; experiences that many prepare for, for a long time, investing in equipment, time and lots of hard effort. The main track is described as rather long and the recommended training amount quite extensive in the information to the participants. Along the track all service is included such as medical aid, cycle repair up to a limited amount, transportation, beverages and food at the rest stops, different facilities, entertainment, etc. The service is provided by 3 500 volunteers belonging to contracted clubs.

The participant is given a number bib and a computer chip to wear so that their ride can be monitored via the Internet and SMS. The SMS service is not included in the start fee. Other subsidiaries are photos, profile clothing and other memorabilia sold at sight and at the webshop. The magazine *Cykla* is also included with inspiration and information prior to start as well as event documentation. (Cykla, 2007) On the Vätternrundan website there is a discussion forum where participants and cycling interested can share information, experiences and give each other advice. Most topics and messages are of the participants of Vätternrundan. Two popular topics prior to the events are accommodations and transportation to Motala. There are few hotels in Motala, private lodging and camping is frequent. Bringing the bicycle on the train or bus is normally not allowed why most arrive by car.

The invitation to participate is each year distributed by post and e-mail to the participants two years back. The paper invitation is available in Swedish, German and English. The event is also promoted in cycling magazines, at sport consumer expos, community websites, through partners and sponsors (Appendix I). The largest sponsors contracted for 2008 are a major cycling manufacturer, a cereal product corporation, a sports clothes manufacturer, a corporation of sports shops, a major sports television channel, and the local newspaper, all presented at the Vätternrundan website.

More than 70% of the participants register at the website with direct payment according to the registration program. Some use a registration form and pay to a bank account. Registration is possible from September 1st up to start, except for Vätternrundan, which have a limit in participants². Early registration and online registration is stimulated by a lower fee, which is motivated by it taking less time to administrate. The start fee is comparable to the fee of the

² A limit that in 2009 may be raised because of changed location of start area.

other *Klassiker* events, but higher than any other Swedish cycling event (a discussed topic on the forum). The office is open all workdays answering the questions that the participants may have and most information may also be found at the website which is in Swedish, English and German.

Vätternrundan, Tjejvättern and Halvvättern are components of En Svensk Klassiker, a partnership between and circuit of large recreational events in different disciplines. The series of events within En Svensk Klassiker (ESK) has many participants and has motivated people to train throughout the four seasons since 1971 when the official co-operation between the five different organisations first started according to the En Svensk Klassiker website (2007).

To achieve the award and receive the En Svensk Klassiker certificate one has to complete one event in each discipline of these annual classic sporting events within 12 months; Vasaloppet 90 km or Engelbrektsloppet 60 km (cross country skiing), Vätternrundan 300 km (cycling) Vansbrosimmet 3 km (swimming) and Lidingöloppet 30 km (cross country running). One can choose which event to start with. Women also have the alternative Tjejklassikern including all female alternatives, one third the length of the original alternatives. Open to both gender is since autumn 2006 also Klassikerhalvan including sport events half the length of the originals.

A study of the marketing of the En Svensk Klassiker events in 2004 (Engman & Mårtensson, 2004) came to the conclusion that all events considered the existing customers to be very important and the individual web sites as information channels. The shorter or complementary and female events do place greater emphasis on peripheral event services. All events benefited from the joint promotion of both individual events and the shared concept, resulting in more participants totally.

Two other event partnerships of Vätternrundan are Skandinavialoppet (a network of cycling events in Scandinavia) and Vätternrundan China, a recently started event in China borrowing the Vätternrundan name in exchange for royalties. (Vätternrundan, 2007)

4.2. Results of earlier studies

During the last years, information of the brand Vätternrundan and the company has been collected at two separate occasions. The participants are each year e-mailed a questionnaire

with questions regarding the event and their participation. The results of the brand evaluation, company analysis and the consumer survey of 2007 are here presented.

4.2.1. The brand evaluation

The brand evaluation performed by a consultant in 2005-2006 came to the conclusion that the brand Vätternrundan is well known in Sweden, but not the smaller rides such as Tjejevättern why the recommendation was to always include the name Vätternrundan in all advertising and benefit from possible brand extension effects. The Vätternrundan brand was found to stand for *Health, Challenge, Camaraderie, and Cycling*, supported by its resources;

- the environment of lake Vättern in the summertime
- the service and facilities of the event
- the serious participants or 'super men'
- its size as the worlds largest of its kind
- the organisation with its volunteers and the tradition of the event as a health preventing initiative, supporting its credibility

The study was performed in close co-operation with the actors of the organisation. The result of the evaluation was new logos and a communicative profile to follow, all presented in the communicative handbook (Kommunikations handboken, 2006). (Appendix IV-V)

4.2.2. The company analysis

An over all company and workplace analysis was done within a local development project initiative by an external consultant in 2006. It included interviews with the employees regarding work environment, the use of ICT and the need of complementing education in order to be more effective. Complemented by a discussion within the executive team in SWOT terms the effort resulted in the following analysis:

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <p>Vätternrundan is a strong brand, making it a popular partner.</p> <p>An operationally well functioning organisation.</p> <p>Has a steady economy and capital value in facilities.</p> <p>The employees have high ambitions.</p> <p>Good working environment.</p> <p>The competence and resources to organise large events.</p>

<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <p>Vague mission and objectives.</p> <p>The existing partnerships are not believed to strengthen the brand sufficiently.</p> <p>Vulnerability due to being dependent on only one profitable product.</p> <p>Unclear and limited liabilities of the executives.</p> <p>Ineffective and unsystematic routines of planning, documentation and evaluation.</p> <p>Low or uneven use of facilities and event equipment.</p>
<p><u>Possibilities</u></p> <p>The resources and core competence makes it possible to take on and supply other large sport events.</p> <p>The brand Vätternrundan has potentials that can be expanded.</p>
<p><u>Threats</u></p> <p>A serious accident or other incidents causing restrictions against recreational rides on public roads, trafficked by other vehicles.</p> <p>A charismatic leader with egoistic stakeholder interests.</p>

4.2.3. The participant survey

The participant survey is each year e-mailed with the help of a survey company to a random sample of the registered Swedish participants with stated e-mail address; in Vätternrundan this is 10 850 or 61% in Tjejevättern 3 803 or 69 %, and in Halvvättern 1701 or 70 % out of number of registered. In 2007 the answers received were from Vätternrundan 1086 out of 2000 e-mail sent, Tjejevättern 1238 out of 2000, and Halvvättern 1017 out of 1700³. The questions asked in the e-mailed questionnaire were of the information prior to the event, their participation in recreational activities and their experience of the events. (Appendix VI)

Number of registered (N)	Stated e-mail address	E-mails sent (n)	Answers received
Vätternrundan 17 500	10 850 or 61%	Approx. 2 000	1086
Tjejevättern 5 500	3 303 or 69%	Approx. 2 000	1238
Halvvättern 2 500	1701 or 70%	Approx. 1 700	1017

Halvvättern was organised for the first time, but 19 % of the respondents had taken part in one of the other events before. For Vätternrundan the number of returnees in Vätternrundan was 41% and for Tjejevättern in Tjejevättern it was 65%. In Tjejevättern the number of turns in average per participant were higher than in Vätternrundan⁴, as illustrated below:

³ Some bounced because of invalid address.

⁴ Vätternrundan statistics 2007 on the total number of entrants show an average of 2,5 in Vätternrundan and 4 in Tjejevättern.

Event	First time	2-4 times	5-10 times
Tjejevättern	29%	35%	26%
Vätternrundan	52%	44%	4%

According to the survey, 48-58% depending on event, had turned to the website for information while less had answer to the invitation received by post; in Vätternrundan 8%, Halvvättern 7%, and in Tjejevättern more than twice as many, 21%. Recommendation from a friend was another common source of information; amongst Vätternrundan 33%, in Halvvättern 27% and Tjejevättern 20%.

In Vätternrundan 35%, Tjejevättern 31%, and in Halvvättern 38% of the respondents had participated as a part of the *En Svensk Klassiker* concept. To them the disciplines of swimming and running are the next coming up within a few months. Almost half of the respondents did take part in sport events of other disciplines (Vätternrundan 49%, Tjejevättern 44%, Halvvättern 49%), including the *En Svensk Klassiker* participants.

In Vätternrundan 41% did also take part in other cycling events and 48% did do spinning or other gym activities. In Tjejevättern only 23% did take part in other cycling events, 47% did do spinning or other gym activities, and 32% did other non-cycling recreational sport activities. In Halvvättern 36% did take part in other cycling events and 43% did do spinning or other gym activities.

Event/activity	En Svensk klassiker	Sport event of other disciplines	Other cycling events	Spinning or gym activities	Other recreational activities
Vätternrundan	35%	49%	41%	48%	
Tjejevättern	31%	44%	23%	47%	32%
Halvvättern	38%	49%	36%	43%	

The greatest source of exercise inspiration to the respondents where sport magazines, sport shops (28-38%), the Internet, friends and 'basic need' from within one self (52-53%). The age of the respondents participating in Vätternrundan was: 58% 21-40 years and 38% 41-60 years old, 81% male and 19 % female. The age of the respondents participating in Tjejevättern and Halvvättern was: approx. 40 % 21-40 years and 51% 41-60 years old. The gender representation among the Halvvättern respondents was 50% of each and in Tjejevättern they were 100% female.

Event/age/gender	21-40 years	41-60 years	Male	Female
Vätternrundan	58%	38%	81%	19%
Tjevättern/Halvvättern	40%	51%	0% / 50%	100% / 50%

Over all the respondents were rather content with the service and facilities of the events and the average score was above 4 out of 5 except for the following areas that had an average score above 3; Vätternrundan and Halvvättern Expo, Vätternrundan safety and the food of all events. Compliments were given to the experience as a whole. Some of the complaints or recommended improvements regarded:

- The long queue at Friday night prior to Vätternrundan at the Expo Marquee.
- The short opening hours at the same Expo prior to Halvvättern.
- The crowded Rest Stops during Halvvättern.
- Not sufficient guiding to the facilities within Motala.
- Cars or cyclists behaving badly along the road, the safety.
- The magazine Cykla focusing more on Vätternrundan than the shorter alternatives.
- The food and beverages served.

A similar questionnaire was also e-mailed to the 308 English speaking and 1113 German speaking participants with registered e-mail address. (Appendix VII) 44 respectively 102 questionnaires were returned. They had all taken part in Vätternrundan 2007 and gave answers similar to the Swedish. 2/3 was above 40 years old and 9/10 was male. They were mainly recruited through friends. The answers also showed that they wanted more information at sight to be translated. Some asked for organised/package trips to Motala as there are none today.

4.3. Result of the interviews

The C.E.O. of Vätternrundan was asked of her view of the market, customers and organisation. (Appendix II) She answered in short that she sees the niche as important to the welfare and health of humans. The cyclists are a distinguished group, but the participants of the Vätternrundan events are a divergent group regarding training amount, but all sharing the joy and challenge of the experience. The organisation is strong and financially stable, but there is a lot that can and should be developed in order to compete successfully with other experiences. Lacking control over the inputs of the volunteers she sees as a possible organisational weakness.

The same questions were asked the chairman of the SCF (Swedish Cycling Association) Exercise Committee who answered in short that the atmosphere within the SCF is disturbing and not focusing enough on recruitment in his opinion. Also the media helps giving the sport bad PR reporting of repeated doping scandals. The general cyclist he sees as either an active person who wants to try out cycling for a while or one who sees himself as a cyclist and keeps updated within the culture. In Vätternrundan most participants are concerned of their result/time and in that sense competitive.

The cycling is according to him competing with all other recreational sport disciplines, but Vätternrundan is better off than other recreational cycling events due to its co-operation within En Svensk Klassiker and it being so big. A threat to the event would be the mandatory license and club membership that the SCF is trying to make the government introduce which might reduce the number of participants severely, as it would make participating less easy and accessible. A threat to cycling in general would be MHL (Mandatory Helmet Law). In every case everywhere in the world MHL has led to less cycling as far as he knows. Thankfully this is not a hot issue in Sweden.

4.4. Results of the observations

Observations of the cycling expos and cyclist arenas were registered at several occasions during the last year. (Appendix I) At each occasion/place notes were taken regarding who visited and what they did ask the company representative. The results imply that the visitors are very interested in cycling, stayed for long and asked many detailed questions of both the events and the destination. Most of them were men in their middle ages or slightly over.

Questions of training in general were frequent at the En Svensk Klassiker expos, the other expos or arenas were male, cycling and cyclist dominated.

Observations at sight and in the film of the equipment and cyclists of Tjejevättern, Halvvättern and Vätternrundan showed some event specific differences:

Tjejevättern	Many standard city bikes with a few gears or hybrids. Functional sport clothes but not necessary bike clothes. Saddle bags and baskets, weight is not an issue. Relaxed, social and happy atmosphere.
Halvvättern	More budget racer bicycles than standard city bikes More bike clothes than general functional sport clothes. Some saddle bags and baskets. Relaxed, social and happy atmosphere.

Vätternrundan	<p>Many racer bicycles and some of them quite expensive. Mostly specialised and fashionable bike clothes and shoes. Some saddles bags, weight is an issue. A more serious and tense but still social atmosphere.</p>
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4.5. Conclusion

The data includes information of the present case situation of the marketing mix, customers and company, needed for analysis and strategy formulation.

The participant survey shows that there are differences within the group, regarding returns and age, among other issues. The majority of the survey respondents had enrolled online, but worth noting is that the questionnaire only was distributed to the participants with registered e-mail addresses.

The quality of the event experience is perceived as rather high, and the areas that need improvement are known.

Notable is also the higher percentage of repeated customers in Tjejvättern.

The Vätternrundan participants do more frequently take part in other cycling events than the Tjejvättern and Halvvättern. Could be that they are more serious cyclists (absorbed by the sub culture) and/or that they do it in order to get the recommended kilometres of training prior to start. Many do also train at gym or take part in events of other disciplines, partly because they are participants of En Svensk Klassiker.

The observations also revealed differences between the events in participant's equipment.

The English and German speaking questionnaire respondents did ask for packaged trips. The visitors at expos abroad repeated this question.

The brand evaluation from 2005 is focused on Vätternrundan and provides the organisation with a communicative platform to work from. The company analysis in 2006 had also the purpose of teambuilding activity amongst the different units of Vätternrundan. This means that several respondents had little insight in some event related issues and the SWOT analysis covers all units, why its applicability could be questioned.

The interview respondents answered the same questions differently, having different perspectives. The C.E.O. mentioned the good resources but weaknesses of the organisation, partly supporting the result of the earlier company analysis (in which she also had taken part). Much of her everyday struggles concerns internal communication and controlling the individual inputs and thereby the efficiency. A possible threat brought up by the SCF representative was the possible introductions of mandatory license and club membership

which if implemented might scare of less serious cyclists but give additional income to the SCF. Apart from supporting other data collected, the interview shows how the head executive apprehends of the situation and confirms a leading position of Vätternrundan in the eyes of the SCF.

In conclusion the results shows that the present situation of the Vätternrundan case is as follows:

Customers: Vätternrundan attracts mainly men from all over the world, Tjejvättern is for women only and Halvvättern attracts women and men equally mainly from Sweden. The participants are of all ages with an average just above 40 years old, who do enjoy cycling. Many return year after year while others do not. The shorter alternatives have less serious cyclists than those attending the longer ride, based on equipment and length.

Company: The organisation is built on voluntarism, run by a non-profit board. The employed office executes the daily work and the company network involves suppliers, associated sport organisations, the host city, sponsors, etc. In some aspects the organisation is strong in others it is weak, relationships and communication is important but difficult.

Competition: Mainly from other kinds of recreational activities, especially when it comes to the less serious bicyclists. The shorter alternatives more so than the longer ride, based on the participants involvement in other sport alternatives.

Marketing Mix: There are core elements and there are supplement and extensions. The product is an experience including service, prolonged in time into a process, involving encounters with personnel and volunteers. The offer is of high quality and a rather high price. The promotion is mainly done by word-of-mouth and at other En Svensk Klassiker (ESK) events, based on the number of participants who are recruited through friends or are ESK participants.

Of the marketing mix of today can be concluded that the product mix contain mainly three products with supplements, one far more attractive than the other two. They are positioned as high quality products sold at a rather high price. The main place of registration is the Internet although the process of distribution includes a series of experiences and services delivered by the personnel; employed or volunteers.

With its size and international participation the Vätternrundan brand holds the image of a leading member of the cycling community.

The En Svensk Klassiker concept is supportive to all member events and an important arena for promotion. Otherwise different promotion channels are used, many directed towards the cycling community, with a message based on the communicative platform to appeal to the serious recreational cyclists.

5. ANALYSIS

Theory and empirical data is all coming together in this chapter of concluding situation analysis as a basis for strategy development, focusing on market definition and the capability of the company to serve the market.

5.1. Defining the market

The market of the business unit Vätternrundan consists of consumers who need a participate sport activity and business that wants to exhibit their brand as a sponsor to the events, following the line of theory. With focus on the consumers, earlier studies by Schreeder, et.al. (2005) and Andersen & Cychosz (1998) as well as Wendel-Vos, et.al. (2007), show that the segment where participants are most likely found are among higher educated men with a sport active history, active friends and sporty accessories, with this activity in line with their self image. When targeting the segment consideration can well be taken to variations in the subculture as it is not all homogenate (Bull, 2006). The observations of the film, cycling expos and arenas showed a difference in visitors and equipment between the more serious cyclists and generally exercise interested.

The presented fitness trend (Beitz, 1996; Dubbert, 2002; Nordin, 2005), supports sporty activities and although the event Vätternrundan today is the obvious choice to the majority of the sport cycling interested in Sweden, there is an even larger possible market found in Europe among the growing number of cycling sport tourists, especially from Germany according to the study of Koucky (2007). Notable though is that the successful examples of the Netherlands and Mallorca does have bike rental, hotels and other services in a way that is lacking in Sweden and Motala.

Vätternrundan is organised with a profit and Tjejevättern and Halvvättern are to complement the main product but do not provide sufficient profit on their own. Vätternrundan seems to appeal to the serious recreational cyclists of Sweden and has little competition in this league today. To Tjejevättern and Halvvättern the alternatives and competitors are several. Cycling is a popular activity according to RF Statistics of 2006, but less so than for example walking and running, and it has decreased during the last years. Compared to other recreational activities, cycling is a rather gentle form physically according to Forbese (2004) that can be continued for long, regardless of age, why the growing number of active elderly also can be a market

opportunity as well as the environmental conscious who might prefer the cycling for transportation.

5.2. The situation of the company

The process of increasing the awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation can reveal additional possibilities. By improving and communicating the mission and objectives, the management can be supported and more effective and necessary systematic routines of planning, documentation and evaluation be enabled (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

Notable is that the past SWOT analysis sees the organisation as operationally well functioning although it has ineffective and unsystematic working routines, in line with the C.E.O. statement.

Motala AIF and Vätternrundan have a long history and an organisation built on voluntarism determining its structures, policies and the corporate culture. Organisational characteristics are by Eriksson, et.al. (2004) as well as Kotler & Keller (2006) the ground stone for the strategic decisions being taken or not taken. The Alliance board members are elected based on the individual Sports Club interests by its members influencing the stakeholder interests. Including and developing the partner relationships in the search for new possibilities may be fruitful and crucial according to the marketing network perspective mentioned by for example Mulin, et.al. (2007). The main actors and organisations with a relationship to Vätternrundan are the individual MAIF Clubs, suppliers, associated sport organisations, employees, trustees, the host city business and citizens, media, governmental organisations, sponsors and other sport industry actors, complementors, and customers.

5.3. Competitors

Not even a percentage of the serious sport cyclists in Europe find their way to Vätternrundan based on the potential market size presented by Koucky (2007), and internationally there are several large cycling events open for all. (Appendix VII)

To those recruited by family and friends into for example serious⁵ jogging, there is little room for cycling, unless they are on their way towards one of the *En Svensk Klassiker* alternatives, in which the disciplines are combined. More popular is also walking and gym exercise. The alternative cycling events in Sweden present them selves mainly as complementors and

⁵ By serious meaning being their main exercise activity, several times a week.

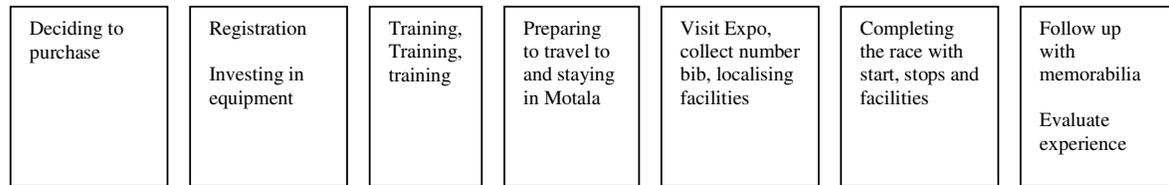
training tracks for those preparing for Vätternrundan. Several of them have the same lengths as and close dates to Tjejevättern and Halvvättern why they probable are competitors to those events and not differentiated enough. There are also cycling event competitors to Vätternrundan from an international view. Notable is that although the participants of the shorter alternatives are said to place greater emphasis on peripheral event services, there are none especially offered for those. Since the recommended training (500 km) for the shorter events do not force the participants to become serious cyclists, the step towards an alternative recreational sport activity is shorter, unless cycling is chosen based on a physical reason or is the subculture most identified with.

5.4. The Marketing Mix of today

The Marketing Mix concept describes the interaction taking place according to Mulin, et.al. (2007). The segments described in the market definition are partly targeted so far. The main product is according to the brand evaluation, a true challenge, well known to the serious cyclists and with an image that probably adds to the self-concept of the serious cycling participants. It is of high quality and a rather high price, which suites this category according for example Nordin (2005). The repeated customers found in Tjejevättern imply that this product too is an attractive experience to a group of customers, approximately 2/3 had participated before. The invitation is being distributed to former participants and at En Svensk Klassiker events, channels supported by the data showing that most are recruited through other participants by word of mouth (approx. 1/3) or are En Svensk Klassiker participants (approx. 1/3).

The experience of the place and program is pro longed by the process prior to the event according to Mulin, et.al. (2007). In this case the registration process, the training facilities and accompanying friends, the service of the sport shop at home, the trip to and stay in Motala, etc. All being included in the total experience evaluation done by the customer. The process that the participant goes through is illustrated by the figure below, following the recommended steps in the information to participants.

Figure 4. The extended process.



Source: Own model based on the information to participants.

Of great importance is the encounter with the personnel as in any service product according to Kotler & Keller (2006); the 3500 volunteers along the track providing the cycling service, serving the food, showing the way, encouraging and sheering. The promotion activities have been concentrated to the places and media where serious cycling participants are found (Appendix I). The most important channel for word-of-mouth is the individual participant, either as a returnee or as a recruiter. The participants survey also shows that promoting under the umbrella of and at the other events of the En Svensk Klassiker have been important, sharing the cumulative marketing efforts. The generally exercise interested who not yet have chosen cycling or En Svensk Klassiker or do know a participant, do seldom meet the Vätternrundans promotion activities (Appendix III).

5.5. The situation at hand

A Marketing Strategy starts with the company mission and objectives according to Kotler & Keller (2006), which in this case states:

We shall be the best in the world in organising recreational cycling rides by constantly improving us in order to attract even more cyclists.

Our work and the events shall be unique, characterised by high quality, service and level of safety.

The goal is 30 000 participants in 2010 and a profit no less than 20% of the annual turnover, going back to the Sports Clubs.

With the limitation of participants in Vätternrundans to 17 500 registered due to safety reasons, the answer to additional participants must be found in an extended main event or a new

event, or by increasing the number of participants in the complementary events. In order to maintain the objective profit, costs must be kept under control without jeopardising the quality, service and/or level of safety. A threat is according to the SWOT a serious accident.

Another restraining factor is the area where the event takes place as it is temporarily borrowed for the time of the event; the road, the area for the rest stops, the park where the finish is situated, parking areas, the town square where the Expo is, etc. Consideration has to be taken to all affected actors and the impact of the event. Permission is requested in advance and the areas are thoroughly cleaned after the event for example.

The SWOT also suggests the development of additional complementing products, which could increase the use of facilities and event equipment. Possibly also the right memorabilia or other supplements could bring additional income.

The interviews with the C.E.O. and the SCF representative adds three new issues to the SWOT analysis. 1) The volunteers as both a strength and a weakness. 2) The membership in En Svensk Klassiker as a strength. 3) Possible new, not Vätternrundans supportive legislation initiated by the SCF.

The result of the participant survey shows a rather content respondent group experiencing high quality and satisfying service, a probable result of the experience being in line with what was expected based on the theory of Kotler & Keller (2006). The brand evaluation shows that the Vätternrundans brand holds the image and positioning of a market leader as the largest cycling event in Sweden and as a member of En Svensk Klassiker. The image is especially important when there are few tangible aspects, which is the common in sport experiences according to Grant (2005) and Mulin, et.al. (2007). The image and position of Tjejvättern and Halvvättern is weaker than Vätternrundans. From a Swedish perspective they are both quite large, but then cycling is a small sport in Sweden with European standards or compared to the total number of participants in the running events or the members of gym.

The pattern and survey results of the Tjejvättern participants show a group of exercise active rather than serious cyclists; fewer did take part in other cycling events compared to Halvvättern and Vätternrundans. To the Tjejvättern participants the importance of cyclist subculture identification is probably less important than to the Vätternrundans participants. However ones participated the Tjejvättern participants tend to be more loyal, is a repeated

buyer and returns several times. Halvvättern however has only been organised ones so far. The participants of this event turned out to be a little older in average and rather equally representing males and females. The participants of both Tjejevättern and Halvvättern are more locally originated.

The Vätternrundan brand evaluation performed is to guide the market communication as recommended by Mulin, et.al. (2007). It sees the brand as standing for health, challenge, camaraderie and cycling, supported by its human and physical resources;

- the environment of lake Vättern in the summertime
- the service and facilities of the event
- the serious participants or 'super men'
- its size as the worlds largest of its kind
- the organisation with its volunteers and the tradition of the event as a health preventing initiative, supporting its credibility

The theoretical recommendation is that the messages should be consistent and uniform in order to be strong and all advertising is now following the same graphic profile, a little more modern than before. Tjejevättern and Halvvättern however do not answer as strongly to all of the resources above. They do not go around lake Vättern, the participant is a less serious cyclists and they are not the largest.

5.6. Amplifying the events attraction

The patterns of the participants imply that there are different sub-groups within the segment., reviewed in theory by Green (2001);

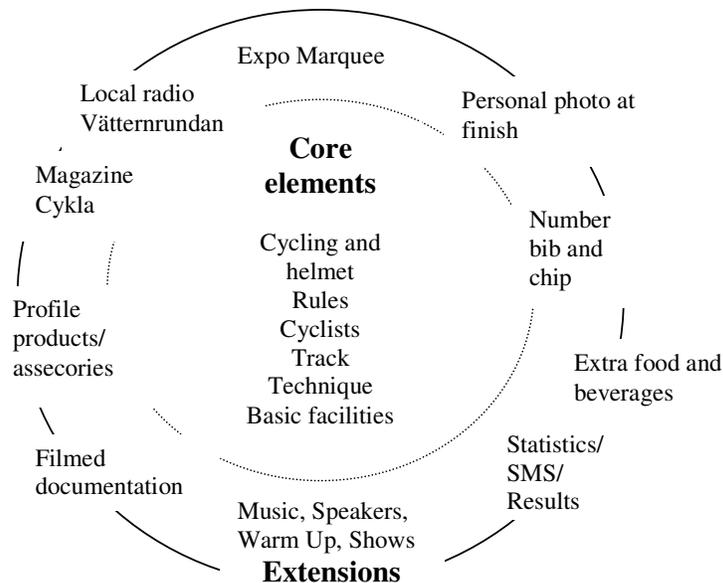
- *the serious cyclist* is a frequent trainer, chooses longer distances and may also participate in other cycling events
- *the generally recreational sport interested* who participate as the event is a component of En Svensk Klassiker, Tjejklassikern or Klassikerhalvan is today making up 30-38% of the participants.
- *the generally exercise interested or sport tourists* who sees some other benefits in participating and is trying the product and comparing it to other recreational sport activities or sport tourism offers.
- as many of today's participants do *indoor spinning and gym attendants* is a growing group in general according to RF, this can also be also an interesting place to promote the event.

According to the survey almost 50 % do either participate in sport events of other disciplines and/or do spinning or other gym activities.

The core values found at the brand evaluation can well be appealing to the groups above. As the values differ in importance to different groups so does the effective marketing message according to for example Kotler & Keller (2006). The health potential appeals to some and Vätternrundan being one of the world's largest events appeals to others.

The product can be developed and differentiated along any of the core elements or extensions according to Mulin, et.al. (2007). The core elements of the events are the rules of cycling in-group along a track between start and finish, essential facilities, cycling and the cyclists. The supplements or extensions are the ceremonies, music, Expo marquee, the magazine Cykla, SMS-service, etc. Important cultural expressions and communicative arenas that can be developed to fit the different segments. Placed into the sport product model by Mulin, et.al. (2007) the core elements and the extensions can be illustrated as in the figure below.

Figure 5. The core elements and extensions of the Vätternrundan cycling events put into the model of Mulin, et.al.



Source: Original model by Mulin, et.al. 2007, p. 150.

Inseparable from the product are according to studies of service products, also the process and the personnel, deliverer of the service that is given prior, during and after the event.

Interactive marketing is to be performed by the volunteers towards the customers. Internal marketing is needed to provide the volunteers with the knowledge and tools to perform the interactive marketing and to do the most out of every encounter. External marketing are the activities performed by the company directly towards the intended customers. All three are important marketing strategies in service marketing according to Kotler & Keller (2006).

To the customer accessibility is one important factor predicting activity according to (Dubbert (2002), why any improvement of training possibilities is important. Another important factor is the group as sub culture identification is a result of socialisation stated by Green (2001), supported by the studies of Wendel-Vos, et. al. (2007), proven by the fact that a large number of the participants today have been recruited on recommendation of other participants, in Vätternrundan more so than in the in the other events (33% compared to 20 in Tjejvättern and 27% in Halvvättern). Following the logic of relationship marketing defined by Kotler & Keller (2006), this makes keeping and improving existing customer relationships very important, as well as deliberately using them as a tool in promotion.

Besides the relationships with employed, volunteers and customers, Vätternrundan can also find development possibilities in the relationships with other actors and organisations. To be able to form valuable relationships is especially important in services and experiences according to Almquist, et.al. (1999) and Boye & Sandberg (2005).

5.7. Promotion

In order to target the segments the theory of Kotler & Keller (2006) among others, supports the promotional activities of external marketing to be placed where these groups are found and correspond; at communities, at other events, training facilities, sport shops, etc. where ever the cycling sport culture and the recreational sport culture is manifested and communicated, reinforcing the brand image, with a message adjusted to the target. In order to spread the knowledge of the brand, most channels appeal to the dominating generation but the Internet use is steadily growing and 'upper class' alternatives are likely to give the best outcome according to the customer characteristic presented by for example Nordin (2005). Co-branding with Vätternrundan can strengthen both Tjejvättern and Halvvättern although consideration needs to be taken to the sub cultural differences. Partnerships with the right image and clientele can also be a channel to new consumers following the line of Mulin, et.al. (2007).

As most participants are recruited through word of mouth, which is a result of a satisfied experience, traditional promotion activities may at first seem unmotivated. However in order to withhold and build the image of being part of the cycling culture and a major player, the brand needs to be exposed where the culture is manifested and communicated; web sites, magazines, expos, etc. Along with memorabilia it also supports the individual participant who wants to talk about or show ones accomplishment (Andersen & Cychosz 1998; Ferrand & Page, 1999).

5.8. Strategic decisions

The strategic decisions being taken depend on the company profile, its core competence and capacity according to Eriksson, et.al. (2004). In this case the company owner is a non-profit organisation and the majority of the personnel are volunteers greatly influencing the profile. The SWOT analysis however showed weaknesses such as unclear and limited liabilities of the executives and, ineffective and unsystematic routines of planning, documentation and evaluation limiting the possible effect. The C.E.O. also mentioned the problems of the large group of volunteers. Improving these weaknesses should be one important objective of Vätternrundan. Resource strengths on the other hand are a steady economy and capital value in facilities, event equipment and long tradition. Wolfe, et.al. (2005) refer to this important area as resource management.

The situation analysis reveals sub segments with growth potential and products with the potential to target. Segmentation and targeting are two of the corner stones in developing a strategy (Kotler & Keller, 2006). The data also showed on possible development as well as needs of improvement in order too reach the position and objective of the company mission. Placing the situation of Vätternrundan into the three key strategies of a sport product, which is product development, product differentiation, and branding according to Mulin, et.al, (2007), can result in the following objectives:

Product development of core elements and extensions: The yearly participant survey is here an important tool in finding out the customer opinions. Responding and constantly improving according to the survey result should be an annual objective as the experience is a measure of perceived quality. In a product like Vätternrundan, the marketing mix also involves process and personnel. The prioritised areas the upcoming year should for example

be the queue and opening hours of the Expo, looking into the food and beverages served, and expanding the rest stops of Halvvättern.

In order for Halvvättern/Tjejevättern to attract more sport tourists the product could well be complemented into a suitable package since it is a demanded concept although the lack of hotels and transport alternatives is a limiting factor. Possibly this problem could be solved in co-operation with suitable partners and promoted to sport tourist in mainly Germany where the market is growing.

Product differentiation: A part from being an exclusive member of En Svensk Klassiker and co-branded by Vätternrundan, Tjejevättern and Halvvättern are much similar to other events. A deepened competitor analysis, product development towards differentiation and a better-targeted marketing communication should be the objective, following the recommendation of Mulin (2007). This will take a deepened analysis of the needs and demands of the Tjejevättern and Halvvättern participants as well as the event images.

Branding: To a product as emotional as participant experiences, the image of the product is very important as it is a part of your own image. The image is communicated through the brand elements and the participants as there is no tangible products part from the memorabilia. (Grant, 2005, Kotler & Keller, 2006; Mulin et.al, 2007). The objective should therefor be to strengthen the brand image in accordance to the core values; health, camaraderie, challenge and cycling through consistent marketing messages and activities. Summarising the core values found at the brand evaluation and the resources of the organisation there are several possible brand or image strengthening possibilities. Coming up with these alternatives is the creative part of the marketing process (Eriksson, et.al, 2004):

Exemplifying ideas of strengthening the *health* image:

- A propaganda campaign of the health benefits of cycling, in co-operation with a partner to strengthen the resources and reach.
- Publicly donate to health preventing research, partner up with a research institute or fund raising organisation.

Exemplifying ideas of strengthening the *camaraderie* image:

- Exposing to position mainly the Vätternrundan brand as a strong member of the cycling culture where ever it is manifested, at community web sites, cycling expos, cycling magazines, at gatherings, etc.
- Exposing Vätternrundan, Tjejevättern and Halvvättern as the number one alternative to the recreational sport interested and manifest them wherever the culture of recreational sport interested is manifested.
- Reflect all targeted subcultures in the magazine Cykla and all other marketing communication.

Exemplifying ideas of strengthening the *challenge* image:

- The level of challenge depends on the skill of the performer. All the ride alternatives can therefore be a challenge to the appropriate participant, which must be strongly messaged; they are all “supermen”. The conclusion is that each ride must be partly “individualised”, targeting the right sub culture.
- The experience can benefit from being presented as more demanding or in some other way more differentiated from the competition. Differentiation being one of the key issues in sport product strategy according to Mulin, et.al. (2007).
- By communicating being the best and the biggest, the organisation can in its actions and messages “challenge” the competition.

Exemplifying ideas of strengthening the *cycling* image:

- The cycling is a core element of the product and any initiative resulting in an extended use might be in the interest of Vätternrundan as the market thereby increases.
- Vätternrundan could publicly be supporting the development of a more cycling friendly society and the region as the heart of cycling.
- Close co-operation to other strong actors within the cycling business could be of mutual interest and a win-win partnership.

The messages are communicated through the Marketing Mix, which consists of the Product Mix including Process and Personnel, the Price Span, the Place of distribution, and the Promotion. Resources and possible ways to the market are also the network of company relationships (Mulin, et.al. 2007). In this case the product is not new and the price level is already set. The objective should be to evaluate it each year in relation to the competition and company situation. By each year there is an increase in use of the Internet for registration but the printed form is still requested. The objective should continuously be to each year distribute the written form to earlier participants two years back, sample it at expos and other events in and outside Sweden and to place it at our partner sport shops and gym. Earlier and interested participants are also e-mailed. The promotion activities are to follow two lines; what can be expected of a market leader from the view of the cycling community, competitors, media, and partners, etc. and exposing the brand and informing of the events and advantages of cycling in the channels targeting the sub segments; serious cyclists, generally recreational sport interested and sport tourist (in northern Europe). Additional research of media preferences of the sub segments will show what promotion activities to priorities. A PR/Media program is also recommended by Mulin, et.al. (2007).

Relationship marketing is another recommended approach by Kotler & Keller (2006) for the service industry, where the relationships with key parties increases the company competitive strength as it instead competes as an enlarged network. The objective of Vätternrundan should be to analyse all the key relationships for development possibilities, also referred to by Wolfe, et. al. (2005) as stakeholder management, for example:

A public relations program and increased press service towards the media.

Establish routines of information and clear roles between the unit and the MAIF board.

Suppliers can become potential partners in a mutual interest to enhance the total value created.

Relationships with sponsors can be increasingly valuable and new sponsors can be contracted.

With the host city actors recognising the value of the events, complementing product can extend the Vätternrundan experience and the process facilitated. Governmental support of police, county administrative, municipalities and public road department is crucial in order to have a good, accessible track and a safe event. With them as co-organising partners the total effectiveness and competence is improved.

The Swedish Cycling Associations and the En Svensk Klassiker events are some of the Associate Sport Organisation with whom Vätternrundan has much co-operation and a very valuable relationship that must be cared of.

With Sport shops and other cycling events seeing themselves as complementors they have a mutual interest of being associated with and exposing Vätternrundan.

Two of the most important relationships according to theory however are the customers and the personnel enlightening the importance of both **internal and interactive marketing**. (Kotler & Keller, 2006) With 3500 temporarily working volunteers and only a handful employees encountering approximately 25 000 cyclists it is important that everyone knows and communicates the appropriate message. An objective of Vätternrundan should be to make sure that everyone does the most out every encounter and that the message is consistent with the objectives of the company. This can for example be achieved through good communication, information and more education. The satisfied customer brings both returnees and newcomers as word of mouth is the number one channel. The recruiting work of the former participant could be supported by profile clothing, memorabilia, excellent post event service and continued support of the veterans club.

6. CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

This final chapter concludes the study by answering the key study questions as well as reflects on the process, the result and suggestions for future research.

6.1. My key questions answered

The introducing chapter of this study gave a short background to the case, the motivation of the study and key study questions to be answered:

How can competitive advantage be achieved?

What is the holistic current situation of the business?

What marketing strategy can and should be used?

The following theoretical framework gave a review of the key concepts and relevant theories, very much answering to the how and what. But also showing that there are special concerns to be taken to the business being within the service industry and the product being an experience, co-produced by the participant. The potential customer is not just anyone; some are more pre-disposed to demand these products than others, and the input of the consumer is very much influencing the outcome of the experience.

Based on the empirical findings and my analysis, this study has resulted in the following answers to the key questions asked:

How can competitive advantage be achieved?

The study shows that a holistic view is required, minding the uniqueness of the company and product. Knowing the customer is not an overstated parole, nor is the importance of the personnel as one of the service company's most important resources, making internal marketing a key issue in this case.

Besides the volunteers, the experience is very much co-produced by the participants.

Listening in and giving the volunteers and the customers the right prerequisites is probably a core competence for the organisation of this case worth developing and nursing. The key is to be a rightful member of the culture and carry the right image, to be the number one event to all cycling interested.

What is the holistic current situation of the business?

The environmental forces and trends favour the business. But it is not simple to draw the borders of the business. Are we referring to the sport business, the tourism business, the fitness business or the experience business? The complicating mixtures but still differences became evident to me already in the initial theory search. The lack of matching examples and prior similar cases was evident. The situation also makes it hard to tell who are the competitor and/or a potential partner to the company. Regardless of which, with the right product there is a growing market potential, but co-operation with complementors is crucial as the customers have a wide choice.

What marketing strategy can and should be used?

The recommendations of theory are to mind the relationships and image above all, but also to see to product development and differentiation. The case analyse show that this multiple marketing strategy successfully could be applied on this case as the events differ in customers and the customers probably differ in preferences. Setting event individual objectives, targeting the different sub-segment, can improve the competitive advantage of the company. The next step of each strategic decisions is an action plan, answering to the How, When and Who of the stated What. Limited by the organisational support determining what can and will be done.

6.2. My recommendations

Based on this study my recommendations in the Vätternrundan case is as follows:

- Continued product improvement based on annual participant e- survey.
- The shorter rides should be packaged in order to attract the international market.
- The shorter rides should be developed and/or differentiated in order to attract more on the national market. Additional research is needed to determine how.
- To strengthen the image in line with the brand evaluation, Vätternrundan should engage in a national PR-campaign focused on health/environment/cycling.
- We are to be present as the number one where ever the cycling culture is manifested.
- Develop the internal and external relationships. Improved relationship management. This includes the interaction with the volunteers.
- Strengthen our image with consistent messages. Improved image management.
- Place messages targeting the sub segments in the media and places of their preferences.

These are objectives to be put into an actions program and given the necessary resources.

6.3. Reflections on my study and Suggestions for future research

Before this study begun, the mission and long-term objective of the business was recently set. Since the number of a rather steady 26 000 participants is to be increased to 30 000 within two years, the marketing needs to be developed. The question to the marketer is how as competitive advantage is a relative and changeable state. The analysis on which the executive decisions are made must regularly be updated as the company and the world around it changes. From the company perspective it is a matter of having an organisation and routines to handle the situations and possibilities that come along. The advantages of Vätternrundan must be managed and developed properly in order to sustain. The company has its strengths but also its weaknesses. Even if one talks of taking on a growing market, there is no certainty that one has the ability to act accordingly. As with this study, the width of the situation brings the risk of only brushing the surface.

As the study proceeds additional questions arise and information gaps are revealed such as why some choose to not return. The work of the marketer is never finished; it requires a reciprocal approach to the ongoing changes of the internal and external environment. Many of the questions that remain to be answered however concern more short-term issues such as which are the most popular magazines of the sub-segment this season, how are the relationships to be managed and by whom. Even though this study has not provided answers to these kinds of company individual questions I believe it to show where to focus should be and what strategic areas to mind if you are a company with a product like Vätternrundan.

The impact of the study on the case and the involved has been an ongoing process ever since the study began as the information found had to be applied directly. This has resulted in a situation of which the case today is not the same as it was a year ago and much of the empirical information has turned into that of the past. And as inseparably linked to the case the author's view of the situation has changed with increasing knowledge. With the unavoidable subjectivity that the researcher in this case brings, there has been an obvious risk of one seeking confirmation of one's own assumptions and not being able to distance oneself sufficiently from the task as marketing manager. It is also a position that brings a unique case knowledge and access to case information. Interpretations and conclusions are however

always the researchers personal products. Company colleges who have read the study believe that the presentation of Vätternrundan well describes the case.

Besides the strategic guidance that this study will to bring the company, I also believe it to bring additional knowledge of the market for other similar events as well as hopefully be an interesting case to fellow academics, illustrating the marketing of a recreational sport event and its customers. The marketing of sport is a growing issue, so much more than commercial rights and sponsoring. Sport is not only entertainment but also an important element of the fitness trend. Increased knowledge of how to make more people physically active is a necessity for the health of humans.

There are voices within the organisation that fear that increased professionalism would align the business from the non-profit organisation. The culture of the volunteer Sport Club built on idealism in combination with a professional profit-making business is a delicate balance of trust and power that well could be studied further. The weakness of the case as it is today is found in its structure it seems and additional knowledge of how to amplify the efficiency of an organisation where social and profit-making objectives meet is needed.

APPENDIXES

Structured interviews with key actors Appendix I

Observations of cycling expos and cyclist arenas Appendix II

Promotion activities 2007 Appendix III

The Brand Evaluation Appendix IV

The Participant Survey Appendix V

International survey Vätternrundan 2007 Appendix VI

The answer and survey of UCI Appendix VII

Development Committee – discussion and reflections Appendix VIII

The questions asked:

Hur vill du beskriva cykel/motionsidrottens situation/ karaktär?

How would you describe the situation and character of the exercise and cycling sport.

Hur uppfattar du cyklister generellt?

How would you describe the cyclist generally?

Hur uppfattar du dem som specifikt deltar hos oss?

How would you describe the ones that participate at Vätternrundan?

Beskriv Vätternrunda loppens situation från din synvinkel.

Describe the situation of the Vätternrundan events from your view.

Vilka är våra konkurrenter?

Who are our competitors?

Hur uppfattar du organisationens möjligheter och begränsningar?

What do you see as the possibilities and limits of the organisation?

Occasion/Place	Who visited?	What did they ask us?
IFMA Cologne Köln, Germany September 2007	Cycling interested. Travellers and potential tourists interested in cycling holidays and challenges. Mostly men in their middle ages or slightly over. Many stayed all day or several days.	Most questions regarded and most attention was given Vätternrundan. The visitors wanted very detailed information. They asked for packaged solutions/trips. We were asked many questions of Sweden as destination in general.
Mallorca, Spain March 2007	Lots of Germans in their middle ages or slightly over, mostly men or couples who cycle fairly fast in groups or slow on their own on cycling holidays. They stayed in one of the many good hotels, dressed well and used expensive bicycles.	They new focused on their activity and interaction with fellow cyclists. We tried to make conversation with them at the hotels but they showed little interest to non-cyclists.
Svenska Cykeldagarna Jönköping, Sweden November 2007	Swedish cyclists, both amateur and elite , many Vätternrundan participants. Mainly middle ages men with friends or family. Many stayed all day.	Almost all visitors had experience or knowledge of our events and asked of planned changes or improvements.
En Svensk Klassikers expo stand Stockholm, Sweden September 2007 Mora, Sweden February 2008	Participants in the En Svensk Klassiker events with different favourite disciplines. Women and men with an estimated average age of 35.	We were asked detailed questions of the ESK concept and each separate event. Many questions regarded training as it was a new discipline to many.
Rad Tourism Fair Bremen, Germany	Travellers and potential tourists interested in active holidays and challenges. Many couples and families.	At this expo it was possible to try out different activities. We had many visitors and questions of the events and Sweden as a destination for an active holiday.
<p>Observation of the event participants in the films and at sight, June 2007.</p>		
Tjejvättern <i>Bicycle and cyclist observations.</i>	Many standard city bikes with a few gears or hybrids. Functional sport clothes but not necessary bike clothes. Saddle bags and baskets, weight is not an issue. Relaxed, social and happy atmosphere.	
Halvvättern <i>Bicycle and cyclist observations.</i>	More budget racers than standard city bikes More bike clothes than general functional sport clothes. Some saddle bags and baskets. Relaxed, social and happy atmosphere.	
Vätternrundan <i>Bicycle and cyclist observations.</i>	Many racers and some of them quite expensive. Mostly specialised and fashionable bike clothes and shoes. Some saddles bags, weight and is an issue. A more serious and tense but still social atmosphere.	

Printed matters

4 issues/year, 30 000 ex of magazine Cykla
120 000 invitations out of 5 000 are in German and English
Posters placed at partners and in Motala

TV commercials

Kanal lokal march - april Stockholm, Östergötland
Eurosport march – april Sverige

Advertising (often single adds)

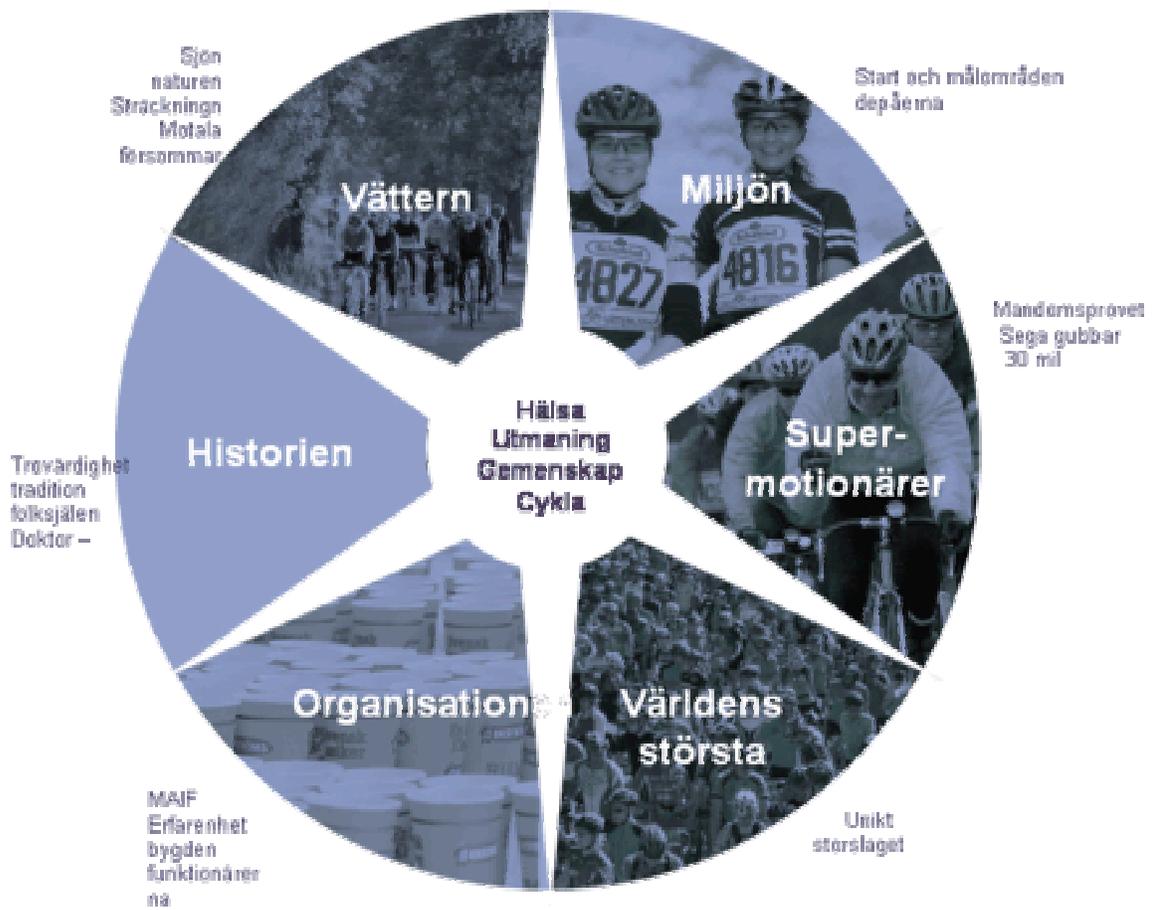
Aftonbladet (with a En svensk Klassiker)
Cykelmotion (Denmark)
Birkebeinern (Norway)
Wasalöparen (Vasaloppet)
Varvet (Göteborgsvarvet)
Skogssport/O-ringen
SCF Motionskalender
SvD
Metro
DN
Motala Tidning
Corren
Kartbolaget
Östsvenska Turistrådet
Kommun broschyren

Webb banners

Corren.se
Slf.no
Cyclesport.se
Cykla.com

Expos and activities

Jan, Mässan På Två Hjul Göteborg
Feb, Engelbrektsloppet, Norberg
Mars, Vasaloppet, Mora, Turmässan, Gbg
April, Butikshelg Stockholm och Göteborg , cykelgrupper på Mallorca
Maj, Göteborgsvarvet (med ESK)
Maj-Aug, Långloppscupen (fem lopp)
Juni – Aug, Skandinavialoppet (DK,NO)
Juli, Vansbrosimningen
Aug, Grenserittet, Birkebeinerrittet, Norge
Sept, Lidingöloppet
Okt/nov, Cykeldagar i Falun, Allt för hälsan/Träningsdagarna i Stockholm
The Great Wall International Bicycle race och Vätternrundan i Kina
Butikskampanj AXA
Internetkampanj Swedbank
Butikskampanj Team Sportia



1	Deltog du i det lopp du var anmäld till? Tjejevättern, Halvvättern, Vätternrundan		93% Yes			
2	Hur fick du tag på information om Vätternrundan/Tjejevättern/Halvvättern?		Internet	VR 58%	TV 48%	HV 52%
			Friends	33%	20%	27%
			Printed invitation	8%	21%	7%
3	Vad var den/de främsta anledningarna till att du valde att anmäla dig?		Challenge	70%	50%	58%
			Returnee	41%	65%	19%
			En Svensk Klassiker	35%	31%	38%
4	Vilka övriga motionsaktiviteter deltar du i under året?		Other cycling event	41%	23%	36%
			Event in other disciplines	49%	44%	49%
			Gym or spinning	48%	47%	43%
5	Var hittar du inspiration till träning/motion?		Sport magazines	35%	30%	35%
			Sport Shops	38%	28%	32%
			Other, myself	52%	53%	53%
6	Nyttjar du hemsidans "Mina Sidor" funktion?			~53% Yes		
7	Vad är ditt helhetsintryck av det lopp du deltog i?			4,22	4,55	4,46
8	Gick det smidigt att anmäla sig till loppet?			4,69	4,81	4,78
9	Vad tyckte du om den information du fick inför loppet i form av tidningen Cykla?			4,41	4,45	4,34
11	Hur gick det att få ut din nummerlapp?			4,42	4,68	4,78
12	Vad tyckte du om vår mäsas och butik på torget?			3,42	4,10	3,91
13	Vad tyckte du om servicen och bemötandet vid depåerna?			4,41	4,69	4,39
14	Vad tyckte du säkerheten under loppet?			3,75	4,13	4,17
15	Vad tyckte du om den mat som erbjöds efter loppet?			3,57	3,79	3,68
16	Hämtade du ditt diplom efter målgång?			60% Yes		
19	Hur reste du till Motala?			~90% with car		
20	Övernattade du i Motala i samband med loppet?		Yes	68%	45%	60%
			No	32%	55%	40%
23	Varför deltog du inte?			65% Sickness		
27	Har du för avsikt att deltaga i någon av Vätternrundans lopp 2008?		Yes	60%	65%	53%
			No	8%	4%	4%
			Do not know	32%	23%	33%
28	Ge gärna tips och idéer på förbättringar till nästa års arrangemang samt hur vi kan locka ännu fler personer att delta!					
Nr	Extra Frågor	Medel Värde	Yes	No		
1	Vad tyckte du om den mat som erbjöds i Jönköping och Hjo?	3,80				
2	Känner du till 6-timmarsregeln?		98%	2%		
3	Hur lång tid efter din målgång körde du bil (alt. motorcykel/moped/minibuss)?					
4	Hur många gånger har du deltagit i Vätternrundan?		One	52%		
			2-4	44%		
5	Har du deltagit i Tjejevättern, Grabbvättern och/eller MTB-vättern någon gång?					
6	Vad tyckte du om aktiviteterna på torget?					
7	Berätta vad du tycker är bra med Vätternrundan?					

Nr Urvalsfrågor

- 1 [Vilket lopp deltog du i/var du anmäld till?](#)
- 2 [Hur anmälde du dig?](#) Internet: VR 72%, TV 76%, HV 80 %, The rest mainly through friend or printed form
- 3 [Är du man eller kvinna?](#) VR Male 81%, Female 19%; TV female 100%, HV Male 50%, Female 50%
- 4 [Vilken åldersgrupp tillhör du?](#) VR 21-40: 58%, 41-60: 38%, TV 21-40: 40%, 41-60: 51%, HV 21-40: 39%, 41-60: 52%
- 5 [Vilken siffra börjar ditt postnummer på?](#)
- 6 Datainsamling (dold fråga):

	Vätternrundan		Tjevvättern		Halvvättern	
	Positiva %	Svar	Positiva %	Svar	Positiva %	Svar
7. Vad är ditt helhetsintryck av det lopp du deltog i?	87	1008	95	1149	94	944
8. Gick det smidigt att anmäla sig till loppet?	95	963	97	1126	97	915
9. Vad tyckte du om den information du fick inför loppet i form av tidningen Cykla?	90	1002	90	1131	87	924
11. Hur gick det att få ut din nummerlapp?	86	1001	93	1137	96	941
12. Vad tyckte du om vår mäsas och butik på torget?	50	902	78	919	70	781
13. Vad tyckte du om servicen och bemötandet vid depåerna?	88	981	96	1099	87	909
14. Vad tyckte du om säkerheten under loppet?	65	987	80	1100	84	914
15. Vad tyckte du om den mat som erbjöds efter loppet?	55	855	63	902	60	760

1. Which event did you participate in?
2. How did you register?
3. Your gender?
4. Which age group do you belong to?
5. Which country do you live in?
6. How did you get knowledge of our events?
7. I came to the event and Sweden alone, Yes or, No I came accompanied by
8. What is your general opinion of the event/events you took part in?

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
1	2	3	4
9. What do you think of the information given on our website?

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
10. What do you think of the information sent to you prior to the event?

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
11. What do you think of the service and facilities of the event?

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
12. How many times have you visited Sweden?
13. How did you travel to Motala and Sweden?
14. How many days did you stay in Motala?
15. Was your visit to Motala/Sweden also followed by business, vacation, etc.
16. Are there, if any, improvements you would like to see of the events?
17. Are there, if any, additional facilities or services you would like to see in Motala?
18. What do you believe would attract more international participants?

Dear Sirs,

I have a few questions that I think and hope you can help me answering. My name is Jessica Hallros and I work with the cycling event Vätternrundan in Sweden but I also study marketing and am now writing a thesis on the market of cycling. In your opinion or according to your statistics: How many are the licensed bicyclists in Europe? How many races are there? How many races/events (if any) are there open for all? How many people are there that use bicycling for exercise/leisure? (In percent if you prefer). Are the numbers growing or declining? Any national significant? Northern Europe?

Thank you in advance for a soon reply!

Kind regards Jessica Hallros

Dear Madam,

Following your email, I would like to provide you with some elements and figures related to Cycling for All (cycling as a pastime). I let my colleagues answer to you as regards competitive/elite cycling.

Your question requires a detailed answer, which the UCI is not able to give today. As regards Cycling for All, the UCI currently does not have a complete set of figures. These latter are currently being collected and analyzed and are going to be analyzed in the end of this year. That way, we will be in order to have a more accurate view on Cycling for All (number of cyclists and events, type of events and disciplines most appreciated, etc.) by the end of 2007/beginning of 2008.

Nevertheless, we have clearly observed a general ascending trend, especially for the last decade, which is partly due to the development of the leisure focused society:

Cycling: a confirmed growing recreational activity

As you know, cycling has been a growing sport for the last two decades. The impetus given to modernization and development of cycling (elite and recreational cycling as well) is now bearing fruits, and the development projects are being carried on the five continents. Cycling for All has become a most popular free time activity.

The UCI represents more than 160 national cycling federations. At the present time, we are in a position to communicate the following figures concerning Cycling for All (situation in the end of 2006):

Belgium: 14'500 licensees

France: 9'817

Italy: 243'869

Spain: 18'205

UK: cycling is becoming even more popular and great impetus has been given to this sport, but we do not have figure at the present time.

These figures are not representative, for many national federations do not issue recreational licenses or member cards. Furthermore, "cycling for all" events are open to everyone (to both cyclists who hold a license and those who don't), to cyclists of all ages and abilities or levels. The organizers of the "cycling for all" events can also issue day licenses to participants who do not hold an annual license. It is thus difficult to evaluate the number of participants to recreational cycling.

We note an increase in the number of "cycling for all" licenses/memberships which is connected with the growing UCI's and national federation's commitment to develop and promote recreational cycling. "Cycling for all" events can gather from about 150 to 30'000 (!) cyclists, depending on the country and on the type of event (cyclo sportive events, mountain bike marathon events, rides, cycling days, etc.). For instance, more than 100'000 cyclists took part in the 9 events in the UCI Golden Bike Series (www.ucigoldenbike.com) last year.

In addition, Cycling for All is different from competitive cycling, for you have both formal (participation to events) and informal participation (cycling on a free basis), which explains the difficulty to get an estimate of the number of recreational cyclists.

Moreover, The UCI has been strengthening relations with ten or so "cycling for all" bodies (not affiliated to the UCI) that represent about 400'000 members/licensees.

Finally, it is obvious that Cycling for All has become an important market for cycle, leisure/recreational and tourist industries.

Having said all the above, I would like to add that road and mountain bike have become the most popular "cycling for all" disciplines. Besides, the number of events has regularly increased over the 10 last years, and the market of road and mountain bike bicycles increased in a significant trend.

We have also noticed that an increasing number of national cycling federations are integrating Cycling for All to their portfolio of activities.

Cycling for All is now considered an even more interesting tourist activity by the tourist offices in countries such as France, Spain and Italy.
If you need further information, please do let me know. You will also be welcome at the World Cycling Centre in Aigle (Switzerland, www.cmc-aigle.ch).
I would be very interested in the thesis.
Yours sincerely,

Coordinateur Cyclisme pour Tous
Cycling for All Coordinator
Union Cycliste Internationale

Outdraft of the UCI questionnaire 2007 with answers by SCF

National Federation : Swedish Cycling Federation

Date : 31 July 2007

1 The national structure

1.1 Is cycling for all – cycling as a non-competitive pastime – included in your National Federation's activities?

Yes No

1.3 How many cycling clubs affiliated to your National Federation organize cycling for all events? 200

1.4 How many cycling clubs affiliated to your National Federation number cycling for all licence holders/members? 270

1.5 Is (are) there another (other) federation(s) active in cycling for all? _____

Yes No

If so, which federation(s): "Korpen - National Sports Cooperative " and Orienteering and cross country skiing but there are others, something we would like to control because for instance they have no experience of arranging cycling events.

2 The cyclists

2.1 Does your National Federation issue a specific licence/membership card to the cyclists who practice cycling for all?

Yes No

If so, which is the minimal age to obtain a licence/membership card? 7

2.2 What is the present total number of cycling for all license holders/members affiliated to your National Federation? 5000

2.3. What is the estimated total number of cyclists who practice cycling for all in your country? 120 000

3 The disciplines, activities and events

3.1 What are the disciplines and categories of cyclists concerned by cycling for all within your National Federation?

Disciplines: Categories:

- Road Masters (category of riders as per UCI rules)
- Mountain bike
- Cyclo-cross
- BMX
- Other(s): Handbike

3.2 What are the cycling for all events and activities developed by your National Federation?

- Amateurs races National Masters Championships
- Events, with timekeeping and classification ("cyclo-sportives", XC marathon MTB, etc.)
- « Brevets »
- Long distances (Audax, etc.)
- Rides (no timekeeping, no classification)
- Family events
- Youth events (initiation-découverte, etc.)
- General promotion of cycling as a sporting, recreational and leisure activity
- Training for coaches
- Training for accompanying guides (tourism)

3.3 What is the total number of cycling for all events, incl. all disciplines and categories, that are annually organized under the auspices of your National Federation? 160

3.4 Does your National Federation set up a national cycling for all calendar?
 Yes No

3.5 If need be what is the total number of events that are organized under the auspices of the other federation(s)? 300

3.6 Does your National Federation publish national cycling for all regulations?
 Yes No

Suggested need/objective:	Accepted and realistic?	Resource allocation?
Continued product improvements based on annual participant e-survey.	Yes, but we need to concentrate on a few specified objectivity's at a time.	The service is bought and performed today. Additional analysis of the answers need to be bought to find the specified issues to target on.
The shorter rides needs to be packaged in order to attract the international market.	Necessary but not realistic in the short run...	...due to not sufficient personnel resources, no strategy for development nor host city support.
The shorter rides needs to be developed and/or differentiated in order to grow on the national market.	As a merely complement to Vätternrundan the shorter alternatives can not grow enough, they need to be individually developed based on the wants of participants and the competitive situation.	There is not sufficient personal resources today why we need to take on a consultant for this task. Additional research is needed to determine how.
To strengthen our image we should engage in a national PR-campaign focused on health/environment/cycling.	An accepted and realistic objective, that...	...already is being planned in co-operation with an external consultant/partner.
We are to be present as the number one where ever the cycling culture is manifested.	As the biggest we hold that position today and by constant development we can keep it.	It takes a reciprocate attitude and strong finance that we have and a strategy that is being developed.
Sustainable and effective use of resources, improved resource management.	The present level is enough with today's economic situation.	Sufficient/ not prioritised.
Develop the internal, and external relationships. Improved relationship management.	An important, personnel demanding issue.	Additional personal resources may be allocated through restructuring tasks and engage more/delegate.
Strengthen our image with consistent messages. Improved image management. Place messages targeting the sub segments in the media of their preferences.	This is prioritised and we have come far.	The earlier brand evaluation gives sufficient support today and communicative guidelines. Media preferences and community arenas of the sub cultures needs to be monitored.

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