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The importance of an IMC strategy to improve the effectiveness of Iniciative Plus, being an SME in the pharmaceutical industry

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November, 2022

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Abstract

The main goal of this project is to develop an integrated Marketing and Communications strategy for Iniciative Plus. Being Iniciative Plus, a B2B service company for the pharmaceutical industry.

The industry where Iniciative Plus operates is very competitive, despite the small number of competitors. The services that Iniciative Plus provides range from consulting to in-store and off-store promotions and organizing both external and internal events. These services are available to pharmaceutical companies and laboratories, wholesalers, or groups of pharmacies.

One of the goals of Iniciative Plus, before the pandemic and crisis period, was to increase the number of clients, increase the loyalty of their past and current clients. With the pandemic situation creating some fractures in the industries, this goal became a priority for Iniciative Plus. For the scope of this paper, an in-depth analysis will be carried out, studying both the market where Iniciative Plus is inserted, and the company itself.

In conclusion, the main objective of developing an integrated marketing and communication strategy for Iniciative Plus is to increase and retain clients, increasing brand recognition and notoriety. Being a long-term goal, when developing it we have to take into consideration Iniciative Plus's past and the industry it is competing.

This paper will be used as a guide for Iniciative Plus and other companies inserted in this industry with the same business concept. It will present ideas to solve Iniciative Plus difficulties and will help in the resolution of some problems previously presented.

Keywords: Marketing and Communication; Communication Plan; IMC Strategy; Pharmaceutical Industry; SME; B2B Company

JEL Classification: (M31) Marketing; (M30) General

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Resumo

O principal objetivo deste projeto é desenvolver um plano integrado de Marketing e Comunicação para a Initiative Plus, uma empresa de serviços B2B para a indústria farmacêutica.

O setor é bastante competitivo, apesar do reduzido número de empresas concorrentes. Os serviços prestados englobam consultoria, promoções in-store e off-store, passando pela organização de eventos externos e internos. Estes serviços são prestados para empresas farmacêuticas e para grupos de farmácias

Um dos objetivos da Initiative Plus, antes da pandemia e crise, era aumentar o número de clientes, e fidelizar os seus clientes atuais, aumentando assim o volume de serviços prestados e a notoriedade da marca. Com a situação pandémica a criar fraturas nas indústrias este objetivo tornou-se prioridade.

Para tal, será realizada uma análise aprofundada, estudando o mercado, e a forma como a Initiative Plus se insere na indústria farmacêutica, serão também conduzidas entrevistas a funcionários, assim como também será efetuado um conjunto de análises ao mercado, à vantagem competitiva e às lacunas da empresa.

Concluindo, o principal objetivo de desenvolver uma estratégia IMC é aumentar e reter clientes, aumentando o reconhecimento e notoriedade da marca. Sendo um objetivo de longa data, no desenvolvimento do mesmo temos de ter em consideração o passado da empresa e a indústria onde se insere.

Esta tese será utilizada como guia para a Initiative Plus e outras empresas inseridas nesta indústria com o mesmo formato empresarial. Apresentará uma estratégia integrada de marketing e comunicação que ajudará na resolução de alguns problemas apresentados pela empresa.

Palavras-chave: Marketing e Comunicação; Plano de Comunicação; Estratégia IMC; Indústria farmacêutica; PME; Empresa B2B

JEL Classification: (M31) Marketing; (M30) General

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ACRONYMS

IMC – Integrated Marketing and Communication

ROCI – Return On Customer Investments

AER – Acquisition Expansion Retention

STP – Segmentation, Target and Position

SEO – Search Engine Optimization

SME – Small and Medium Enterprise

CRM – Customer relationship management

B2B – Business to Business

ROI – Return on Investment

B2C – Business to consumers

WOM – Word of moth

KPI – Key Performance Indicator

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1. Problem Definition

Initiative Plus is an SME focused on providing services for the pharmaceutical company in a B2B format. These services range from consulting; in-store promotion, mainly in pharmacies; organization of events, either internal or external events; medical scanning in pharmacies; and other marketing services that companies may ask for.

The objective of this thesis is to develop an Integrated Marketing and Communication strategy. The fact that Initiative Plus does not own any type of communication and marketing strategy was the starting point to develop an IMC strategy.

The pharmaceutical industry, besides being very competitive, is a highly regulated industry with a lot of restrictions both in marketing and communication. The work that Initiative Plus provides to its clients must take into consideration all the regulations inside the industry.

When working in Initiative Plus I concluded that the lack of a communication and marketing strategy was impacting their client base. Without planning and a strategy, Initiative Plus was starting to lay off some projects, hence some clients stopped working with them. With this reduction in the number of clients was obvious that Initiative Plus needed to acquire some more costumers and start to retain the existing ones. The only way to grow the link between a company and its clients is to communicate and involve them, this was the main reason behind the development of this thesis.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought several negative side effects to companies all over the industries. The pharmaceutical industry felt these side effects as any other industry: big laboratories who had the opportunity to invest in the research for a vaccine were able to go through that phase but nowadays are starting to have some troubles due to the lack of investment in other products; small laboratories could not go pass that stage that easily, hospitals and pharmacies being closed and having a reduction in treatments and sales, created a decrease in the usage of some products, hence leading to a decrease in revenues; pharmacies also felt with the pandemic, being forced to close led to a reduction of sales drastically; and finally, companies such as Initiative Plus, being a service provider, felt the consequences more heavily. With the reduction of clients in pharmacies or events, the services requested by clients were lower, even some of their clients stopped requiring services.

Initiative Plus always had as objective the acquisition of more clients and providing services or projects with a bigger dimension. After the pandemic, it was clear that Initiative Plus needed to urgently increase the number of clients, as well as their brand awareness and recognition. Nowadays companies cannot only survive through word of mouth, and past experience. Companies need to innovate, engage with prospects, convince them to work with the companies, involve them and mainly, understand them. Companies need to start to have a customer-centric perspective and approach.

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More now than ever, prospects are being bombarded with media and marketing all the time, for companies to acquire and retain clients they need to present products or services outside the box and, at the same time, meet clients' expectations. Companies need to differentiate themselves from other companies if they present the same services or products, and companies in the same industry need to find a feature to differentiate themselves from their competitors. With the increase in competition, clients need to feel that the company they choose, cares about their needs and wants, and are working specifically for them, with tailored services.

Iniciative Plus, since the beginning of its existence, has been a service provider company, always presenting tailored services to their clients, this feature is the biggest advantage for them. The only downside is that they need to acquire more clients and have more impact in the industry since they want to grow.

During some conversations with Sónia and Luísa, it was clear that Iniciative Plus not only need to improve its communication with current clients, but also need to develop a communication and marketing strategy to reach future clients and have an impact in the market. The biggest downside we encounter was the fact that Iniciative Plus has a lot of restriction when it comes to presenting their services. Due to disclosure issues, they don't have permission to share the work they have done with their clients. This raised the question of how they can communicate their brand, services, and experience. It was one of the main points to take into consideration when developing their Integrated Marketing and Communication Strategy.

In conclusion, the main purpose of developing this thesis is to increase and retain clients and increase the levels of brand recognition and notoriety. During the development of this strategy, we must consider the fact that Iniciative Plus should expand to digital, but they should never stop investing in personal contact with their clients.

This thesis will be used as a guide for Iniciative Plus to attain its objectives. Moreover, it can also be used for other companies inserted in this industry with the same business concept for developing their integrated strategy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Integrated Marketing communication strategy

The development of a well-integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategy is a crucial ingredient for a company's communication success. With the development of the new digital era, more now than ever marketers need to know which questions to ask to make sure that their IMC strategy design is truly optimized (Keller, 2016).

With the increase of access to limitless information about everything, consumers are meeting firms at different levels. Consumers now have the power to become engaged with a brand as they please. Their influence ranges from posting comments and reviews to actively guiding the nature and direction of the brand's activities (Keller, 2016). On the other hand, firms can choose to become involved as they wish, from hosting their website to actively interacting with consumers. As Keller (2016) affirmed, *"consumers and firms can increasingly communicate, relate, and exchange anything, anytime, with anyone."*

2.1.1 Development of the IMC definition

A definition for IMC has been in discussion for over 30 years, and even nowadays is still a subject that is constantly being discussed by all scholars and researchers in the Area of Business and Marketing. These ongoing discussions seek to determine a satisfactory definition for the IMC concept, although no consensus has been concluded yet. Although there is an agreement about the core of IMC, which states that it involves the value-optimizing management task performed by the company (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017).

One of the first IMC definitions presented was from the American Association of Advertising Agencies in 1989 initial definitions are characterized by having a more tactical and centralized perspective (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017). IMC definitions have gradually developed and adopted a more strategic and customer-oriented perspective which started to include internal and external stakeholders instead of only customers as the central target group (Kerr et al., 2008). Table 1, which can be found in the annexes¹, shows the evolution of the IMC definition presented by Bruhnn and Schnebelen (2017) in their research.

¹ Table **Error! Main Document Only.** - IMC definition evolution (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017) – page 56

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IMC is a concept that has a great potential to influence business performance it confers a competitive advantage, increases brand equity, and ensures the effectiveness and consistency of the company's communication by enabling the achievement of communication and marketing goals (Luxton et al., 2015; Madhavaram et al., 2005; Reid, 2003, 2005). Integrated marketing communication is a concept that is more than simply integrating, coordinating, and unifying the communication instruments, it is related to strategic positioning, managerial, organization, personnel issues, and relationships (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017).

In 1993, Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn understood the change in perspective occurring in the world with the advancements in social media and technology. Therefore, they introduced a new concept of IMC, the first definition presented to shift IMC to a more strategic point of view. In this concept, they suggested the abandonment of McCarthy's 4Ps and replacing them with a 4Cs model, adopting a more customer-oriented perspective: Stop studying the product and start studying consumers' wants and needs because companies can only sell what someone specifically wants to buy. Understand the consumers' costs to satisfy their needs or wants and forget about the price. Technology changed the way we live and interact, people don't have to go anywhere to buy, forget places and think of convenience. And finally, allow the buyer to be aware and beware of the buyer, stop thinking about promotion and focus on communication (D. E. Schultz et al., 1993).

The emergence of social media shifted the way stakeholders and brands communicate nowadays; we have a multi-way type of communication. Social media can be used either by companies, to communicate with consumers, or by the consumers themselves, to interact with the company and with other customers (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017). Another definition aggregates this shift given by the development of social media, presented by Lucia Porcu, Philip J. Kitchen, and Salvador Del Barrio-García in 2012 in their study about how IMC works. Their definition is proposed to help us to better understand the role that IMC plays in modern corporations, as a wide perspective and not only as a tool for marketing communication managers. Thus, their definition of IMC is *"IMC can be defined as the interactive and systemic process of cross-functional planning and optimization of messages to stakeholders to communicate with coherence and transparency to achieve synergies and encourage profitable relationships in the short, medium, and long term."* (Porcu et al., 2012).

Lastly, a definition by Kliatchko (2008) represents the strategic view that IMC must aggregate to keep up with the shift of the technological era. He proposed that *"IMC is an audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programs."* (J. G. Kliatchko, 2008).

2.1.1.1 Three new classifications of IMC definitions

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A new classification of the IMC definitions was proposed by Porcu et al. (2012) to better clarify the conceptual background. The categories are The Inside-out approach, The Outside-in approach, and The Cross-functional strategic approach.

The Inside-out approach. This view is represented by the older IMC concepts and states that IMC originates from the company, meaning that the integrated communication activities are managed by the company. This first category shows a poor customer orientation representing IMC as a task consisting of joining and integrating the elements of marketing communication to make them speak with “one voice”. This definition's weakness lies in considering IMC as a tool for marketing communication elements, thus, it is lacking the strategic view of the overall company (Porcu et al., 2012).

Following this inside-out approach, we can include some definitions, such as the Duncan and Everett (1993) definition that states IMC as *the “strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organization to influence its perceived brand value”*. Kotler (2000) also presented a definition that goes into accordance with this approach, he defined IMC as a concept under which a company integrates and coordinates its communications channels intending to deliver a clear, consistent, and compelling message.

The Outside-in approach. Within this approach, IMC is considered a customer-centric approach, in which a company aligns its communication activities with its customers and integrates them into its communication. This approach expands the direction of the relationship between the company and the customer, presenting two-way communication. In this view customers actively search for information from the company or interact with the company. The outside-in approach takes into consideration the evolution of social media; hence it involves user-generated content in the IMC concept. Therefore, following this approach (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017) assumed that *“IMC moves from telling and selling to listening and learning”*.

Following this approach, some definitions can be withdrawn. The first one was presented by Schultz (1993) it was the first to recognize that IMC must evolve from an inside-out approach, he considered IMC as the process of developing and implementing distinct forms of persuasive communication with customers over time. He stated that the final objective of IMC is to influence or affect the behavior of the targeted audience. The next definition shows us the side of strategic thinking when planning an IMC strategy, Pickton & Broderick (2001) proposed that IMC involves the management and organization of all agents within the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of all marketing communication tools. With the target to attain product and corporate marketing communication objectives, having in mind the effort of marketing communication to derive the greatest economy, efficiency, effectiveness, enhancement, and coherence of such communication

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The Cross-functional strategic approach. This perspective is based on investing significant resources in the creation of a segmented database and the restructuring of the organization to develop a customer-oriented view. Moreover, only by investing, measuring, and relating the communication resources to actual customer behavior will be possible to estimate the financial benefits achieved. Porcu et al. (2012) considered the IMC process a circular one that *“represents the core of all relationships and creates brand value in terms of sales and profitability to attract, retain and increase the number of clients.”*

According to this line of thought, a new IMC definition was developed, which stated that IMC is an interactive and systematic process of cross-functional planning and optimization of all messages delivered to stakeholders aiming to communicate with coherence and transparency and to encourage profitable relationships (Porcu et al., 2012). In conclusion, this definition embraces a multidimensional concept with four principal dimensions: “one voice”, “interactivity”, “cross-functional planning”, and “profitable long-term relationships”. Figure 1, which can be found in the annexes², will shed a light on these four dimensions, this scheme was presented by Porcu et al. (2012) when proposing this new IMC definition.

2.1.1.2 Principles of customer-centric IMC approach

As we have seen, the changed conditions either in the market or on the customer side due to the changes in social media, affected the IMC concept. The IMC concept had to evolve and become customer-centric to follow the market needs, thus, IMC requires important new and interrelated principles that need to be integrated when developing marketing research and practice (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017).

Nowadays, an IMC strategy needs to be playful, interactive, and open to co-creation (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017), therefore for a customer-centric IMC, is extremely necessary to adopt a relationship orientation, content orientation, and process orientation, being these the three concepts adopted by Bruhn and Schnebelen (2017) when redefining the IMC concept. This concept of IMC aims to strategically manage the customer experience, by understanding and studying customer needs, wants, desires and behaviors in the marketplace, and ultimately align them with the company to meet the customer requirements.

2.1.2 The four pillars of IMC

² Figure 1 - Four dimensions of IMC (Porcu et al., 2012) - page 53

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Kliatchko (2008) considered that the IMC approach to planning followed a process that involved four pillars that must be considered, both as antecedents and as consequences. The IMC process includes a mechanism of measurement, evaluation, and analysis that can impact the future direction of future programs. The consequences of an IMC program derive from the improvements, changes, and adjustments that followed an analysis of a previously implemented program. Therefore, the four pillars are considered as both consequences and antecedents, the IMC approach follows a closed-loop model (J. G. Kliatchko, 2008).

First IMC pillar: Stakeholders. This first pillar of IMC is audience-focused and highlights the centrality IMC gives to the relevant public (J. Kliatchko, 2005). The relevant public for a corporation includes both internal and external audiences (D. E. Schultz & Schultz, 1998). Building and strengthening positive relationships with the internal audience is crucial because it fosters in them a sense of loyalty and business ownership (J. Kliatchko, 2005). To be audience-focused means the IMC programs are directed at multiple markets with which the company interacts, this is the reason why it is used the term “audience”. As a customer-centric business model, the planning process of IMC requires a deep understanding of the target and a deep analysis of the issues surrounding the brand and its competitive environment. Managing the external markets in IMC assumes that the process of developing an IMC program places the target at the core of the process, aiming to effectively address their needs and wants, and to create a long and profitable relationship (J. G. Kliatchko, 2008).

Second IMC pillar: Content. The need to understand consumers more deeply was arising, so researchers started to study consumers beyond the traditional marketing descriptions, which evolved to an understanding of consumers' insights and the discovery of the consumer “sweet spot”, which is the perfect connection between them and the brand (D. E. Schultz & Schultz, 2004), and ultimately creating a compelling and involving content. Not only the consumer is the nucleus and constant reference point for an IMC strategy development, but also they are also fully empowered to take absolute control of the content they desire to receive and create. This new paradigm enables audiences to be both the creator and the receiver of the content all at once, excluding the exclusivity of content creation from media and marketers (J. G. Kliatchko, 2008).

Third IMC pillar: Channel. The IMC must be channel-centered (J. Kliatchko, 2005). To be channel-centered the strategy must be an integrated approach to planning and managing the appropriate use of multiple possible channels, disciplines, and communication tools. These tools include not only traditional tools, but also all possible touchpoints where consumers experience the brand and get in touch with it. Marketers can determine which contact points or channels are relevant by doing an audit of consumers and examining their path to purchase, this audit may also aid marketers in understanding how consumers desire to communicate and interact with the company (J. G. Kliatchko, 2008).

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Fourth IMC pillar: Results. IMC programs should be measurable and accountable for business results, therefore, should be result-driven (J. Kliatchko, 2005). The IMC approach measures behavioral responses and outcomes (D. Schultz & Walters, 1997), the accountability for business results is done through a process of customer valuation and by estimating return-on-customer-investments (ROCI), which are then verified and evaluated throughout time at several points aiming to track the effectiveness of the IMC program. On one hand, marketers can determine how much a target aggregate is worth for the firm, and, besides, the process of customer valuation helps them to identify which aggregate is worth investing in. On the other hand, when estimating ROCI marketers can determine and evaluate not only returns to the firm but also estimate the wealth contribution of investments made in targeted audiences (J. G. Kliatchko, 2008).

2.1.3 IMC implementation

Several studies had been conducted to better understand the best way to implement an IMC approach; researchers have been developing theories regarding the implementation of IMC.

Fill (2002) presented IMC as a change of mindset that must be first embraced by marketers. Therefore, in Fill's (2002) point of view, the first step in an IMC approach is to focus on promotional activities, meaning that marketers must ensure consistency and harmonization when applying promotional tools. The second step is to implement a cultural shift of values and beliefs inside an organization; hence the different parts of the organization must be introduced to the idea of "*internal marketing relationships*" (P. F. Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010) aiming to introduce an IMC approach throughout the company. This model is lacking significant detail and explanation and using it might be difficult to overcome the problem of positioning companies at their individual stage.

Pickton and Broderick (2005) presented an IMC implementation model where the first step is to assess the company's current position in the marketplace, therefore outcomes and feedback from previous marketing campaigns and activities must be evaluated to determine the company's target audience. Next, a budget allocation and a review of available resources need to take place, followed by setting the company's objectives and strategic plan. After this accessing, follows the promotional level, where promotional tools need to be chosen as tactical instruments. Lastly, the success of the new company must be monitored and evaluated. This model only concentrates on the implementation of marketing communication campaigns, and it does not present how IMC could be used as an approach in the long term.

Finally, the last model presented by Kitchen and Burgmann (2010) is the four stages of the IMC model proposed by Kitchen and Schultz (2001). The first step of this model is to coordinate IMC at the tactical level, which is to generate harmony among the various communication tools and the product,

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therefore the initial focus is on the external communication of the brand. The second step involves redefining the communication, meaning that all contact points between the audience and the company must be considered. Companies must withdraw behavioral data to understand the customers. The third step is to focus on the utilization of information about customer behavior and attitudes, therefore customer data is turned into customer knowledge. Lastly, the fourth step is to implement IMC at the strategic level, to succeed at this stage marketing and finance must work together for the business to become fully customer centric. Companies must understand that for an IMC approach to be successful it needs to take into consideration the corporate goals instead of simply serving tactical objectives (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Figure 2, which can be found in the annexes³, shows the four stages of the model presented by Kitchen and Schultz (2001).

The presented four-stage model reveals that an IMC plan should derive from the contact points between the company and its audience (P. F. Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Due to the developments of technology and the rapid expansion of media, IMC researchers concluded that is needed a more behavior-oriented segmentation guideline. This means that after grouping the customers into segments, the chosen promotional activities should be integrated in such a way that they work according to the overall IMC strategic plan to accomplish the marketing communication objectives previously defined (P. F. Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010).

According to (Baynast et al., 2021) we can define an integrated communication strategy based on the questions of Lasswell's communication paradigm, where respective answers will allow us to establish the different stages of the strategy elaboration. The questions and answers we must search for are 1) Who? – *Agents*: Select which communication agents will perform in the strategy; 2) To whom? – *Target audience*: Select the target to whom we want to communicate; 3) For what? – *Objectives*: Determine which objectives to achieve in each target; 4) What? – *Content*: Decide what content and creative concept are more adequate to be part of the transmitted message; 5) How? – *Variables*: Decide which variables and actions will be developed; 6) How to evaluate? – *Indicators/Criteria*: Identify which are the performance indicators to evaluate and monitor the actions taken; 7) When? – *Schedule*: Establish the dates for each action; 8) What is the cost? – *Budget*: Define the communication budget.

2.1.3.1 Communication target

³ Figure **Error! Main Document Only.** - Four stages of IMC model (Kitchen and Schultz, 2001) – page 53

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The first step when developing a communication and marketing strategy is defining the target audience. This is one of the most important steps because the entire strategy will be aligned to communicate and interact with the defined targeted audience. Due to customer heterogeneity, companies should select a specific segment of customers and target them by positioning its offerings as the best solution in the market for that specific segment.

The SPT approach (Segment, Target, and Position approach) appeared in the 1950s intending to manage customer heterogeneity and it evolved into a strategy that is based on the principles of marketing. The first principle tells us that “all customers differ”, thus companies target customer segments by evaluating perceptual maps to determine their position in the market. Moreover, customer segments evolve over time due to changes in their desires or preferences, which relates to the second principle of marketing which is “all customer change”. When developing a communication and marketing strategy companies must also consider the third and fourth principles of marketing which are “all competitors react” and “all resources are limited”, respectively, all business environment matures, and several different products emerge in the market.

According to Palmatier R. & Shrihari (2017) segmenting is the process of separating the overall market into groups such that potential customers in each group have similar needs and desires. When segmenting, the companies must take into consideration the sources of customer heterogeneity such as functional needs, self-identity, individual differences, life experiences, and marketing activities. According to Kotler and Keller (2006), the segmentation variables are Geographical, Demographic, Psychographic, and Behavioral. The second part is to identify which of the defining segments should the company target and afterward position to reach their selected audience.

Depending on the need of the company it may be necessary to develop a dynamic-based segmentation that is called Acquisition-Expansion-Retention (AER), this approach captures customers entering the firm’s portfolio and expanding over time, meanwhile others slowly leave. There is the Acquisition stage which begins with the first contact, the Expansion stage where firms try to upsell or cross-sell to expand their sales and engage with the existing customers, and finally, the Retention stage which deals with customers that migrate due to their basic propensity to switch.

When considering a B2B market the process of segmenting, targeting, and implementation must account for other types of variables. Mora Cortez et al. (2021) presented a study where it developed the process of STP for B2B companies, they presented a template of their analysis which can be found in the annexes⁴ (Figure 3). Their study requires, firstly, firms to conceptualize B2B market

⁴ Figure **Error! Main Document Only.** - Conceptualization of B2B market Segmentation (Mora Cortez et al., 2021) – page 54

segmentation, where they must establish what is the view of the market and what is the dynamism of segmenting a market. After, they can proceed with a pre-segmentation stage, exploring and determining what the market is and what is the purpose of the segmentation. The next phase is the segmentation stage, where companies must identify the variables for segmenting, choose a segmentation approach, and select the target. After, the third step is implementation, where they exercise leadership and assign resources, execute marketing mix adjustments, and conduct a reorganization. Finally, companies must evaluate the segmentation, by analyzing changes in customer satisfaction, sales force performance, and financial firm-level performance, this evaluation will impact the next segmentation cycle.

2.1.3.2 Communication objectives

The second step when developing an integrated marketing communication strategy is to develop the objectives of the communication, this means that companies must define what type of message they want to transmit to their target. Defining the objective of the transmitted message is extremely important to understand and develop the strategy further. The objectives defined will determine not only the content of the communication but also which contact points should the company communicate. A study presented by Moriarty (1996) suggested that campaign planners must begin with measurable objectives and conclude with a plan to evaluate the objectives accordingly.

One of the most influential approaches related to setting communication objectives was developed by Russel Colley and published in *Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results* (1961), these elements of the book become known as the DAGMAR approach. This approach focuses on the importance of specifying objectives in terms of communication tasks. Moreover, while objectives must relate to communication tasks, they should also specify a target audience, a degree of desired change in the audience, and the time during which the change should occur. Therefore, communication objectives have four components: task, audience, change, and time (Patti et al., 2017).

2.1.3.3 Communication content

After defining the communication objectives and the targeted audience, companies must define the content of the message. The content of the message can be related to Rational, Emotional, and Moral appeals, and can be designed by the AIDA Model, which means “Get Attention, Hold Interest, Arouse Desire, Obtain Action” (figure 4, which can be found in the annexes⁵). Strong developed this concept

⁵ Figure Error! Main Document Only. - AIDA Model (Strong, 1925) – page 54

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in 1925, and it suggests that consumers move through levels of awareness, interest, desire, and finally, action, an expanded concept presented by Lavidge and Steiner (1961) included six levels: awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase.

The content of the message is an appeal or theme that will produce the desired response, and it must be designed to meet the company's objective and reach the selected target. Rational Appeals are related to the audience's self-interest, where companies present the product that will deliver their desired benefits. The Emotional Appeal can develop either negative or positive emotions that motivate purchase. Lastly, the Moral Appeal relates to what the audience feels is "right" or "proper".

2.1.3.4 Communication tools

Technological changes have presented firms with many new communication tools or have been improving the traditional ones to reach their customer and meet their demands (Civelek et al., 2021). With this digital transformation, companies have become more visible to the world and had to expand their marketing activities (Civelek et al., 2021). Firms compete with their rivals through promotion (Efremenko et al., 2020), competing to gain competitive advantage, thus, companies benefit from marketing communication channels. Innovation in promotion usually depends on the communication channels that firms use, for example, a website of a firm is a practical a communication tool since this channel allows businesses to actively manage their promotion strategy (Civelek et al., 2021).

The ongoing IT revolution has been rapidly replacing traditional interactions with those mediated by new digital technologies (Babutsidze et al., 2021). Firms pursued to combine traditional sales communication tools with their own digital tools to increase sales, especially during the persuasion phase, specifically the B2B sales process (Fraccastoro et al., 2021). Babutsidze et al. (2021), conclude, in their research regarding the relationship between nonverbal content and trust, that the degree to which communication channels enable the transmission of nonverbal content is important to increase trust in human interactions.

When using traditional marketing tools with digital marketing channels, the creation of new goods is accelerated (Robul et al., 2020). Social networks are technology-enabled marketing tools that motivate users to develop new goods (Chia-Liang, 2019), and traditional marketing communication tools may enable a business to have presential interactions with their customers, allowing them to notice their customer's needs and problems and act accordingly (Civelek et al., 2021).

In their paper, Fraccastoro et al. (2021) classified sales communication tools into three categories based on their level of digitalization. They are 1) Traditional sales communication tools, sales communication tools involving face-to-face interaction, phone calls, and postal services; 2) Digital sales communication tools, which involve email, website, SEO, online meeting, and meeting platforms (i.e.,

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Skype and WhatsApp); 3) Social Media sales communication tools involve tools that implement user generated and co-created content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), such as social networking sites, online blogs, and content communities.

2.1.3.5 Traditional communication tools

Traditional marketing communication tools carry high importance for customer relation management when interacting with people (Fraccastoro et al., 2021). They include offline marketing communication, offline promotion, and advertising activities via traditional media channels like television, radio, print, newspaper, pamphlets, posters, business cards, magazines, brochures, and billboards (Cant & Wiid, 2016; Kallier, 2017; Ramasobana et al., 2017). Moreover, it also includes other channels such as personal sales, sales promotion, public relationships, exhibitions, trade fairs, and direct marketing (Civelek et al., 2021; Ramasobana et al., 2017).

When concerning traditional marketing communication channels such as television ads or other channels they present signs, knowledge, or other details about the business, therefore depending on the customers' reaction firms can change their visualization strategy to create innovative business solutions (Civelek et al., 2021). Moreover, concerning tools such as personal sales or face-to-face interactions motivates firms to find an innovative solution in their pricing strategies, this is because salespeople become informed about their rivals' prices and become motivated to provide promotions for their customers (Civelek et al., 2021). Traditional marketing communication tools can also allow businesses to improve their distribution process and implement new distribution strategies to meet the customers' needs (Civelek et al., 2021).

A study conducted by Fraccastoro et al. (2021) concluded that when trying to convert engaged prospects into paying customers, firms use the direct intervention of salespeople in the persuasion activity. Face-to-face communication can be highly conducive to establishing trust in social interaction (Babutsidze et al., 2021).

2.1.3.5.1 Digital communication tools

Technology-enabled marketing communication tools are platforms that enable users to perform online mobile marketing, social media, content marketing, viral marketing, and WOM activities (Kallier, 2017; Ramasobana et al., 2017; Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015). Moreover, firms can develop marketing activities through their website, blogs, forums, social media account, mobile apps, and quick response (QR) codes (Civelek et al., 2021; Kallier, 2017; Taiminen & Karjaluo, 2015).

These technology-enabled marketing tools allow a business to manage its customer relationship (Chia-Liang, 2019), moreover, it also enables users to share their experience and comment about a

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product or service. Hence, these customers' comments can affect the purchase decision of potential customers and stimulate firms to have closer interactions with users (Chia-Liang, 2019; Civelek et al., 2021). These tools also play a role in value creation, since they increase the firms' competitiveness by reducing costs (Civelek et al., 2021; Panasenکو et al., 2021). According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), social media is defined as *"a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content."*, hence, what differences social media from other digital tools is its capability of interactivity and participatory nature (Fraccastoro et al., 2021).

2.1.3.5.2 The use of communication tools during the B2B sales process

Sara Fraccastoro (2021) and her colleagues developed a framework for the integrated use of sales communication tools during the B2B sales process of international SMEs, see figure 6 which can be found in the annexes⁶. The framework they developed divided the sales process into three parts: 1st stage - identification of new business opportunities; 2nd stage – persuasion; 3rd stage – relationship management.

In the first stage, where companies seek to interact and reach new prospects, the use of social media is very common such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The use of these social media platforms has the purpose to create brand awareness, reduce uncertainty about the company and build trust in markets (Fraccastoro et al., 2021). Communicating through social media reduces the uncertainty of prospects about the firm and distinguishes it from competitors (Fischer & Reuber, 2014). From Fraccastoro et al. (2021) study it can be withdrawn that most of the analyzed companies actively use social media and digital tools to promote themselves and to generate leads. Moreover, previous literature confirms that the use of social media and a presence on numerous platforms increase the likelihood of triggering microblogging WOM, which in turn encourages early product adoption and improves the company's profitability (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015).

The second stage is entitled the persuasion phase, which includes the presentation and negotiation. Fraccastoro et al. (2021) concluded that all firms that relied on social media when identifying prospects tended to shift to other digital sales tools. When firms tried to convert prospects into customers the use of email, CRM, online meeting platforms, and traditional sales interaction increases; on the contrary, social media platforms are used to reply to prospects. Moreover, all firms

⁶ Figure 6 – Integrated use of Sales Communication tools in the B2B sales process (Fraccastoro et al., 2021) – page 55

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working in B2B leveraged the use of digital sales tools to shape tailored offers for their prospects. Anticipating the prospects' needs through online interaction and planification of customized proposals, allows firms to save time. Hence, a customized offer increases the likelihood of closing a deal and it is an important element to take into consideration in B2B relationships, given the collaborative nature of such relationship (Tuli et al., 2007).

The third stage is relationship management, this is a particularly important phase for assessing customer satisfaction. Fraccastoro et al. (2021) conclude that studied companies used CRM tools during the ordinary operating activities of monitoring and controlling customer satisfaction. The trend within all companies was the use of email and direct interaction via CRM systems or internal databases with transactional customers.

In conclusion, firms seek great prospects engagement within the first phase of a B2B sales process, by integrating social media, digital, and traditional sales communication tools. Moreover, traditional sales communication tools are integrated with digital tools to manage the post-sales relationships considered transactional rather than strategic. The integration of different sales communication tools when managing the post-sales activities allows B2B firms to manage transactional and strategic relationships with their clients and to respond to strategic needs (Fraccastoro et al., 2021)

2.1.3.6 Communication metrics

Before defining any kind of metric, marketers must define their communication objectives. The metrics are used to establish baselines for communication objectives and track the progress of achieving each objective.

We can consider two types of social media objectives: 1) Short-term: where the purpose of such objectives is to generate revenue. Barger (2013) considered three types of short-term objectives which are gaining consideration, stimulating trial, and encouraging repurchase; 2) Long-term: the objectives are more related to creating brand equity and building brand relationships. Barger (2013) considers four long-term objectives which are improving customer satisfaction, creating awareness, building relationships, and fostering community.

2.1.3.6.1 Social Media metrics

The first step is to identify metrics that will be most informative to the marketer, especially given a large number of social media metrics and the costs involving them (Fogel, 2010). The chosen metrics must provide an indication of progress toward one or more communication objectives to be considered (Barger, 2013). It can be identified seven social media metrics: volume, the share of voice, engagement, advocates, return on investment, leads generated, and response time, and each metric

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applies to one or more social media channels (Barger, 2013). It will be explored each one of these metrics and in annexes⁷ (table 2), where it can be found a table explaining the contents further.

Volume is the number of mentions of a brand in social media channels over a specific period. This metric indicates the progress of creating awareness, and it also serves as the basis for other metrics (Barger, 2013).

Share of voice is the volume of mentions of a brand expressed as a percentage of the volume of mentions of all brands. This metric is usually calculated using only positive mentions since negative mentions are typically not viewed as a competitive advantage (Barger, 2013).

Engagement inside the social media space is most often referred to as “*a consumer taking some action beyond viewing or reading*” (Delahaye Paine, 2011). This action may include “liking”, “commenting on”, “replying to” or “sharing” a brand’s post. Since each social media platform uses its own terminology Barger (2013) classifies the possible behaviors as “expressing agreement”, “rating”, “voicing opinion”, and “sharing”. Measuring engagement per post enables the marketer to estimate the audience’s level of interest in the content of each post, informing the marketer of future post creation.

Advocate is a consumer who creates and uploads content that actively promotes the brand, therefore is extremely useful for marketers to track the number of advocates of a brand (Barger, 2013). The goal is to grow the number of advocates over time if this number decreases the brand may need to establish a program or change the types of posts creating more engaging ones.

Return on Investment (ROI) is defined as “*the revenue gained from a social media marketing campaign minus the cost of the campaign divided by the cost of the campaign*” (Barger, 2013). ROI is more effective when evaluating short-term social media objectives, although attributing sales to social media is problematic especially if the campaigns do not offer incentives. Barger (2013) suggested that marketers start viewing ROI from the consumers’ perspective, meaning what the consumer gets for investing his or her time and energy in engaging with the brand through social media.

Number of leads generated through social media is calculated when a company seeks to gain consideration for its products and services. Leads generated through social media can also be expressed as a percentage of total leads generated by the firm, in this case, it can provide a measure of the relative effectiveness of social media (Barger, 2013).

Response time is essential to be reduced to ensure customer satisfaction. Tracking and managing the average response time can accomplish customer satisfaction.

⁷ Table 2 – Social media metrics (Barger, 2013) – page 57

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2.1.3.6.2 Relationship with traditional metrics

Ewing (2009) classified three types of traditional metric that evaluates integrated marketing communications: attitudinal, behavioral, and financial measures. Attitudinal measures are used to determine the effects of the advertising used (D. E. Schultz, 2011). Behavioral measures are based on actions taken by consumers in their way of responding to marketing campaigns. Financial measures highlight the revenue generated by marketing communication (Barger, 2013).

Social media metrics can be related to traditional metrics. The metrics such as volume, engagement, and number of advocates correspond to the awareness, liking, and conviction stages corresponding to the attitudinal measures. Engagement can also be viewed as a behavioral measure because it reflects specific actions that consumers take, moreover, the number of leads can also serve as a behavioral measure since it quantifies the number of consumers that take an action in response to a brand's message. Financially the return on investment of social media corresponds to the traditional ROI. At last, the response time gives an outcome that is an attitudinal measure (Barger, 2013).

Social media metrics can only be measured when a consumer takes an action that is publicly visible and conducted on social media. Thus, when estimating them it does not include sharing via e-mail, chat, or even privacy-enabled social media accounts (Barger, 2013), and so it is considered the "dark social" which refers to the technology-enabled but essential untraceable methods of social sharing (Madrighal, 2012).

2.1.3.6.3 Attribution

Consumers navigate across multiple touchpoints throughout their decision journey; therefore, marketers face the question of attribution, which is deciding which channel is responsible and should get credits for consumer conversion. This issue is augmented considering that fully integrated marketing communication programs must include an array of digital and non-digital channels (Barger, 2013).

It will be discussed the potential attribution models. *Last-click attribution* is based on the notion that the last marketing communication tool a consumer encountered is the one responsible for the conversion, being the most commonly used model. *First-click attribution* gives credit to the initial consumer-brand interaction tool, although it disregards the impact of other touchpoints. *Equal attribution* values all interactions and assigns identical weight to each touchpoint. The downside of this model is that since all touchpoints have equal value it may not reflect reality, moreover, as the number of touchpoints increases the value of each one decreases equally. Finally, *Fractional attribution* assumes that different touchpoint plays different roles and delivers different interaction

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and so they should be weighted accordingly. This is theoretically the ideal method since it considers the respective value of each touchpoint (Barger, 2013).

2.1.3.7 Communication schedule

The next step is to define when each action will take place. Firstly, the marketer must consider the period of time that their communication strategy will take place, on the other hand, the marketer must take into consideration the time span of preparation of each action since these are going to condition the practical viability of the beginning of the strategy. For a correct definition of a communication schedule, the marketer must establish the time and the duration more fitted for each action, therefore it must: respect the important events for the brand; must adapt to the seasonality or efficiency of the possible tools; must adapt to the seasonality of the market itself (Baynast et al., 2021).

2.1.3.8 Communication budget

For a correct communication budget definition, the marketer must take into consideration the costs associated with the development of the actions, as well as the costs of acquiring partners accordingly to the necessity of the strategy development.

According to Lendrevie et al. (2010), there are five methods for defining a communication budget: *From the defined objectives* – the value of the investment is determined by taking into account the estimated costs compared with the objectives and actions that are intended to be developed; *Invest as much as possible* – determine first a global value of possible profit, predictable business volume minus global costs; *Percentage on sales* – set a fixed percentage on predictable sales; *From the investment on communication from the competition* – a communication quota is determined based on the global value invested in communication by all the competitors. *Previous year's budget update* – the value of the budget is determined by readjusting the previous year's budget.

2.2 IMC strategy in SMEs

Firms must invest in innovative actions in marketing to boost their performance. These innovative actions include changes or improvements in product, price, promotion, and distribution (Anzules-Falcones & Martin-Castilla, 2020). Moreover, there are other areas of marketing where firms can innovate such as people, visualization, and process, which boosts firms' performance by fulfilling the customers' demands (Civelek et al., 2021).

Digital transformation has forced businesses to implement new strategies to stimulate firms' innovative activities. For example, considering the technology-enabled marketing communication tools, social media has become a tool commonly used that allows firms to explore and find new opportunities, and in consequence improve firms' innovativeness (Civelek et al., 2021).

2.2.1 Usage of technology-enabled marketing tools by SMEs

Traditional marketing tools such as direct marketing, personal selling, and exhibitions, allow marketing teams to have close interaction with their customers. Moreover, customers nowadays are more interested in searching for information about SMEs via technology-enabled tools rather than traditional marketing communication tools (Bačík et al., 2017).

SMEs incur in some costs when using technology-enabled marketing tools, even though using traditional marketing tools is more expensive. Hence, financial institutions can provide SMEs with financial support that allows firms to take innovative actions when using technology-enabled and traditional communication channels that can improve their innovation in the marketing area. SMEs can place advertisements of their novelties on the most visited websites giving them a vast range of possible customers (Civelek et al., 2021). It's important to acknowledge the importance of integrating traditional and technology-enabled marketing communication tools on firms' innovativeness to stimulate firms' competitiveness.

In the study developed by Fraccastoro et al. (2021), it is presented that contact with a customer initiated online has a higher impact on firms' profit. Other studies also confirm that B2B companies that use social media and digital communication tools benefit from it and boost their performance. Rapp et al. (2013) also found that social media is relevant for sales because it boosts companies' performance. Furthermore, when SMEs, operating in B2B, used social media it improved their communication and business performance, hence it can be concluded that social media can assist salespeople in their job function (Fraccastoro et al., 2021).

Fraccastoro et al. (2021) developed a framework for the integrated use of sales communication tools during the B2B sales process of international SMEs operating in the service industry, based on the grounded theory which identified three main phases of the sales process: identification of new business opportunities, persuasion, and relationship management. Their analysis showed that exist two different levels of integrated use of sales communication tools: 1) those happening within each phase of the sales process, and 2) those happening across the sales process phases.

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3. Methodology

To understand the importance of developing an Integrated Marketing Communication for Iniciative Plus, collecting qualitative data was necessary. Since Iniciative Plus is a B2B company in the pharmaceutical industry, qualitative data is the most suitable data collection method to withdraw conclusions.

The qualitative data collected was based on in-depth interviews. Normally, the interview flows using a guide that facilitates the flow of the conversation and allows the respondent to answer with their point of view due to open-ended questions. In-depth interviews are normally carried out face to face, and then to have success in an in-depth interview, the interviewer must listen more than talk. Is based on a guided conversation rather than a question-and-answer session.

The interviews were conducted in the headquarters of Iniciative Plus and were made with Luísa Carvalho, which is the Product Manager and Majority shareholder, and Sónia Silva, which is the Marketing Director. The objective when interviewing both Sónia and Luísa was to understand their point of view on implementing an IMC strategy and to get an inside look at their communication and marketing strategy. Moreover, the interviews allowed a better comprehension of their view on the structure inside Iniciative Plus and their opinion about what should be changed or improved.

The last interview was with a creative designer, João Colaço who works with Iniciative Plus. Although João does not work in Iniciative Plus, nor develop any type of communication or marketing work for them specifically, he has previously worked with Iniciative Plus for several projects, his opinion on creativity in marketing and communication is advantageous for the scope of this project.

The other method chosen to collect qualitative data was a Focus Group. A focus group is a group interview involving a small group of participants who have common experiences. Focus groups are used in market research to understand reactions to products or services and the participant's perceptions, the discussion can be guided or open.

For the scope of this project, a focus group was conducted, also in Iniciative Plus's headquarters, with Sónia and Luísa to instigate discussions about several marketing and communication issues that Iniciative Plus is having. The full-transcribed interviews and the focus group can be found in the annexes section.

For a better understanding of the industry Iniciative Plus inserted in, and to comprehend what is required of a B2B service company in the pharmaceutical industry, a benchmark was used to compare Iniciative Plus with the actual competitors.

Furthermore, it was conducted an analysis of the competitors of Iniciative Plus, to understand where Iniciative Plus can improve, and what their competitive strengths and weaknesses are. To proceed with the benchmark, it was conducted several analyses, such as a SWOT Analysis, a perceptual

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map, a GE/McKinsey matrix, and a competitive advantage analysis. All the data collected for this benchmark was based on an analysis of the social media platforms, digital tools and website for each competitor.

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4. Contextualization and Analysis

Initiative Plus is a small and medium enterprise that provides services for the Pharmaceutical Industry. It offers a vast range of services in areas of interventions and solutions integrated into sales and training in the Pharmaceutical Industry, developing a project with innovation and competency that fits best the need of their clients.

Initiative Plus focus on the provision of services of consultancy in the areas of the organization, management, marketing, sales, corporative strategies, projects, processes, and other relative services.

4.1. Business Areas

- Training

Due to the permanent scientific update and the introduction of new products in the market, consistent and expert training is needed to achieve the success of any company in the pharmaceutical industry.

Initiative Plus provides a vast range of formative themes with a technical background and matches those themes with the need and goals of their clients. With a multi-disciplinary and highly accredited portfolio, it is possible for Initiative Plus to develop training programs for sales teams to integrate into scientific or social events.

- Consultancy

Initiative Plus consultancy services specified in health care, it runs a complete diagnosis of the existing processes, and further present solutions to improve and increase sales as well as clients.

It's a differentiated product in the market and it is an added value in the satisfaction and preference of their clients. This service is available in the areas of management of health spaces, human resources management, marketing, merchandising, and others.

- Sales support action

Initiative Plus develops several tailored actions about brands and products for sales support, such as health workshops, traces, and education for health actions. These actions are guided by experienced and motivated professionals. Therefore, creating a culture of proximity between the client, health space and event promotor, and consequently acquiring and retaining clients.

- Merchandising

Merchandising evolves a wide range of promotional actions which includes management, optimization and dynamization of sales points. The management of the promotional actions involves developing creativities in the décor of the sales point, the assembly of the shop windows, and in creating samples and flyers for distribution.

The optimization includes developing an action that can hold the attention of potential clients, and the dynamization includes the logistic support and assistance during the sales process.

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- Events

Iniciative Plus dynamizes events which includes congresses, company meetings, symposia, stands, and special events, always in accordance with the objectives presented by the clients and tailored to them. Organization and coordination of the event are assured by Iniciative Plus, from the first steps of planning until the end.

- Outsourcing

Iniciative Plus's goal is to support its clients and improve the relationship between consumers and their clients' products/services, through the reinforcement of promotional actions. This is achieved through the development of commercial competencies offering suitable information, which allows the consumer to reach a decision.

- Promoting

Direct contact with a potential client in sales point is much more important nowadays and is a differentiating point when compared with the competitors. The use of promoting people is suited to help companies achieve this goal; they invite potential clients to take tests or interventions, to feel the product, or understand the advantages of such. That way the client takes a risk when purchasing a product is minimized and the trust in the company is increased.

Therefore, in the launch of new products and during brand or product activation, these promotion professionals are extremely necessary to differentiate the company. Promoting people is a recourse extremely advantageous, and a way to ensure that the product's message stands out from the competition, moreover, is an excellent tool to increase brand awareness and boost sales.

4.2. Organization

Iniciative Plus is a partnership by shares, it is 7 years old, being born on the 4th of September of 2014. Its social capital is 20000€.

It is formed by 3 employees: Luísa Carvalho who is the Product Manager and Majority Shareholder; Sónia Silva is the Marketing and Communication Manager; and Cláudia Gomes is an administrative who takes care of the financial and operative part of the company. Iniciative Plus works with outsourcing companies when concerning services such as digital content, creative content, or other types of materials needed for some events. The biggest outsourcing company working with Iniciative Plus is Mundoideias, usually, the requested projects are related to marketing campaigns, mainly for pharmacies or pharmaceutical laboratories.

4.3. Strategy Guidelines

According to the conducted interviews, Luísa Carvalho stated that their major communication target is the pharmaceutical laboratories, and the competitive advantage of Iniciative Plus is focused on the quality of the provided services. Both Sónia and Luísa have previous experience in the Pharmaceutical Industry, which helps Iniciative Plus to deliver more accurate and specific services knowing the need of their clients and the environment in which they are implemented.

Moreover, Luísa stated that the main reason they are contacted by clients is due to the tracing actions they implement in pharmacies, called medical scanning. When interviewing Sónia she stated that the main challenge Iniciative Plus is facing is related to the complex chain of selling. Iniciative Plus services are B2B, but effectively they arrive at the clients in a B2C form, so they must transmit their communication correctly and sell both their service and their client's services.

4.3.1. The problematic

The problematic approach in this thesis is the fact that Iniciative Plus does not own any type of communication and marketing strategy. During the interviews, some conclusions could be withdrawn concerning this matter.

According to Luísa, there is not any communication tool that clients can use to get to know Iniciative Plus, it was an initial choice of Iniciative Plus when developing the initial communication and marketing strategy. In Luísa's opinion, she cannot understand how a service provider can communicate their projects or services through social media, mainly due to disclosing questions. For Iniciative Plus to publish any type of project they must have their client's permission for doing it. Although Luísa stated that she would like to develop a project or a strategy in which Iniciative Plus is able to communicate with their clients or future clients in a corporative way, meaning transmitting only what is Iniciative Plus, its objectives and the type of services they provide.

When interviewing Sónia, I concluded that Iniciative Plus does not own any type of communication plan, schedule, or budget. And that their communication strategy is only based on Word of Mouth, and on their relationship with their clients. Moreover, Iniciative Plus does not use any type of direct marketing such as e-mail marketing or newsletters, their only contact is personal. Sónia believes that since their value chain is complex it is difficult to be present in social media.

In conclusion, Luísa and Sónia plan to develop a digital strategy for Iniciative Plus but continuing to maintain the personal direct contact and word of mouth, since it has been working perfectly so far.

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4.4. Mission, Vision, and Values

Initiative Plus defines its mission in the quality of the services provided. They deliver, develop, and implement a solution based on a strategy completely developed for the need of their customers.

The values that define Initiative Plus are presenting integrated solutions with aggregated value; innovation in the delivery of services; personalization in the solutions presented; great quality when supplying the service; increase in the customer's value chain; respect for the Ethical and Deontological principles; the value of the human capital as key to success; respect for the confidentiality rules; and reinforcement of partnerships based on mutual trust.

Their vision is to grow beyond and build a trustworthy chain of partnerships, always presenting a wide range of possibilities personalized for their clients and adapting their practices to the client's needs, delivering the promised service at a high level of excellence.

4.5. Internal Analysis

4.5.1. GE/McKinsey Matrix

There are two dimensions to rate each market segment: market attractiveness and competitive strength. Market attractiveness captures the external market characteristics that make a given segment strategically valuable to the company, such as size, growth rate, and price sensitivity. Competitive strength captures the relative strength of a firm when compared with the competitors, in terms of securing and maintaining market share in a particular segment (Palmatier R. & Shrihari, 2017).

To analyze those dimensions, the GE/McKinsey matrix is a strategy tool that offers a systematic approach for companies to prioritize their investments among their business units. Furthermore, it evaluates business portfolios and provides further strategic implications. This matrix weights the firm competitive strength and market attractiveness through the creation of the axis and the crossing of nine quadrants according to three intensities of each axis: low, medium, and high.

Firstly, it must be selected four factors for each axis, secondly is necessary to identify the relative weight from 0 to 1 for each factor (0 being the last relevant and 1 being the most relevant), and the final total must be equal to one. The next step is to assign a rating value for each factor, from 0 to 5. Finally, when the relative weight and rating are defined it is possible to achieve an evaluation for each factor, the final grade will provide a value for each axis, and then it is possible to position Initiative Plus in the matrix and withdraw the conclusion for the final position when comparing to the market.

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Considering competitive strength, the factors are Market share; Customer loyalty; Product differentiation; Tailored products. Further it will be explaining the choice of the factors, as the respective rating and weight reason.

Competitiveness	Weight	Rating	Evaluation
Market share	0.1	2	0.2
Customer loyalty	0.3	4	1.2
Product differentiation	0.2	3	0.6
Tailored products	0.4	5	2.0
Total	1		4.0

Table 3 - Competitive Strength (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

- *Market share* is the percentage of the total revenue or sales in a market that a specific business makes. Considering the studied market, market share is not the most important factor, of course it is necessary to be measured to understand the position of a company but it does not determine the competitiveness of a firm, hence the weight of 0.1. Iniciative Plus is one of the most known companies in the market, but their sales volume is low, since they are an SME competing with big companies, that is the reason the rating is 2.
- *Customer loyalty* describes an ongoing emotional relationship between the firm and the customer. As it was seen before, this market does not have many competitors, hence it is important for each firm competing in it to develop a strong emotional relationship with each one of their clients, otherwise their clients shift to another company, this is the reason why the rating for this factor, 0.3, is so high. Iniciative Plus has been competing for these years relying only on customer loyalty and the relationship with them, hence it is a strong feature for Iniciative Plus, the rating for this factor is 4.
- *Product differentiation* is the process of distinguishing a product or service from competitors. In a highly competitive market, a wider range of products is important to increase the firm's own attractiveness. In this specific market, the differentiation is difficult due to all the specifications, thus the weight for this factor is 0.2. Iniciative Plus has a wide range of products, but not all of them are their specialization, hence the rating of 3.
- *Tailored products* are products specially made to be suitable for a particular request by a specific client. The weight of 0.4 is the highest weight given to any of the chosen factors because the services provided by the companies in this industry need to be adjusted for each of the clients. It is very important, due to the industry they are inserted in, to tailor each service provided to the clients' needs and wants. This is the strongest advantage of Iniciative Plus, it

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is known for delivering and providing services always meeting the clients' needs and considering their wants, hence the rating of 5.

Passing to market attractiveness, the factors chosen are Industry rivalry; Market segmentation; Changes in demand; Trend of prices. Next it will be explained why these factors were chosen, as well as the reason for the rating and the weight of each one.

Attractiveness	Weight	Rating	Evaluation
Industry rivalry	0.4	4	1.6
Changes in demand	0.4	4	1.6
Trend of prices	0.2	1	0.2
Seasonality	0.2	2	0.4
Total	1		3.8

Table 4 - Market Attractiveness (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

- *Industry Rivalry* is the intensity of competition in an industry, in most industries a company's competitive move will have an impact in the competition. Since, Iniciative Plus market is a highly competitive market, it is a factor with high importance, hence the 0.4 weight. A company's move creates a huge impact in the market. The rating is 4, because it is a highly competitive market, thus is extremely important consider this factor when analyzing the industry.
- *Changes in demand* describes a shift in the consumer desire, regardless the price variation. It is one of the most important factors, since Iniciative Plus is a service provider, specialized in product promotion, marketing communication, and consulting. Companies are shifting their view towards the consumer; therefore, the importance companies give to clients' needs and wants is increasing. This factor was given a weight of 0.4, due to the reasons explained before. More now than ever, companies must focus on consumers and have a customer centric approach. The rating is 4, because if a company competing in this market does not take into consideration the consumers demand it will not evolve and grow.
- *Trend of prices* is the direction that a product's price is taking in a specific market. Being a market of services providers B2B companies and considering that is a small market with few competitors, the trend of prices is not of very importance. Clients do not have many choices and companies cannot vary prices if they want to compete, hence the weight of 0.2. The rating of 1 is because the trend usually does not change drastically, so it is not considered a market with price volatility.
- *Seasonality* is a characteristic of a time series in which the data of a service required occurs regularly every year. Even though the pharmaceutical industry has a seasonality of products,

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it does not imply that for companies such as Iniciative Plus have also a seasonality of a services required. Hence the weight of 0.2, it is not important for this industry the seasonality of a product, because it is not stable that a service required one year will be required the next one. The rating of 2 is the fact that some services have a season, but others does not occur every year.

With all the evaluations and scores placed it is possible to withdraw the GE/McKinsey matrix.

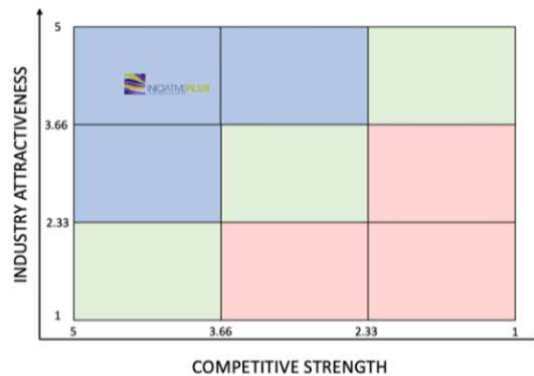


Figure 6 - GE/McKinsey Matrix (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

In conclusion, Iniciative Plus is inserted in the Invest/Grow box. Companies inserted in this specific box are considered to be strong and competitive firms, with a lot of potential to grow. They should keep investing and growing in the market.

4.5.2 SWOT Analysis

It is important to do a SWOT analysis to better understand the status of Iniciative Plus and to be aware of its strengths and weaknesses, as well as possible opportunities and threats that might be favorable or harmful for the company.

4.5.2.1. Strengths

- Loyal and trustworthy group of clients;
- Around 95% of Iniciative Plus sales are in-store promotions;
- Wide range of possible strategies and activities presented to clients;
- The strategies presented are following the client's needs;
- Specialized work;
- Team with prior experience in the pharmaceutical industry;
- Known due to the activities of medical scanning in pharmacies.

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4.5.2.2. Weaknesses

- The marketing strategy is not developed;
- There is no digital communication with clients;
- They have a low number of regular clients;
- Small team for the number of jobs requested;
- Highly dependent on specific clients;
- Difficulty in communicating through social media due to disclosure issues;
- The current website does not reflect what type of work Iniciative Plus does;
- The need on using WOM to acquire clients, and the necessity of personal connections to maintain the relationships with the current clients.

4.5.2.3. Opportunities

- Market still developing, there is space to present products and services that was not present so far;
- Few companies working in the area, there is an opportunity to grow the company's market share;
- Possibility of innovating in the proposed strategies or activities;

4.5.2.4 Threats

- Competitors have a strong communication strategy;
- Competitors have specialized in present, communicate and sale a specific product;
- Relying on personal connection and previous experience to maintain clients.

To take advantage of its strengths and market opportunities, and to battle its weaknesses and possible threats, Iniciative Plus must have a communication plan which uses digital tools, as well as social media, to present itself in the market and acquire new clients.

4.5.3. *Competitive advantage analysis*

According to the previously mentioned competencies of Iniciative Plus, it can now be defined which competitive advantage:

- *Brand recognition*, since Iniciative Plus relies a lot on WOM and previous connections, current clients recognize the good quality of the services provided and can share their past experience with possible future clients;

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- *Diversity* of services provided and wide range of knowledge inside the pharmaceutical industry;
- *Tailored solutions*, due to the wide knowledge inside the pharmaceutical company, Iniciative Plus can offer tailored solutions and services according to the client's needs and wants, meeting their expectations;
- *Small team with a big motivation*. Since Iniciative Plus is composed by a small team of 3 people they are highly motivated to present the best solutions for their clients, at the same time bringing innovative ideas tailored to their clients;
- *Client loyalty*, the majority of Iniciative Plus clients remain working with them, especially due to the highly qualified work presented, despite the high increase in competition;
- *Presence*, Iniciative Plus headquarters are in Lisbon but they maintain a presence all over the country when working for the clients.

4.5.4. Growth Opportunities

The strategy of Iniciative Plus is to combine the demand of the customers with their capability to present solutions with quality and innovation, aiming to create a big net of clients, increasing their loyalty and acquiring new ones.

Iniciative Plus tries to consolidate its position in the Portuguese market by being more innovative in its services and increasing its number of clients. More now than ever, Iniciative Plus tries to work with more clients by providing the service more required (medical scanning) becoming experts in this type of service presented.

Concluding, Iniciative Plus must continue to innovate when presenting the service of medical scanning, and expand its expertise for other types of services, such as promotions and event planning. These types of services are the ones that will increase brand awareness and recognition, bringing more clients and retaining the current ones.

Moreover, the company should also consider being present in the pharmaceutical industry fairs, or any exhibitions where they can present themselves to future clients and present the work developed for them. By being present at fairs, as Iniciative Plus, the companies in the pharmaceutical industry will have them in mind when they are searching for a company that provides a specific and specialized service.

4.7. Main competitors

There are four main competitors for Iniciative Plus: Triangulu, Rastrifarma, Planet+, and Wize

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Triangulu is a specialist in Human Resources and has a wide range of employees with experience in several areas, and it was founded in 2008. The areas they work in are hospitality and tourism, logistics and distribution, maintenance and industry, mass market, contact centers inbound and outbound, administrative solutions, sales, and pharma. Taking into consideration, we are studying the pharmaceutical industry it will only consider the pharmaceutical services of Triangulu.

It has a team of consultants with a strong experience in the pharmaceutical sector. Their strategic vision and operational experience allow them to enhance each brand's characteristics and turn them into competitive advantages. The specialized services they provide are product promotions, in-store training, medical scanning, training, workshops, sell-out managing strategies, merchandising, recruitment and selection, sales teams, event management, and mystery clients. Besides all these services they provide a platform for online reporting that each client can access and rapidly finds the results of the different developed actions.

In terms of communication tools, Triangulu has a good structure website, easy to follow and navigate through, when searching for “triangulu” in a search engine it appears in the first place. Their Instagram has around 1113 followers and 630 posts. Since Triangulu is a company with a wide range of areas of services, their Instagram is used to post about job openings. Their Facebook has 6395 likes and 6566 followers, the purpose of Facebook is the same as Instagram. Their LinkedIn has 16079 followers, and it is use to present the company to future clients.

Rastrifarma has been in the pharmaceutical market for 10 years, they provide services such as clinical pathology screening and dermo-cosmetics, promotion in points of sales, sale and rental of equipment, and sales of diagnostic tests. Rastrifarma mainly works in pharmacies, clinics, health centers, hospitals, the pharmaceutical industry, and beauty and care centers. The other services they provide are training and consultancy and screening of clinic pathologies.

When analyzing their communication tools, Rastrifarma has a non-captivating website, with limited information about their services, and the design is outdated. When searching “rastrifarma” on a search engine it appears in the first place. They are not present on Instagram, LinkedIn, or Facebook.

Planet+ is a company specialized in solutions and services with a strong presence in commercial and technical outsourcing, human resources management, consultancy, and recruitment and selection. Planet+ offer customized service with a 360º view of the economic development of the client.

Planet+ has an inside division called PharmaPlanet, which is a B2B company focused on offering innovative services inside in pharmaceutical industry. The services available include brand promotion, educational scientific knowledge activities, consultancy, and the development and execution of brand maximization projects.

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When analyzing PharmaPlanet's website, we can navigate easily through it, but it has a lot of links and hidden information, which it gets hard to find the needed information. In the social network, PharmaPlanet does not have a Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn account. The only social network they are present on is Facebook has Planet+ where they have 2574 likes and 2617 followers; their communication is based on recruitment and human resources, which leads to reduced interaction.

The last competitor is Wize, a company that develops Route-to-Market models for the pharmaceutical sector to present efficient solutions for each client. Their teams are fully dedicated to business-oriented towards sell-in and sell-out aspects. Wize business is focused on presenting the right solution to boost pharmacies and para-pharmacies through a set of sell-out services with the sell-in aspect.

Wize's website is simple but hard to navigate, it creates confusion with all the hidden information, and the information presented is not enough to withdraw any conclusion about the business or the company. In terms of social networks, Wize is only present on LinkedIn with 1826 followers, where it communicates actively, creating some interaction between the company and its followers.

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5. IMC Implementation

5.1. STP

Before developing a specific marketing and communication strategy for Iniciative Plus, it is necessary to define our target, to understand who is going to be address. Following the study conducted by Mora Cortez et al. (2021) on how to proceed with a STP analysis if a company is a B2B company, firstly companies must establish the view of the market and the dynamism of segmenting it. After, they proceed to explore and determine what is the purpose of the segmentation.

During the segmentation stage companies must identify the variable for segmenting, choose an approach and select the target. After this analysis they implement these steps, where they exercise leadership and assign resources, conducting a reorganization. Finally, companies need to evaluate segmentation, analyze customer satisfaction, sales performance, and so on.

5.1.1 Segmentation

The pharmaceutical industry has a competitive environment, there are a lot of pharmaceutical laboratories and pharmacy groups. These laboratories and groups hire companies like Iniciative Plus to conduct several activities such as corporate events, sales rentrée, communication in pharmacies, and events in pharmacies, such as reports about sales and product placement. The majority of these events also evolve promoters and several marketing materials.

Iniciative Plus's best customers are toLife, who have been their client for some time; KRKA, which started to work with them during the pandemic; EloFarma, which is a group of 280 pharmacies where Iniciative Plus develop communication, marketing material, and strategies of product management inside the pharmacy.

In conclusion Iniciative Plus can focus on two big segments inside the pharmaceutical industry, there are pharmaceutical laboratories and the pharmacies groups. After this type of segmentation, Iniciative Plus must target the ideal laboratories and groups to invest in as their customers.

5.1.2. Targeting

Now that the different targets are defined for each kind of segmentation, we will conclude on which group should the company focus on. This way Iniciative Plus can direct communication activities and argumentation to gain awareness in these groups, more efficiently.

In conclusion, Iniciative Plus's main segments are pharmaceutical companies that work with pharmacies; groups of pharmacies that sell OTC products and work with generic products; and groups

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of pharmacies with a higher dimension of sales volume with a budget capacity to hire consulting and marketing services to Iniciative Plus.

Both these groups share the same motivation towards the pharmaceutical industry: they need a company that understands the market and customers' needs, a company that is specialized in developing activities and events that boost their marketing and communication results.

5.1.3. Positioning

Being a competitive industry is important before positioning and analyzing Iniciative Plus's competitors. An analysis of the positioning of Iniciative Plus and its major competitors in the market will give a larger understanding of where Iniciative Plus stands competitively.

5.1.3.1. Strategic Triangle

A strategic Triangle is a form of analysis, where it involves three aspects that must be considered allowing us to conclude where Iniciative Plus is heading in the market, and what position is trying to achieve.



Figure 7 - Golden Triangle/Strategic Triangle (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

The first factor is the service or product itself and its differentiating features, the second factor is the consumers and their respective expectations regarding the service/product itself, and finally, the third factor is the competitors and their positioning in the market.

Regarding the *service*, it can be identified as key differentiating factors the following: service provided according to time sets, well adapt according to what is asked, good quality

Concerning the *consumers' expectations*, they expect that the service provided by the companies always meet what they asked for, innovative ideas, prices according to the market's usual established prices, and a friendly team who are open to talk and discuss ideas. Finally, consumers seek a company who is transparent and ethical and that competes according to the market rules.

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About Iniciative Plus's direct *competitors*, such as Triangulu and Rastrifarma focus mainly on sales solutions and in-store promotion. Regarding their indirect competitors such as PharmaPlanet and Wize, these focus on the consultancy of innovative solutions for pharmaceutical companies.

5.1.3.2. Perceptual Map

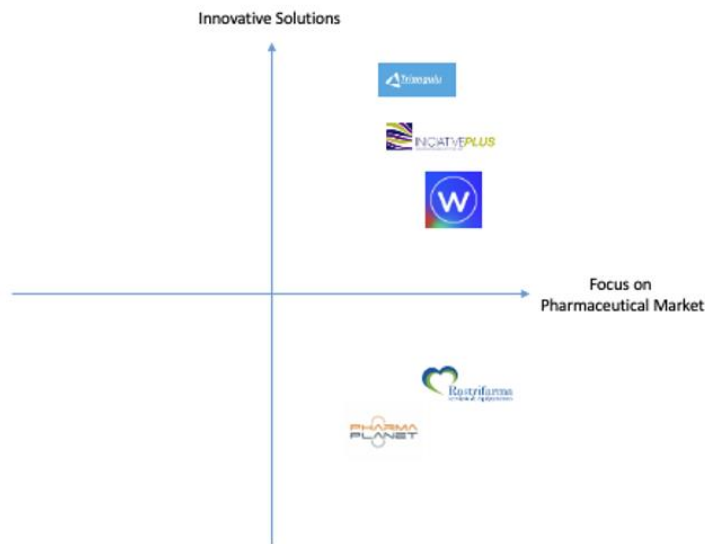


Figure 8 - Perceptual Map (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

The choice of the variables *Innovative Solutions* and *Focus on Pharmaceutical Market* is justified by the two most crucial and determinant factors for clients when it comes to hiring a service.

Iniciative Plus is position at a medium-high level in presenting innovative solutions, when compared to its competitors, it can be concluded that Triangulu has a higher level of innovative solutions, and Wize has approximately the same level as Iniciative Plus, but Rastrifarma and PlanetPharma have a low level of Innovative Solutions.

When comparing Focus on the Pharmaceutical market all have a high level of focus on the pharmaceutical market when presenting solutions. All the competitors and Iniciative Plus are focused on the pharmaceutical industry or have a department specialized in that industry.

5.1.3.3. Points-of-Parity and Points-of-Difference

The identical points of parity are the following:

- Communication strategies are very similar (highly focused on WOM and previous connections);
- Focus on the same type of services requested (in-store promotion and diagnosis tests);

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- High level of pharmaceutical industry knowledge.

Main points-of-difference:

- Direct contact with clients;
- The client's previous experience turned to positive partnerships;
- Specialized solutions for each client;
- Innovative ideas and solutions;
- Friendly and inviting communication.

5.2. Objectives

The IMC strategy developed for Iniciative Plus has a main objective: to increase and retain clients. To achieve them the strategic guidelines and the communication and marketing strategy must be aligned.

As such the IMC strategy has the following goals:

- Improve Iniciative Plus social audience;
- Arouse curiosity in future clients;
- Increase partnership time (contracted time between Iniciative Plus and their clients);
- Better engage with actual and future clients;
- Become the top-of-mind company for B2B companies in the pharmaceutical industry in sales promotion and in-store communication;
- Create engagement in social media and Website platforms.

5.3. Message Content

Iniciative Plus's message must engage current clients and appeal to future clients. It must show Iniciative Plus's capacity and competence in the business. It should also be transmitted by showing what the company does and its capacities but without using any previous work done for any clients, due to the exclusivity in contracts. The main topics that should be included in the message are:

- *Types of projects and services:* Show the variety of projects that Iniciative Plus can do and the wide range of services they offer.
- *Present the team:* Present all the people involved in the preparation of the services required, this will create a feeling of proximity and will reduce the boundary between the client and the company.
- *Fairs and events:* Show all the fairs and events Iniciative Plus is present, so the clients can know what type of events they will be present, and in that way, they can connect easily with Iniciative Plus.
- *Communication:* Share the ways clients can communicate with the company.

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- *Specialization*: While communicating the services Iniciative Plus is able to provide, they should always specify that the service they are specialized in are medical scanning in pharmacies.

5.4. Marketing and Communication tools

In the first stage of communication, the main objective is to interact and reach new prospects, for that matter Iniciative Plus is going to use social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Using social media has the objective to create brand awareness and reduce the uncertainty of prospects about the firm, additionally Iniciative Plus can publish posts with redirections to the website. Moreover, the use of social media and the presence on numerous platforms increases the likelihood of triggering WOM, as we saw in the literature review.

Besides social media, Iniciative Plus can also use Programmatic to publish some pop-ups on the website of pharmacies or pharmaceutical companies, so prospects can be directionally redirected to the Iniciative Plus's website. Additionally, Iniciative Plus can also be present in events such as ExpoPharma. In this specific event for pharmaceutical laboratories, companies are present, and usually Iniciative Plus organize such events for their clients. Instead of just organizing for their clients, Iniciative Plus should be present as the firm itself, so companies can get to know them and to know their work, hence initiating contact.

The second stage is the persuasion phase, which includes the presentation and negotiation. In this phase B2B companies leverage the use of digital sales tools to shape tailored offers for their clients, this customized offer increases the likelihood of closing a deal. For that Iniciative Plus will:

- Increase their presence on Social Media platforms
- Invest in e-mail marketing to keep in touch with their prospects
- Invest in their website for a better friendly user website, Iniciative Plus's website is confusing and is not easy to navigate through it.

The final stage is relationship management, this phase is important for assessing customer satisfaction. To assess customer satisfaction Iniciative Plus should use e-mail marketing with satisfaction forms, so clients can fill out what was their experience while working with Iniciative Plus. Another tool Iniciative Plus can use during the third phase is personal contact, since Iniciative Plus relies a lot on WOM and previous connections they can use personal contacts to keep the relation with the prospects and analyze their satisfaction.

The next table presents a conclusion of the tools used, the description of such tools, the objective about why to use such tools, and finally the target is chosen.

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Communication tool	Description	Objective	Target
E-mail marketing	Send weekly e-mail marketing to current clients with information about: upcoming news in the pharmaceutical industry; with the latest events, so clients can decide if they want to be present while working with Iniciative Plus; or offers designed specially for them	Maintain the relationship with current clients, showing them that Iniciative Plus is constantly thinking about their objectives and has several services that goes according to their needs.	Current Clients
	Send e-mails to check their opinion and to get their feedback after working with Iniciative Plus	Get feedback about past projects, understand if the clients need were met, and see the space for improvement.	
	Seen-mails with the presentation of products and services, presenting the company and showing what Iniciative Plus can offer. Na important point is to explain these services are customized to the clients needs and wants.	Increase awareness for future clients about Iniciative Plus and increase arouse on them to meet the company and start working with them.	Potential clients
Events - expopharma	Participation in events where pharmaceutical companies can acknowledge Iniciative Plus.	Brrand awareness and epxanding the number of clients	Potential clients
Social Media	Invetsment in Social Media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkendIn. The investement must be focused in KPIs such as engagement and reach.	Increase the impact of Iniciative Plus in Social Media, inscrease the mediatic impact, brand awarness and recognition, arouse curiosity and increase brand loyalty.	Current and Potential Clients
SEO	Improve the follow of clients when navigating through the website. Increase the the number of sessions and users.	Use the website as a tool to get to know Iniciaitve Plus and a way to get in touch with the company. With an improved website clients will have more tendency to navigate through it and to know Iniciative Plus.	Current and Potential Clients
Programmatic adds	Pop-ups are used in other companies' website to create awarness and to redirect clients to Iniciative Plus' website. A percentage are digital ads (run through programmatic ads,another perentage is paid serach and social ads)	The objective to use pop-ups is to increase the number of sessions and users in the webiste, creating more engagement and more conncestions.	Potential clients

Table 5 - Marketing tools for the IMC Strategy (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

5.5. Evaluation Metrics

For the first stage tools, the social media metrics should be the increased number of followers, the reach, and the engagement of each post. These metrics will evaluate the level of interaction with new prospects and the evolution of those will show if Iniciative Plus is doing a good job in the social media area.

An important part is also comparing the evolution of the social media metrics with those of the competitors. The higher the levels of the metrics and the number of used platforms the higher will be the increase of WOM, hence the recognition of the brand will increase. The WOM metrics should be the increase in the number of connections, which will increase the number of effective clients.

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In the second stage with the improvement of the website the metrics chosen are the number of sessions, the number of users and new users, and the time spent on the website. When connecting social media tools with digital tools, Iniciative Plus can increase the number of posts with redirection to the website. With the increase of posts with redirection all the metrics will increase, hence the interest of the prospects in the website will also increase.

Another important metric for the second stage is the number of sent forms. Iniciative Plus has an area for prospects to fill out asking for budgets or a specific service. The increase of these sent forms will show the increase in the level of interest of the prospects in Iniciative Plus's services.

For the final stage, the metrics chosen are the level of satisfaction expressed by the clients, and the number of services required by the clients for future years.

5.6. Communication and Marketing budget and schedule

For Iniciative Plus the months with the majority of the projects and provided services are April, May, June, November, and December. All proposals for services and events are approved outside these months.

Hence, the schedule for the marketing and communication strategy and the respective budget allocation will be considering this information. Therefore, the remaining months need to have an extra investment in all platforms, to potentiate the capacity and the marketing and communication strategy. Most of the communication and marketing tools chosen would be outsourced, and it will be negotiated for a fee, according to the needs, objectives, and goals defined. The research for this fee will be calculated according to a search made on companies already existent.

Therefore, the budget calculation will be based on the method "from the defined objectives", presented by Lendrevie et al. (2010), where the value of the investment is determined by taking into account the estimated costs compared with the objectives and actions that are intended to be developed.

The next table will present the schedule and budget allocation for Iniciative Plus's IMC strategy for the entire year of 2023, beside to the resume budget and schedule table some explanations will be provided. These explanations will include not only the values for each tool but also the chosen allocation.

1. *E-mail marketing* – taking into consideration Iniciative Plus's client base, they don't need to outsource this service. The cost allocation is for the purchase of a platform so the company can send the e-mails themselves. The budget allocation for the extra period is to pay for extra human resources that will need when increasing the quantity to send. A market research was conducted to understand the ROI of e-mail marketing,

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and it was concluded that on average for each dollar invested there is a return of 38 dollars.

2. *ExpoPharma* – This event usually occurs in october/november, but since the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization decided that in 2023, the event would take place in february and the date for enrollment is during august. Assuming that ExpoPharma will take place always in february from now on, the cost will be considered during july and august, and behind inserted in the planning in these months. The value inserted in the budget was extracted from the ExpoPharma platform where all the information about space purchase and promotion materials can be found.
3. *Social Media* – Research was made through some companies specialized in providing this service. Social media managers usually are outsourced, and it involves not only posting and sharing on social media platforms, but also the management of the investment when promoting posts, the schedule, and communication direction and speech. The fee on the budget was withdrawn from an average value found in several companies. This fee will include not only the work for developing posts and scheduling a strategy but also promoting the post in KPIs such as reach and engagement. The extra fee is to increase these promotions so in times of importance the posts can reach and influence more users. A market research was conducted to understand the ROI of investing in Social Media Management, and it was concluded that on average for each dollar invested there is a return of 3 dollars.
4. *SEO* – The investment in SEO is extremely needed. Not only in website optimization, but also in the recreation of the website. Iniciative Plus's website is extremely confusing, and it is not optimized to reach high levels on search engines. Without good website optimization, and investment in programmatic ads and paid media the website will not have the impact that is necessary to acquire and arouse clients to visit the website. The fee is constant, and it will not have an extra budget allocation because the work on the website is long-term work, with objectives for the long term. A market research was conducted to understand the ROI of investing in SEO, and it was concluded that on average for each dollar invested there is a return of 2.75 dollars.
5. *Programmatic ads* – Programmatic ads are extremely important not only to increase brand awareness but also to increase the number of visitors to the website. Programmatic ads are usually pop-ups in other websites that when clicked redirects the client to the Iniciative Plus website. With the objective to increase the number of clients, Iniciative Plus need to move these prospects to the website so they can know

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them. Programmatic ads are mainly used to increase brand awareness, which is one of the most important goals of the IMC strategy.

Table 6 present a resume of the schedule for each marketing and communication tool for the entire year, as well as the budget allocation for each month and in total.

For a clear, understand of the table: each tool has a color, and the months that are colored and have a budget value are the months were the tool is going to be put in practice. Some tools have an extra investment, has we have seen before during the year there are several stages in client communication, and for some months Iniciative Plus can increase the monthly investment to boost their marketing and communication strategy. Therefore, increasing and accelerating the results obtained from this strategy.

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		Janeiro	Fevereiro	Março	Abril	Maior	Junho	Julho	Agosto	Setembro	Outubro	Novembro	Dezembro	Total
E-mail marketing	Current Clients	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	120,00 €
	Potential Clients	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €				10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €			10,00 €	70,00 €
Events								2 795,85 €						2 795,85 €
Social Media	Fee	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	3 600,00 €
	Extra investment	100,00 €	100,00 €					100,00 €	100,00 €	100,00 €			100,00 €	600,00 €
SEO		200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	2 400,00 €
Programmatic Ads	Fee	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	9 600,00 €
	Extra investment	100,00 €	100,00 €					100,00 €	100,00 €	100,00 €			100,00 €	600,00 €
														19 785,85 €

Table 6 - Marketing and Communication budget and schedule (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

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6. Conclusions and Limitations

The main purpose of this master's project was to develop an integrated marketing and communication strategy for Iniciative Plus, to retain current clients and acquire new clients, therefore, increasing brand awareness and recognition.

The first step consisted of analyzing and reviewing the already existent literature about the Integrated Marketing and Communication strategy, such as the evolution of its definition through time, the stages of the implementation of the strategy, and how we can apply an IMC strategy for SMEs. The objective of studying these topics was to better understand the concepts that are necessary to further execute an IMC strategy, according to Iniciative Plus goals.

Afterward, it was necessary to study and analyze both the company and the industry that it is inserted. Firstly, it studied Iniciative Plus's organization, mission, vision and values, goals, and objectives. A SWOT analysis was also developed to understand the company's strengths and weaknesses, combined with the market's opportunities and threats, to better understand Iniciative Plus's position in the market. Following the SWOT analysis, it could be withdrawn the competitive advantage of Iniciative Plus and further study its competitors.

The information available was scarce either about Iniciative Plus or about the market that it is competing in. Hence, it was crucial to conduct interviews with Iniciative Plus's team, in order to have more detailed information regarding their current strategy, goals for the future, problems they were facing, and their needs.

After collecting all the information needed, it was possible to develop the IMC strategy itself. It consisted of conducting an STP analysis, defining objectives for the IMC plan, defining the message content and format for their communication and marketing, choosing the marketing and communication tools necessary for the correct implementation of the strategy, and subsequently defining the evaluation metrics for each tool, the respective budget, and schedule for an entire year.

This IMC strategy was planned for 2023, with the objective to overcome all the issues that the COVID-19 pandemic brought, the budget allocation was thought to give an initial push to Iniciative Plus marketing and communication plan.

During the development of this project, there were limitations encountered, mainly because the pharmaceutical industry is a highly regulated industry with little information available. Moreover, the budget allocation was based on companies and information found on search engines.

In conclusion, Iniciative Plus should primarily increase the number of members in the team, if they want to acquire more customers and increase the rate of clients' retention, they need to be able to provide the services necessary without flaws. Since it is an extremely competitive market, Iniciative Plus must stand out through its quality and the loyalty and trust of its clients.

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8. Tables and Figures

8.1 Figures

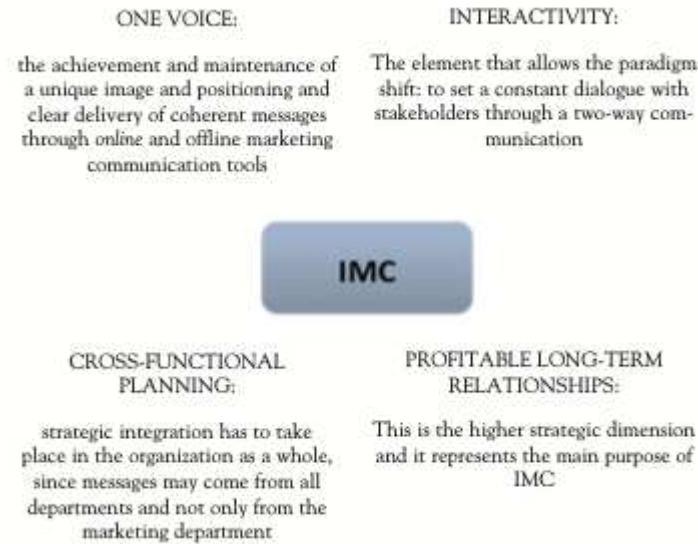


Figure 1 - Four dimensions of IMC (Porcu et al., 2012)

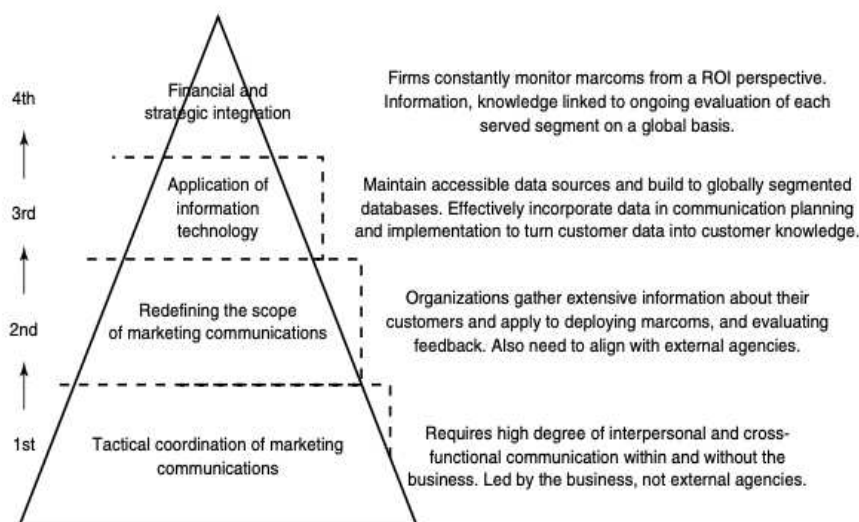


Figure 2 - Four stages of IMC model (Kitchen and Schultz, 2001)

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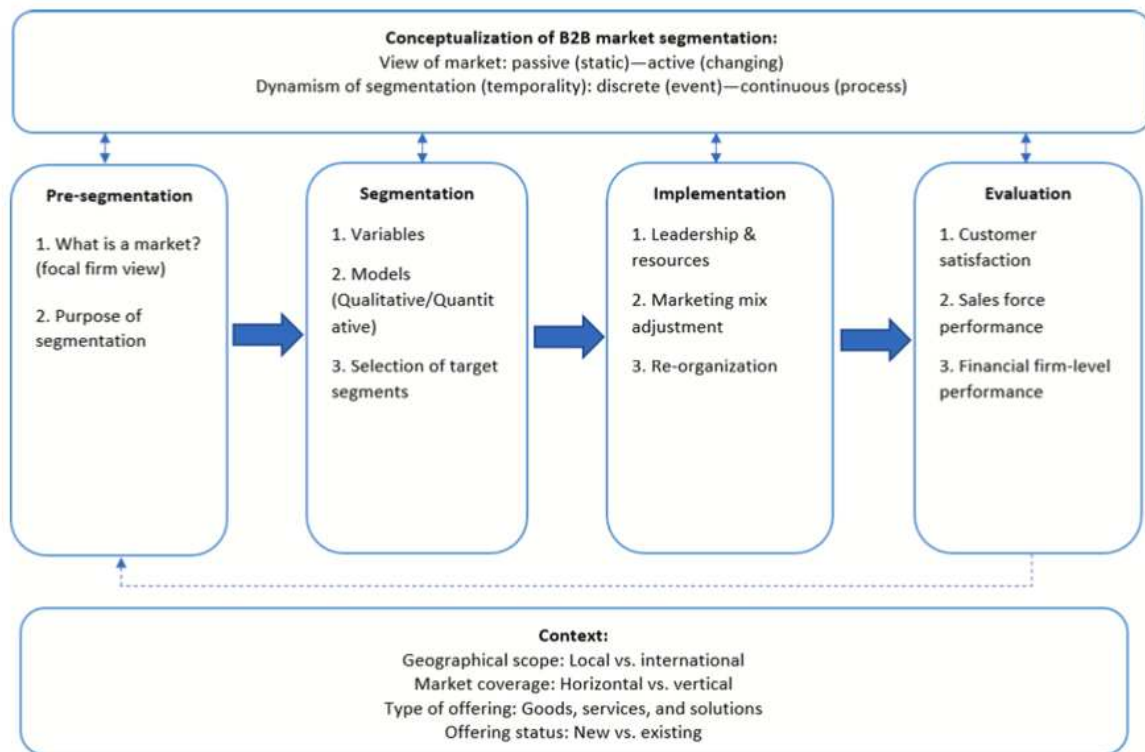


Figure 3 - Conceptualization of B2B market Segmentation (Mora Cortez et al., 2021)



Figure 4 - AIDA Model (Strong, 1925)

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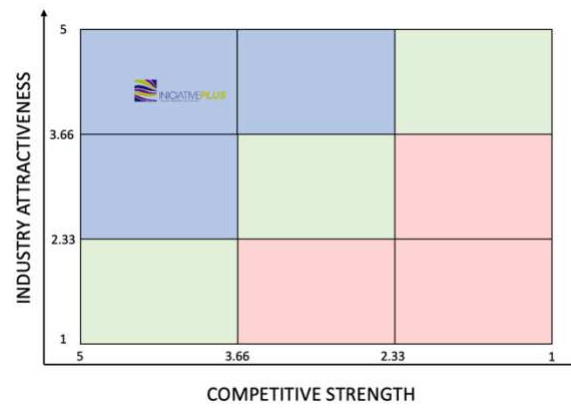


Figure 5 - GE/McKinsey Matrix (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

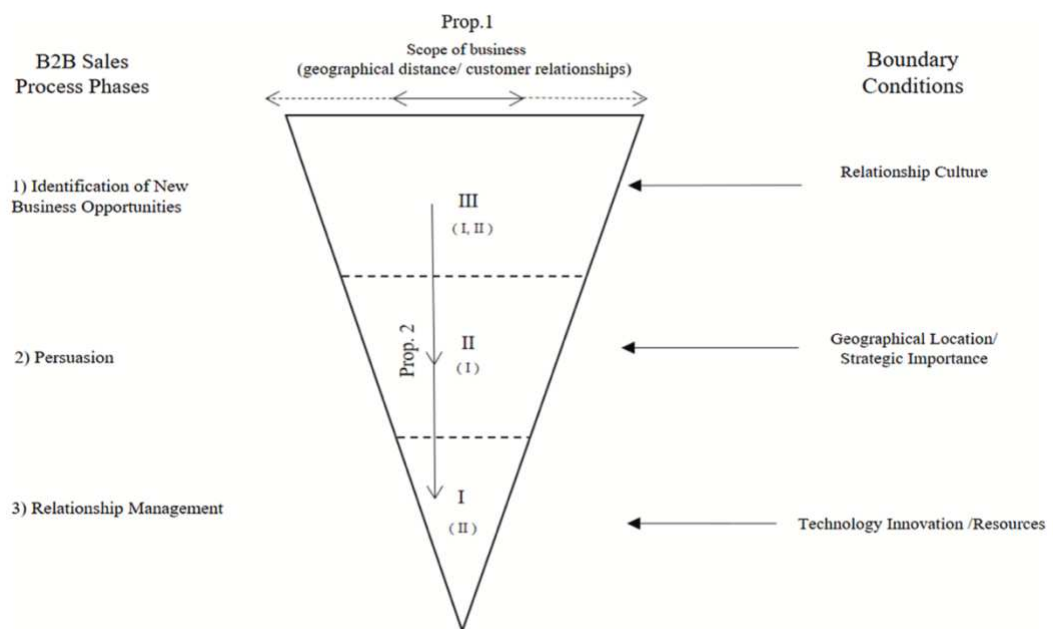


Figure 6 - Integrated use of Sales Communications tools in the B2B sales process (Fraccastoro et al., 2021)

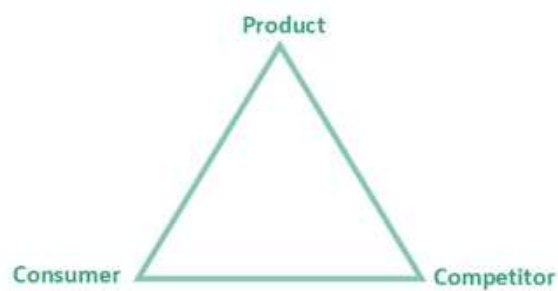


Figure 7 - Golden Triangle/Strategic Triangle (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

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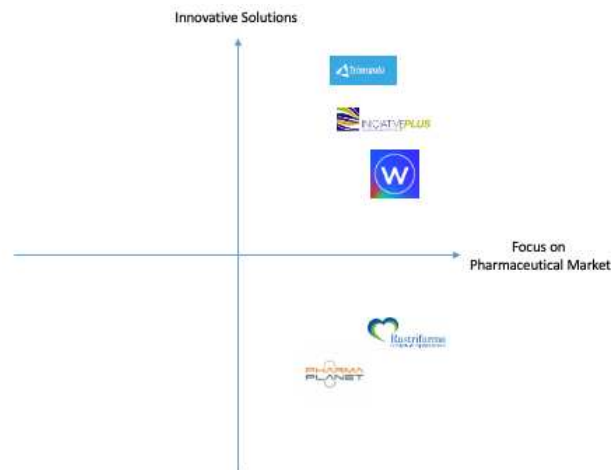


Figure 8 - Perceptual Map (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

8.2 Tables

American Association of Advertising Agencies (1989)	"A concept of marketing communications planning that recognises the added of Advertising Agencies value in a programme that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines—e.g. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations—and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact"
Duncan (2002)	"A cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven purposeful dialogue with them"
Schultz and Schultz (2004)	"TMC is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programmes over time with consumers, customers, prospects, and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences"
Kliatchko (2005)	"MC is the concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centred and results-driven brand communication programmes over time"
Bruhn (2008)	"A strategic and operative process which involves analysis, planning, organizing, implementing, and monitoring and which aims to communicate a coherent and consistent image of a company or reference object by integrating the company's distinctive sources of internal and external communications"
Šerić <i>et al.</i> (2015)	"A tactical and strategic consumer-centric business process, boosted by advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which, on the basis of information obtained from customers databases, delivers a clear and consistent message through the coordination and synergies of different communications tools and channels, in order to nourish long-lasting profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders and create and maintain brand equity"

Table 1 - IMC definition evolution (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017)

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Metric	Formula
Volume	The number of mentions of a brand name over a specified period of time. Often segmented into positive and negative volume using sentiment analysis.
Share of Voice (%)	$\frac{\text{Positive volume of brand}}{\text{Positive volume of all brands in category}} \times 100$
Engagement (per post)	The number of comments on, replies to, likes of, and shares of a given post.
Engagement (overall %)	$\frac{\text{Engagement at time } t \text{ with all posts to date}}{\text{Number of views at time } t \text{ of all posts to date}} \times 100$ <i>or</i> $\frac{\text{Engagement at time } t \text{ with all posts to date}}{\text{Number of followers at time } t} \times 100$
Advocates	The number of social media participants who write positive posts about a brand during a specified period of time.
Return on Investment (ROI)	$\frac{\text{Revenue from campaign} - \text{Cost of campaign}}{\text{Cost of campaign}} \times 100$
Leads Generated	The number of leads generated from social channels (sometimes expressed as a percent of all leads generated).
Response Time	The amount of time elapsed between the receipt of an inquiry or support request via social media and a response from the company.

Table 2 - Social Media Metrics (Barger, 2013)

Competitiveness	Weight	Rating	Evaluation
Market share	0.1	2	0.2
Customer loyalty	0.3	4	1.2
Product differentiation	0.2	3	0.6
Tailored products	0.4	5	2.0
Total	1		4.0

Table 3 - Competitive Strength (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

Attractiveness	Weight	Rating	Evaluation
Industry rivalry	0.4	4	1.6
Changes in demand	0.4	4	1.6
Trend of prices	0.2	1	0.2
Seasonality	0.2	2	0.4
Total	1		3.8

Table 4 - Market Attractiveness (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

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Communication tool	Description	Objective	Target
E-mail marketing	Send weekly e-mail marketing to current clients with information about: upcoming news in the pharmaceutical industry; with the latest events, so clients can decide if they want to be present while working with Iniciative Plus; or offers designed specially for them	Maintain the relationship with current clients, showing them that Iniciative Plus is constantly thinking about their objectives and has several services that goes according to their needs.	Current Clients
	Send e-mails to check their opinion and to get their feedback after working with Iniciative Plus	Get feedback about past projects, understand if the clients need were met, and see the space for improvement.	
	Seen-mails with the presentation of products and services, presenting the company and showing what Iniciative Plus can offer. Na important point is to explain these services are customized to the clients needs and wants.	Increase awareness for future clients about Iniciative Plus and increase arouse on them to meet the company and start working with them.	Potential clients
Events - expopharma	Participation in events where pharmaceutical companies can acknowledge Iniciative Plus.	Brrand awareness and epanding the number of clients	Potential clients
Social Media	Invetsment in Social Media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkendIn. The investement must be focused in KPIs such as engagement and reach.	Increase the impact of Iniciative Plus in Social Media, inscrease the mediatic impact, brand awarness and recognition, arouse curiosity and increase brand loyalty.	Current and Potential Clients
SEO	Improve the follow of clients when navigating through the website. Increase the the number of sessions and users.	Use the website as a tool to get to know Iniciaitve Plus and a way to get in touch with the company. With an improved website clients will have more tendency to navigate through it and to know Iniciative Plus.	Current and Potential Clients
Programmatic adds	Pop-ups are used in other companies' website to create awarness and to redirect clients to Iniciative Plus' website. A percentage are digital ads (run through programmatic ads,another perentage is paid serach and social ads)	The objetive to use pop-ups is to increase the number of sessions and users in the webiste, creating more engagement and more conncestions.	Potential clients

Table 5 - Marketing tools for the IMC Strategy (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

The importance of an IMC strategy to improve the effectiveness of Iniciative Plus

		Janeiro	Fevereiro	Março	Abril	Maior	Junho	Julho	Agosto	Setembro	Outubro	Novembro	Dezembro	Total
E-mail marketing	Current Clients	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €	120,00 €
	Potential Clients	10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €				10,00 €	10,00 €	10,00 €			10,00 €	70,00 €
Events								2 795,85 €						2 795,85 €
Social Media	Fee	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	300,00 €	3 600,00 €
	Extra Investment	100,00 €	100,00 €					100,00 €	100,00 €	100,00 €			100,00 €	600,00 €
SEO		200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	200,00 €	2 400,00 €
Programmatic Adds	Fee	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	800,00 €	9 600,00 €
	Extra Investment	100,00 €	100,00 €					100,00 €	100,00 €	100,00 €			100,00 €	600,00 €
														19 785,85 €

Table 6 - Marketing and Communication budget and schedule (Mariana Pêra, 2022)

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9. Annexes

Annex A - Interview with Luísa Carvalho

Date: 22/10/2021

Interviewee: Luísa Carvalho

Occupation: Product Manager and Majority Shareholder of Iniciative Plus

Mariana P.: What is the target of your communication?

Luísa C.: In terms of clients, is to provide services to pharmacies.

Mariana P.: When you communicate who Iniciative Plus is, to whom do you communicate?

Luísa C.: To pharmaceutical laboratories.

Mariana P.: Who are your competitors?

Luísa C.: As far as the market is concerned, we have two major competitors. These are Triangulu and Rastrifarma. Triangulu works a lot with outsourcing services and in-store services for pharmacies, such as medical screenings. Rastrifarma works only with medical screening services in pharmacies. Our main client is the pharmaceutical industry, but the work that we develop and that makes us known takes place inside pharmacies. We are known more in the pharmacy than in the pharmaceutical industry. We communicate to the pharmaceutical industry, which in turn hands over the services to the pharmacies, and it is inside the pharmacy that Iniciative Plus is known.

Mariana P.: What would you say is your competitive advantage?

Luísa C.: The quality of our services and the way we present our work. Based on our experience in the pharmaceutical industry, we believe that our advantage over our competitors is to offer more to our clients. Since all companies in this industry do the same type of projects, we try to do things a little differently. For example, the final report we deliver to our clients can be presented differently and innovatively. We try to differentiate our connection to pharmacies on behalf of our client. We have started giving presentations at pharmacies, which our competitors do not do. All of this has allowed us to differentiate ourselves from our competitors.

Mariana P.: Which companies do you work with most often?

Luísa C.: Our best customers?

Mariana P.: Yes.

Luísa C.: Now we have toLife; KRKA, which started working with us during the pandemic; EloFarma, a group of 280 pharmacies that might be our most important client at the moment, we develop everything about communication, marketing materials, product management in pharmacies, etc.

Mariana P.: What is your main objective when delivering a message to your clients?

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Luísa C.: At the moment we are not transmitting a message.

Mariana P.: Then why does a client contact Iniciative Plus?

Luísa C.: Because of medical scanning in pharmacies.

Mariana P.: So, it is about this particular type of service that you offer.

Luísa C.: Yes, what we usually call health training. In my opinion, this is the service that makes us stand out. Lately, all the contacts we have been getting are due to medical scanning or lecture projects.

Mariana P.: Basically, your communication strategy is based on WOM, right?

Luísa C.: Yes, definitely.

Mariana P.: Apart from your website, are there any other communication tools that clients could use to get to know you?

Luísa C.: No. But it was a choice for Iniciative Plus when I was developing the initial strategy. In the beginning, I did not want to launch any kind of social media network. In my opinion, we are a service provider company and I do not understand how we can communicate our project. We cannot present a service requested by our client without disclosing it. So, my question has always been, how can I publicize a project requested for our clients without mentioning them? For Iniciative Plus to publish any type of project, we must have permission from our clients to do so. Of course, we can disclose what and who Iniciative Plus is and do without disclosing our clients, and that's a project I'd like to develop.

Mariana P.: How do you set your marketing budget and schedule?

Luísa C.: We do not.

Mariana P.: Not even a communication plan?

Luísa C.: No.

Mariana P.: What do you think are the most important communication tools (that you currently use or not) to attract customers? To increase your success rate.

Luísa C.: Developing a good website is a point in my opinion, especially because we have a link to our website in our email signature. I do not think our website accurately reflects what Iniciative Plus is, and it does not convey well who we are. Speaking of social media, I do not know how useful it is for a company like Iniciative Plus. We also need to update our institutional presentation, which is outdated and outmoded.

Mariana P.: What about traditional communication tools?

Luísa C.: We would like to have a team on the street, maybe an outsourcing team. A small team of 3 or 4 people around the country who go to pharmacies, doctors, etc. to present our company and acquire more customers. But to develop that, I need to align all the aspects. A dynamic and accurate

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presentation that is enjoyable to look at and follow, with only our most important services. Basing our contact in direct contact inside and outside the pharmaceutical industry.

Mariana P.: Why some clients may not want to work with you? Or why some have already worked and then backed out?

Luísa C.: What can make a client say yes or no is related to the budget for the project requested. If they have already worked with us and then the collaboration was canceled, it's usually because the project did not go the way the client wanted.

Mariana P.: Is this something that happens frequently?

Luísa C.: No, it has only happened once or twice that the client's expectations were not met, but we are working hard to make sure it does not happen again. I think that we do not have more clients, and it's not because of our work, because we are good at what we do, but mainly is due to the lack of structure within the company and the lack of time to accept and develop good projects. Because I think we have a lot of potentials and could do a lot more.

Mariana P.: Yes, you have a small team.

Luísa C.: We have many projects that need to be developed in a short time. We always plan with a short time frame because the clients ask us with a short time frame too.

Annex B - Interview with Sónia Silva

Date: 22/10/2021

Interviewee: Sónia Silva

Occupation: CMO of Iniciative Plus

Mariana P.: What are your areas of work inside Iniciative Plus?

Sónia S.: Marketing, and Operational. We sell services, and those services are sold to the client, so all the operational strategies behind the transaction. When dealing with the selling we must take into consideration all the people involved, the equipment's, communication, etc., all that evolves the trading.

Mariana P.: Inside the marketing area what is your focus?

Sónia S.: Our main objective is to deliver to the client the proposed project, and with the goal that they set. Right now, the client's goal is sales. So, we must develop a service that satisfies the client's needs, and that generates sales for them. Our services are B2B, but effectively our service arrives at the client, so in a B2C form. Our biggest challenge is exactly that, we must transmit our communication and sell the client's product to its consumer. It's a complex chain of selling.

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Mariana P.: Who plans your marketing and communication plans?

Sónia S.: Each service has its communication because it's from various clients. We develop a general plan for each type of service and then adapt to each request from our clients, depending on its goals. Normally, the communication contents are exclusively planned by the client itself. We focus on the strategy of how to communicate our client's product. Iniciative Plus doesn't develop the communications for the client, we deliver the service that best fits our client. Our communication, in terms of Iniciative Plus, it's based on the quality, adaption, flexibility, and efficiency of our services.

Mariana P.: But as Iniciative Plus, you don't have any type of communication nor marketing plan?

Sónia S.: Eventually we do have a communication plan, but it's something very general.

Mariana P.: How do you communicate with your current or future clients?

Sónia S.: Our communication is based on a WOM strategy, and it works perfectly for us since we base our product on the quality and final efficiency of the service. What happens is that our clients pass to future clients what is Iniciative Plus and what we do in the pharmaceutical industry.

Mariana P.: So, you don't have any kind of plan or schedule for the communication of Iniciative Plus?

Sónia S.: No.

Mariana P.: The only format you use for communication is WOM?

Sónia S.: Yes. Generally, we don't look for any future client, so far, all our clients got in contact with us, due to past experiences of companies inside the industry.

Mariana P.: Don't you think it would be positive for you if a client gets in touch with you without having any knowledge, a priori, of your work with other companies? Do you think it would increase the rate of client acquisition? For example, you launch a campaign for a client, and my company gets in touch with you because I want to know your company and the work you do, but I don't have any feedback from companies you have previously worked with.

Sónia S.: In terms of customer acquisition, it would be beneficial. We must widen our range of companies and the awareness that the pharmaceutical industry has from us. Although, it always has positive and negative aspects. I believe that when you open your range for companies that don't know you nor know someone that has previously worked with you, they don't know your modus operandum, and they don't have any feedback about past projects. Nevertheless, it would be important to increase the awareness of Iniciative Plus in the industry and increase our range of services provided.

Mariana P.: But for that to happen you must change your communication and your company structure.

Sónia S.: Yes, our structure inside Iniciative Plus would need to change.

Mariana P.: To sum up, you don't have any marketing or communication content, specifically for Iniciative Plus.

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Sónia S.: We do have content, but it's not upgraded or developed annually. We have a base structure for our communication.

Mariana P.: Ok, then who develop that specific content?

Sónia S.: That content was developed several years ago.

Mariana P.: But it was developed by you and Luísa? You don't have anyone specifically working for that development?

Sónia S.: No.

Mariana P.: What are the marketing and communication tools that you use to acquire clients?

Sónia S.: Right now, we don't use any kind of tools, we rely a lot on the WOM. It is a tool that is currently used by us, to transmit the quality of our services. Our message is quality.

Mariana P.: You don't use tools like e-mail marketing or newsletter?

Sónia S.: No.

Mariana P.: And to maintain contact with your current clients?

Sónia S.: It's personal, mainly because our clients are satisfied with our services and already know us and like to work with us.

Mariana P.: And to remind your clients that Iniciative Plus still exists and is available to develop projects?

Sónia S.: We use phone calls; it's based on our relationship with our clients. It's like relational marketing.

Mariana P.: There are times during the year that you are overwhelmed with projects, are you able to manage that relationship with all your clients?

Sónia S.: Yes, Luísa is the one that manages the relationships with our clients.

Mariana P.: What social media network do you utilize?

Sónia S.: We don't use social media, not even LinkedIn. Our value chain it's complex, and we think it's difficult to be present in social media without exposing our clients. We think it is complicated to do any publication of our work since it's based on projects developed for our clients.

Mariana P.: What if we use social media to show who Iniciative Plus is, and its value and mission?

Sónia S.: It would benefit, but we could never expose our clients. If the objective is to know Iniciative Plus, what can we offer of innovation for future clients, would be perfect. Not imposing our work in social media but presenting the value that Iniciative Plus can bring to a future client.

Annex C - Interview With João Colaço

Date: 22/10/2021

Interviewee: João Colaço

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Occupation: Creative Designer at Mundoldeias

Mariana P.: How does the calendarization for the request's works? From Iniciative Plus to you.

João C.: It depends on what type of project is requested, but we don't have any type of calendar.

Mariana P.: So, when Iniciative Plus receives a request from a client that evolves working with creative designers they ask you?

João C.: Yes.

Mariana P.: What is the most request project from Iniciative Plus?

João C.: Marketing campaigns, mainly for pharmacies or pharmaceutical laboratories.

Mariana P.: Usually the creative designers that work with Iniciative Plus are you and António, right? Being António more focused on the audiovisual and you on the static communication, like campaigns?

João C.: Yes.

Mariana P.: What is the level of creative freedom when a project is requested?

João C.: In design, there isn't total creative freedom, not even in art. There are several conditional aspects, not only technical but also about the image of the client that usual is pre-defined and has certain guidelines to follow, about the target that the client intends to reach.

Mariana P.: And all those aspects are transmitted to you?

João C.: Not always. Sometimes the briefings are not complete. But since I have worked with Iniciative Plus for some time, we understand each other, and usually, I know what they want.

Mariana P.: And do you feel that are some clients that are more restricted to the request and others that allow more freedom for creation?

João C.: Yes.

Mariana P.: As a Creative designer, what would you say is the most important aspect of a website?

João C.: The aggregation of several factors. Essentially, putting together the message and the image that the brand wants to transmit. The image is what sells first, but if the content is weak there is no advantage.

Mariana P.: So, a website must be balanced.

João C.: Exactly.

Mariana P.: In your opinion, do you think that creativity in the communication strategy is important for Iniciative Plus, being a service provider?

João C.: Of course. I think that creativity is important, and it is transversal to all industries and companies. Companies nowadays have that attention of being creative on their communication. Transmitting a planned and cared message and the way they pass the message also must be well thought.

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Mariana P.: Is there any suggestion you would give to Iniciative Plus about the way they communicate with their clients?

João C.: Not that I think about. It is related to the circumstances when communicating with their clients, there is always basic communication and then they must adapt depending on the client. Taking into consideration that the importance of good communication is essential.

Annex D - Focus Group With Sónia Silva and Luísa Carvalho

Date: 22/10/2021

Interviewees: Luísa Carvalho and Sónia Silva

Occupation: Product Manager and Majority Shareholder of Iniciative Plus; CMO of Iniciative Plus

Mariana P.: How do you say we can develop a good IMC strategy for a company like Iniciative Plus, a B2B company?

Sónia S.: For us, B2B communication is hard, especially due to the question of confidentiality.

Luísa C.: We could do communication with an institutional objective.

Sónia S.: Yes, we could. What we use a lot is WOM and the relationship with our clients. So, we don't have a lot developed. But I think it would be advantageous to us, mainly because we need to increase our awareness, and include other areas of our industry.

Luísa C.: We would like to keep the traditional WOM but add the digital part.

Mariana P.: I would like you to choose 3 or 4 options, to answer the following question: What aspects of your website you would keep or change? Options are design, layout, consumer flow, content, attractiveness, and SEO.

Luísa C.: Improve our keywords or key phrases of SEO. I would keep our customer flow through the site, which I think is simple. But I would change everything, every aspect you mentioned needs to be changed and reviewed. The content, design, images are weak. The website was based on the institutional presentation, so everything is connected and equal, and at the same time, everything is outdated and needs to be improved.

Sónia S.: Yes, our institutional presentation was designed in the begging, so it needs change.

Luísa C.: I think we have a lot to improve, doesn't necessarily mean a dramatic change. There is the question of how to reach some clients that so far, we could not reach.

Sónia S.: This matter to reach more clients, and widen our contacts is extremely important. Although we don't have the structure to accept more projects.

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Luísa C.: I agreed, our team is too small. But I believe that this is also related to our communication and marketing. We must start to choose which projects make sense to develop, give us a name, and increase our awareness.

Sónia S.: Yes, and all our clients are overwhelming us with projects. All companies want to develop projects for the same trimester, meaning we get a lot of work asked in a short time frame. At the same time, we must organize ourselves and do our planning.

Luísa C.: We were talking about the distribution of our marketing and communication budget because we don't have a clear distribution. We do have to think about how we are going to communicate Iniciative Plus and if we have the money to do so, but internally we do not have any determined budget.

Sónia S.: Mainly because we are focused on WOM and the existing relationship with our clients. We don't invest in our communication.

Mariana P.: Since Iniciative Plus is already known in the pharmaceutical industry, your investment wouldn't need to be high.

Luísa C.: No, it wouldn't. We just must improve what already exists and have something that companies can identify us with.

Sónia S.: We don't communicate exhaustively nor proactively. But companies get in touch with us because they knew some project we did with another client.

Mariana P.: What keywords or key phrases do you think should be developed for your SEO? The objective is that your website appears on the first page of the search engine.

Luísa C.: The first thing I can relate to this company is outsourcing.

Mariana P.: But if a client searches for outsourcing it wouldn't appear Iniciative Plus first, mainly because is a specific service provider.

Luísa C.: Maybe outsourcing for the pharmaceutical industry, or services for the pharmaceutical industry. But service is a vague concept.

Sónia S.: Promotional actions for the pharmaceutical industry for example would lead to us. Promotion is pharmacies.

Luísa C.: Medical scanning, health training.

Sónia S.: Outsourcing is the one that matters to us the most.

Luísa C.: Pharmacy merchandising, is also connected.

Mariana P.: We need to develop this type of keyword and work on them, so your website has a wider range.

Sónia S.: Another thing we have been developing a lot lately, is category management in pharmacies, and it's linked to merchandising. There are several services we develop and that we are known for, but

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it is not linked to our website. Companies get in touch with us because they already know we do a specific project.

Mariana P.: About social media networks. If you had to choose two social media networks to develop for Iniciative Plus, what would you choose? And why?

Sónia S.: My first choice would be LinkedIn because it works very well for B2B since our main clients are companies from a specific industry. Our communication is not focused on the regular consumer/person.

Luísa C.: One thing that would be interesting would be to ask our clients to share the projects they develop with us on LinkedIn, creating a network.

Sónia S.: Yes because those companies forward us to other companies.

Luísa C.: And maybe Instagram since Facebook has not been very used recently.

Sónia S.: But Instagram is based a lot on the image, I don't know how we would communicate.

Luísa C.: In an institutional format. Based on our services, who we are and never exposing our clients. Showing our innovative and creative side.

Sónia S.: Yes, only in that format.

Luísa C.: And if we develop a good Instagram page, our clients could tag us in their posts. That way we are not breaking any confidentiality agreement.

Mariana P.: That would create an interesting social network. Passing now to the events. What offline events do you usually attend?

Sónia S.: Expofarma. Can't think of another one.

Mariana P.: But are you present as Iniciative Plus, or did you develop the project for pharmaceutical laboratories that attend Expofarma?

Luísa C.: No. We never attend as Iniciative Plus, only as organizers.

Sónia S.: We did have a lot of presence in the last one. We had a lot of pharmaceutical labs requesting our organization.

Mariana P.: It would be interesting to be present there, something small and institutional. Because the audience of Expofarma is your target.

Luísa C.: Yes, all the pharmaceutical labs. We already thought about that, but never went forward with it. It is something that can be on our planning for next year.

Mariana P.: Besides Expofarma, you were never present in any event as Iniciative Plus?

Luísa C.: No.

Mariana P.: In your opinion would it be beneficial to expand your marketing and communication team? Or would be better if you keep it small?

Luísa C.: It is beneficial to keep our team small.

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Sónia S.: We need to expand our team in operational terms because the organization and the follow-up of the projects are extensive, and sometimes I and Luísa have a lot on our plates and some things might be left behind. And is not beneficial to the quality of the services provided.

Luísa C.: What we usually do is both of us work on the same project but do different things at different stages. I think what we need is someone to focus on the operational and administrative sides. After the project is done and delivered, do the follow-up of sales, keep in touch with clients, understand if the goals were achieved. Someone to do the “post-purchase” evaluation.

Sónia S.: This stage is very important. Is something that the client demands, which is the feedback of the project.

Luísa C.: Since we are only two, both of us have knowledge of everything happening with a client’s project. This is the good side of a small team, but then we need to expand to all the other parts, the pre and post-agreement stages. So, the structure has a good design, but we need backup to help us in this part. Only with this we can increase our acquisition and accept more clients.

Mariana P.: If your clients could give you their planning of the projects they intend to develop during the year, you could organize much better your planning.

Sónia S.: Yes, and that way we could focus our communication budget for the time during the years that we wouldn’t get a lot of projects. But without that plan, it is difficult to set anything.

Mariana P.: To sum up, Iniciative Plus needs to upgrade and modernize their communication and their ways of communication.

Sónia S.: Yes, to innovate and think outside the box. So, the industry can see us as a modern and fresh company.

Luísa C.: Make the industry understand we can do the same thing that has been developed for years in a row but differently. Like no one ever did, stepping up the level.

Sónia S.: That is our main objective. Everything that the pharmaceutical industry already knows but presented in a way that no one ever presented.