

Communicating Reputation to the Belgian, German and Dutch Microbiology Markets

GA Assignment for Biosisto

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Executive Summary

This research and advisory report presents research results and recommendations, advising Biosisto how to communicate its corporate reputation to international clients, to contribute to an international corporate communication strategy, specifically targeting German and Belgian markets. Having established a considerable customer base in the Netherlands Biosisto is attempting to enter German and Belgian markets. To communicate Biosisto's reputation to potential customers in targeted countries, research sought to establish which organisational values and attributes are perceived as favourable by existing customers, comparing this data to what potential German and Belgian customers state to find important, and how they prefer to be approached by new reference material providers. Research was focused on three areas, namely: Corporate Communication and Reputation, International Communication, and Direction of Communication. Quantitative and qualitative Data has been gathered through the distribution of surveys among existing and potential customers, and the collection of data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with members of the targeted markets. Overall, research has established that Biosisto is known to existing customers for the high quality and reliability of its products, and its customer focused approach. Similarly, data from both Belgium and Germany suggests that high quality and reliability are most important to these markets. Customer focus is important to the Belgian market; less so to the German market. Despite the German market's low need for customer focus, a partner-oriented relationship with reference material providers is preferred. The same can be said of existing and potential customer in Belgium and the Netherlands. The Belgian and German microbiology markets attribute little to no importance to innovation: a consequence of high levels of uncertainty avoidance in both countries. The Dutch market shows a heightened need for innovation in comparison. Long-term orientation is prominent across Biosisto's existing customer base and targeted markets, implying that (potential customers) prefer present- and future-oriented corporate communications.

The consultant advises Biosisto to implement the following recommendations:

- To ensure communicated organisational values and attributes assist in communicating a corporate reputation which is in line with the preferences of targeted markets, it is recommended that Biosisto prioritises communicating the high quality and reliability of its products and services to microbiology laboratories in Germany and Belgium.
- Approaching the Netherlands and Belgium, Biosisto may use corporate communications to highlight the specialised nature of its products and services, and how this allows products to

be tailored to customer demands, to exemplify the organisation's customer focus and making it known to customers, both potential and existing, that their input is highly valued.

- Communicating a high level of customer focus to the German market may undermine Biosisto's quality-related organisational attributes and values in the eyes of German laboratories, and is therefore discouraged.
- Biosisto may communicate innovation-related values and attributes to the Belgian market, ensuring that assurances are given that quality will not be harmed as a result. The same approach may be applied when approaching new customers in the Netherlands, however communications may pay less attention to the calculated nature of risks taken to ensure innovation. Communicating Biosisto's innovative abilities to the German market is discouraged.
- Although Biosisto's historical connections to the NVWA are an indicator of the quality of its products to Dutch customers, seeing as historical connections are not perceived as relevant in Germany and Belgium, and are not necessarily perceived as evidence of quality, it is suggested that Biosisto avoids designing a communication strategy based on the name of the NVWA when entering Belgium and Germany. Particularly in the Netherlands Biosisto's connection to the NVWA has potential to undermine its own customer focus.
- It is advised that Biosisto's corporate communications magnify current operations - including currently available products and services, explanation(s) of current production processes , introduction new staff member(s) - and future plans - concerning the development of new products and services - aimed at existing and potential customers in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, with an emphasis on the company's long-term plans.
- It is recommended that Biosisto does not spend effort emphasising its connection to the Dutch industry when approaching the German market, due to German laboratories' general lack of experience with/knowledge of the Dutch microbiology industry. Biosisto's connection to the NVWA and the Dutch industry are no guarantee of quality from the perspective of the German market, and thus therefore irrelevant to communicating reputation.

- It is recommended that Biosisto continues to conduct itself as a partner with existing and potential customers across all target groups, actively keeping customers updated on developments at the company, ensuring two-way communication between customer and provider is facilitated through, primarily, personal forms of contact. The corporate website may be updated to implement recommendations.

To operationalise the above recommendations it is advised that Biosisto implements a quarterly newsletter to be sent to existing and potential customers via email. The proposed newsletter enables Biosisto to update existing and potential customers on current and future developments at the organisation. The newsletter assures readers of the high quality and reliability of Biosisto's products and services through the addition of a customer testimony. An employee story may also be included to ensure readers that developments at Biosisto are contributing to high quality and reliability. A survey may be attached to the newsletter allowing recipients to have input into Biosisto's products and services, embodying customer focus and the partner-oriented relationship Biosisto maintains with customers. Furthermore, it is advisable for Biosisto to add the mission statement, "Biosisto is dedicated to the improvement of the quality of our partners' products, providing reference materials for now and for the future", and vision statement, "“Together with its partners, Biosisto has a responsibility to enhance the quality of microbiological analyses across the world, simplifying processes for all laboratories, improving the safety of consumer and non-consumer products for all”, representing the organisation's dedication to quality, to present- and future-orientation, and to partnerships with customers. To account for cultural differences with Germany, Biosisto may implement a German-spoken option on its website, highlighting innovation and customer focus to a lesser extent than on its English and Dutch-spoken website.

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Chapter 1, Project Context

Founded in January, 2016, Biosisto is a microbiological reference material provider, providing microbiological laboratories throughout the Netherlands, and miscellaneous other countries, with its products. Five months into its operations, Biosisto has an estimate of 50 customers in the Netherlands, with a small number of customers in countries including Belgium, Germany, and Estonia. Biosisto's staff, operations and accreditation previously belonged to the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA). The NVWA was for years the sole provider of Microbiological Reference Materials on the Dutch microbiology market, with a strong reputation in the Netherlands. Due to government cuts the NVWA was no longer capable of producing reference materials at the low costs and high quality which they were renowned for. A group of NVWA staff was granted the government agency's licensing, accreditation and equipment, resulting in the founding of Biosisto.

Wanting to more actively approach countries outside of the Netherlands, Biosisto faces the problem of not knowing how potential foreign customers should be approached. In the Netherlands Biosisto is a favoured provider of reference materials among customers. With existing customers placing trust in, and relying on Biosisto, it can be stated that the organisation has a good reputation on the Dutch market. This is to a large extent dependent on customers' past experiences with the NVWA.

So far, when approaching now existing customers, Biosisto has been reliant on Dutch laboratories' knowledge of and experiences with the NVWA, and the fact that it is known to the market that familiar previous NVWA staff are now active at Biosisto. Since the inception of Biosisto customers have been satisfied with products and services, while indicating that they perceive Biosisto as an entity separate from the NVWA with its own unique qualities.

Prior to this research project Biosisto did not yet know which organisational attributes shape its reputation, nor does the organisation yet have experience in communicating reputation to markets largely unaware of the NVWA, with which Biosisto has little to no experience. Biosisto currently conducts itself as a partner with existing customers, engaging in active two-way communication. So far this has been experienced as favourable by a number of customers, but research must indicate to what extent this has contributed to Biosisto's reputation.

International customers from Germany, Belgium and Estonia have approached Biosisto. This however represents a very small percentage of potential customers. Without actively approaching foreign

markets Biosisto is leaving a large market untapped. Biosisto currently has no strategy in place to communicate its reputation and stand out characteristics to International markets.

Biosisto conducts much of its business on a face-to-face, personal-oriented level, with no commercial marketing schemes in place. Further abroad Biosisto does not plan on engaging in elaborate, costly marketing methods.

Before approaching foreign markets Biosisto must know which organisational attributes and values are specifically valued by existing customers. Simultaneously Biosisto needs to establish which organisational values and attributes are valued most by foreign markets, assessing whether this is consistent with what existing customers say of Biosisto's reputation. Uncovering how Biosisto's characteristics must be communicated to foreign markets, based on potential customers' wants and needs is a further priority of research. This includes, based on existing customers' perception of Biosisto's partner-oriented approach, analysing whether or not potential customers show preference towards a similar approach. Cultural aspects also play a large part in entering the European market, affecting foreign markets' perceptions of organisational attributes and values and in what way these are communicated.

Currently, Biosisto sees most opportunity in Belgium and Germany, due to the close proximity of these countries to the Netherlands.

Chapter 2, Organisational Context

Company

Almost six months since the inception of the organisation, Biosisto's operations formerly belonged to a section of the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA). In 2015 the NVWA decided it could no longer finance production of reference materials, providing Biosisto with the licensing to continue operations.

Biosisto has managed to gain an estimate of 50 previous NVWA customers. By taking over accreditation, production methods and staff, customers were keen to continue purchasing reference material products from Biosisto. Biosisto has had to increase pricing of its products, worrying that this might deter previous NVWA customers from seeking their services. Despite these increases, the organisation has started off better than envisioned.

The organisation has clear objectives for what it wants to achieve in the future. Biosisto aims to increase its dominance on the reference materials market by expanding sales into Europe. In the meantime, Biosisto plans on developing new and unique reference materials, potentially providing the company with a more advanced competitive advantage.

Biosisto sees an ever growing demand for high quality, more advanced reference materials on the targeted markets. Biosisto envisions becoming the leading authority on reference materials and first line controls. According to their mission, this will be achieved as a result of the production of certified microbiological reference materials, constantly improving quality and adhering to customer demands.

Market

Biosisto faces competition from a number of other reference material providers active on the European market. Significant competitors consist of Public Health England (HPA), Biotraining, Bioballs, Sigma Aldrich, and Microbiologics. The majority of competitors have a more established presence in countries outside of the Netherlands. Biosisto's prices however are considerably lower than those of competitors, while a number of competitors lack an online presence.

An overview of other, less significant competitors can be found in Appendix 1.1.

Communication

Promotion on the market is heavily based on business-to-business communications. Biosisto's current corporate communications revolve around its connection to the NVWA, and the fact that previous NVWA staff are employed by Biosisto to deliver the high quality, long-lasting products which customers are accustomed to. Biosisto perceives itself as a partner to customers and therefore engages in two-way flows of communication. Biosisto seeks to maintain frequent contact with all customers, listening to any feedback which is received.

Product

Biosisto develops and distributes certified microbiological single, multi-strain, matrix, and custom-made reference materials. Biosisto's products are accredited by the Dutch Accreditation Council (RvA), produced according to ISO Guide 34 requirements. Dutch laboratories other than the NVWA have so far shied away from dedicating their entire production capacity to the production of reference materials. This is due to the NVWA's dominance and the fact that the production of reference materials is highly time consuming and can be costly. It is also challenging for reference material producers to achieve accreditation. Biosisto is in a favourable position to produce reference

materials, thanks to the takeover of NVWA equipment, products and accreditation, cutting costs and saving time as a result of not having to undergo the accreditation process. The delivery of reference materials can also be expensive. The costs of which is for customers, indicating why Dutch laboratories opt to purchase from a domestic provider; Biosisto is the only provider of reference materials in the Netherlands. Without accreditation of reference materials it becomes extremely challenging to sell products. Accreditation is highly valued and has provided Biosisto with a favourable position from which to start selling products.

Target Group

Biosisto's products are appropriate for almost all laboratories which carry out microbiological analyses of consumer and non-consumer products. Biosisto is specifically looking to target laboratories in Belgium and Germany. Biosisto is currently reliant on small-scale means of transportation for product delivery, as products must be kept at -80 degrees Celsius. The above mentioned targeted countries are in range of Biosisto's transportation efforts; the organisation does not yet have the capacity to transport products over longer distances. Focusing on countries which cannot be delivered to as of yet seems unreasonable to the client.

Chapter 3, Theoretical Framework

This research proposes a diagnosis of corporate communication elements which are relevant to successfully communicating Biosisto's existing reputation to potential customers in Germany and Belgium. The following presents three areas, – Corporate Communication and Reputation, Intercultural Communication, Direction of Communication - subsequent theories and concepts which will contribute to the diagnosis.

Corporate Communication and Reputation

Corporate Identity and Image

Schultz, Hatch and Larsen (2002) argue that behaviour supporting an organisation's corporate reputation must be deeply embedded in corporate identity. Borgerson, Schroeder, Magnusson and Magnusson (2009) state that "corporate identity rests in an organization's distinctive attributes and core values" (p. 209). To effectively manage corporate identity Biosisto must decide on specific values and organisational characteristics which are communicated to the target group, while also defining how they are transmitted. Highlighting Schultz, Hatch and Larsen's literature, this may form the foundations of how Biosisto communicates its existing reputation.

How Biosisto's corporate identity is communicated to potential customers will largely determine the company's corporate image, i.e. how the company is perceived from an external point of view. Corporate identity is oftentimes largely influenced by various external factors. Although Biosisto must consider external factors when shaping corporate identity in the future, such factors are not subject to proposed research

According to Fog et. al (2010) an effective way to communicate organisational attributes and values is through the use of a living core story, in other words by utilising corporate storytelling. Those exposed to an organisation's core story are more likely to perceive organisational attributes as interconnected, shaping a stronger, coherent corporate image. In order to achieve this Dowling (2006) suggests a storytelling method linked to reputation to establish corporate image. Dowling is a strong advocate for the vitality of storytelling when attempting to communicate corporate reputation, a significant variable within corporate identity. From mission and vision, to an annual report, to visual representations, companies can utilise stories to make reputation- and identity-related statements come across as more authentic and memorable, inspiring increased devotion amongst stakeholders. Mission and Vision statements are especially useful to represent an organisation's organisational attributes and values in a clear and succinct manner.

Too much focus on past achievements and historical connections gives stakeholders the impression the company is no longer performing to the same level as before. Overemphasising the present can seem boring to stakeholders, whilst placing too strong a spotlight on the future may be perceived as overambitious and unrealistic. Any corporate story should evenly look at "yesterday, today and tomorrow" (Dowling, G, 2006). In Biosisto's case the design of a corporate story may be reliant on Biosisto's historical connections to the NVWA and whether or not this is perceived as favourable or not by the target group.

Corporate Reputation

According to Fombrun and Gardberg (2002) "a corporate reputation is a collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders" (p. 304).

Although the NVWA's status contributes to Biosisto's reputation in the Netherlands, Biosisto may not be able to remain reliant on its connection to the former reference materials producer to yield customers abroad. Mahon, J and Mitnick, B (2010) examine how reputation is shifted and modified. A key strategy mentioned by the authors is the adoption of a former company's reputation as part of

a takeover or merger. In the Netherlands Biosisto has built reputation by adopting aspects of the NVWA's previous reputation. Doing so may be less effective on the European market if awareness of the former government agency is not widespread outside of the Dutch market and international customers which have approached Biosisto previously. Furthermore, from a cultural perspective, not all targeted markets may value historical connections, in which case Biosisto may choose to portray its reputation in a different light.

Intercultural Communication

Cultural values of potential customers in Germany and Belgium may play a big part in whether any communication strategy by Biosisto succeeds, dependent on cultural differences compared to the company's domestic market. Hofstede, G (2016) proposes dimensions which reflect core cultural values in any country, which can be applied to both personal and professional life. Cultures in which the dimension defined as 'Uncertainty Avoidance' is prominent tend to be risk averse, placing much importance in proven high quality products. An assessment of to what extent other Hofstede dimensions play a role in targeted countries may indicate how organisational attributes and values contributing to reputation are perceived. Dominant cultural dimensions, such as long-term or short-term orientation, in targeted countries may also indicate whether or not potential customers value historical connections from a cultural perspective. This may for example answer whether or not Biosisto should choose to base corporate communications on its connection to the NVWA.

Overall, as suggested by Rosenbloom, B and Larsen, T (2003), corporate communication and use of certain communication channels can be dependent on cultural differences between countries, and in this case markets. Future research proposes to diagnose cultural differences between Biosisto's domestic and targeted markets.

Direction of Communication

Fombrun and Rindova (Schultz, Hatch and Larsen, 2002) argue that corporate reputation relies on transparency. Literature by Van Belleghem (2012) supports transparency and direct engagement with external stakeholders, accentuating the influence of two-way flows of communication to assist reputation building efforts. Biosisto frequently engages in two-way communication with its customers, portraying itself as a partner to customers, rather than simply a vendor of products which engages in little to no follow-up communication. This has oftentimes been key to the company's success. Biosisto is however aware that not all customers may appreciate such an approach, rendering a one-way approach more effective. Whether potential customers rather perceive

companies such as Biosisto as partners or vendors may influence flows of communication and thus a future corporate communication strategy. Furthermore, the fact that Biosisto's customer base will develop further from home, two-way forms of communication may prove more costly and less effective. Research shall seek to determine target group preference and the effectiveness of two-way communication considering increasing physical distance. Overall, the preference of targeted markets concerning directions of communication may influence the appropriateness of communication channels. Research seeks to uncover which communication channels are most suited to the target group's favoured direction of communication.

Chapter 4, Research Objective

Proposed research shall embody a diagnosis of elements which Biosisto may include in a future corporate communication strategy. Biosisto is aware of a problem (potential international customers are not aware of the company's existing reputation among current Dutch, and a number of, international customers). First must be diagnosed which organisational attributes and values prominently shape Biosisto's reputation according to existing customers. Subsequently, it must be established which elements of the existing reputation, cultural values, and communication methods are relevant to the target group, to be included in a future corporate communication plan, leading to the following research objective (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010):

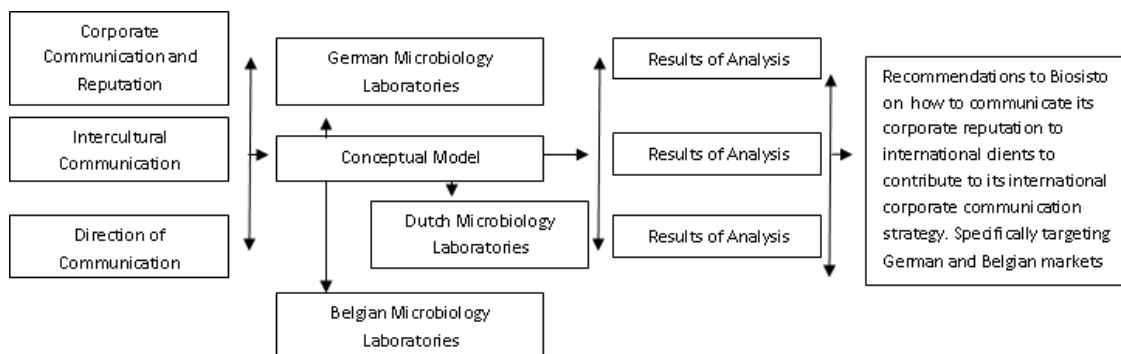
“(a) To recommend to Biosisto how to communicate its corporate reputation to international clients to contribute to an international corporate communication strategy, specifically targeting German and Belgian markets

Three research areas – Corporate Communication and Reputation, Intercultural Communication, Direction of Communication – will contribute to the external objective, leading to the internal objective:

“(b) by analysing existing customers' perception of Biosisto's reputation, the target group's preferences concerning organizational values and attributes, how these are presented through a corporate story, and whether historical connections are perceived as favourable, furthermore assessing favoured communication flows, while diagnosing differences between Biosisto's current and targeted markets' concerning uncertainty avoidance and long-term vs. short-term orientation and the effect differences may have on the target group's perception of Biosisto's reputation.”

Chapter 5, Research Framework

Research will focus on examining the preferences of research objects towards all three areas as can be seen below, reviewing important concepts derived from these areas. Research objects consist of Biosisto's potential customers in Germany and Belgium, and the company's Dutch clientele. How research objects will contribute to this research project can be found in Chapter 7, Research Strategy and Methodology section.



Model 1.1. Research Framework

Chapter 6, Research Questions

Research questions have been derived according to Verschuren and Doorewaard's (2010) 'unravelling key concepts' method. This led to the development of useful and steering central- and sub-questions as can be seen below.

Corporate Communication and Reputation

Central Question:

What aspects of corporate communication does the target group attribute importance to?

Sub Questions:

1. Which organisational values and attributes does Biosisto primarily represent, according to existing customers in the Netherlands?
2. Which organisational attributes and values do potential customers in Belgium and Germany prefer to see represented by reference material providers?

3. To translate corporate identity to a favourable corporate image, does the target group attribute most importance to a past-oriented, present-oriented, or future-oriented corporate story?

Intercultural Communication

Central Question:

Which of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions are prominent in the targeted countries?

Sub Questions:

1. To what extent is Uncertainty Avoidance prominent in the targeted markets?
2. To what extent is Long- term or Short-term orientation prominent in the targeted markets?

Direction of Communication

Central Question:

Which of either a vendor/one-way oriented or a partner/two-way oriented relationship is preferred amongst (potential) customers?

Sub Questions:

1. Which direction of communication is perceived as favourable or non-favourable by the target group?
2. Which communication channels are commonly used to facilitate preferred flows of communication on the reference materials market, according to potential and existing customers?

Chapter 7, Research Strategy and Methodology

Empirical research was conducted by observing and analysing the target group's attitudes and preferences, taking into account German and Belgian cultural elements, towards reputation and corporate communication and how Biosisto conducts itself on both fronts. Data has been gathered through a mixed methods approach, including a survey strategy and grounded theory approach to

gather quantitative data in breadth, and in-depth qualitative data through semi-structured interviews.

A survey strategy was initially employed allowing for breadth of quantitative data to establish a foundation of views of potential customers in Germany and Belgium towards portrayal of reputation through corporate communication and preferred flows of communication. Survey results also confirm what current customers think of Biosisto, in relation to corporate reputation and overall corporate communications. Utilising a grounded theory approach uncovered the views of the research objects concerning corporate reputation and corporate communications in general and Biosisto's current approach to the two, helping gain a deeper understanding of previously gathered quantitative data, underlining the difference in views between potential German and Belgian customers, and existing Dutch customers. The use of both strategies revealed gaps and consistencies between Biosisto's portrayal of reputation through corporate communication, and the demands and cultural perspectives of existing and potential customers. Findings have been continuously compared to already existing observations and theories related to the context of this research, embodying a secondary theoretical comparison.

The results section found below presents the results of research conducted among three research objects: Potential customers in Germany, potential customers in Belgium, and existing customers in the Netherlands. Data has been gathered as the result of a distribution of surveys among all research objects to establish a foundation of quantitative data regarding sub question 1.1, 1.2., 1.3, 3.1. and 3.2. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted with all research objects to gather qualitative data based on quantitative data concerning sub questions 1.1, 1.2., 1.3, 3.1. and 3.2., allowing for a more in-depth analysis of issues regarding these sub questions. Sub Questions 2.1. and 2.2. were the only questions answered through in-depth interviews which were not subject to a survey strategy.

Interview participants include Ferry Pronk of TLR International, and Klaas Bosma of Frisia Foods; both existing Biosisto customers from the Netherlands. Ann Verbeke of Lavetan and Dr. Jef de Smedt of Microsmedt were interviewed to gather in-depth data concerning the Belgian microbiological reference material market. The sole German interview candidate was Kerstin Lerch of IBEN laboratories.

The first interviewee, Ferry Pronk, is manager at TLR International's microbiology and microscopy laboratory in Rotterdam, covering the Food & Feed industry. TLR is one of the first commercial laboratories to have been granted so-called STERLAB accreditation by the Dutch government's

accreditation council. Previously one of the NVWA's largest customers, in January, 2016, TLR quickly made the decision to continue purchasing microbiological reference materials from Biosisto.

The second of Biosisto's existing customer to be interviewed was Klaas Bosma, head analyst at Frisia Food Group B.V., located in Haulerwijk. With 60 years of experience on the market, Frisia Foods is one of the largest poultry suppliers in the Netherlands, with customers from across the world, including from Europe, Russia and Asia. Biosisto, as Frisia Foods' sole supplier of microbiological reference materials, enjoys a strong relationship with the organisation. Frisia Foods is one of a number of customers which are taking part in the testing phase of new products, including Biosisto new Shewhart control chart.

The first of two Belgian laboratories to be interviewed was Dr. Jef de Smedt, of Microsmedt, based in Herentals. Having previously purchased a number of products from the NVWA, Dr. De Smedt was identified as a potential customer by Biosisto. It is important to note that Microsmedt has been in contact with Biosisto in the past, and therefore is aware of its product. Active in the food safety industry Microsmedt is a relatively small organisation, employing a total of 15 individuals. Despite its small scale Microsmedt conducts microbiological analyses of foods and water for a wide range of Belgian customers. With 15 years of experience in the microbiology industry Dr. De Smedt is well-known on the international microbiology stage for his quick methods to detect salmonella.

The second Belgian interviewee, Ann Verbeke, having worked for the company for 15 years, is scientific manager at Lavetan. Influential on the Belgian market, an independent, ISO17025 accredited laboratory, Lavetan is specialised in quality controls within the food, industrial animal production, and pharmaceutical industries. In contrast to Microsmedt, Lavetan is a very large laboratory of a highly commercialised nature.

German interviewee, Kerstin Lerch, of IBEN laboratories, based in Bremerhaven, Germany, is technical manager of the German laboratory's microbiology department. Active in the industry for 30 years, IBEN is focused on quality controls of food products and environmental samples. IBEN quality controls primarily concern fish meant for human consumption. IBEN also assists its customers in achieving certification according to the IFS-Food-Standard and HACCP Certification. IBEN is accredited by the German council of accreditation (DAkkS: Deutsche Akkreditierungsstelle), and the international accreditation council, ILAC.

Interviews were based on the interviewees' responses to distributed surveys, to gain a deeper understanding of their survey responses. Surveys were focused on gathering quantitative insights into the 'Corporate Communication and Reputation' and 'Direction of Communication' areas, whilst

interviews allowed for a qualitative, in-depth analysis of topics introduced in these same areas, including the area 'Intercultural Communication'. Both data collection strategies allowed the researcher to first establish what current customers think of Biosisto, comparing this data to the wants and needs of potential foreign customers, accounting for cultural differences which became apparent through the interview and survey results. This allows for a clear idea of how Biosisto's current communication activities are perceived by current customers, allowing research to test whether these perceptions would also hold true for the foreign target groups, and dependent on this, how communication activities need to change to adhere to the target group's wants and needs. Additionally, seeing as potential customers in Belgium and Germany were asked the exact same questions through surveys, and almost identical question during interviews, an easy comparison can be made between the German and Belgian market. 20 surveys responses were expected per target group. A total of 22 survey responses was received. 13 of which from existing customers in the Netherlands, 9 from potential customers in Germany, and 2 from potential customers in Belgium. All surveys were distributed in English and can be found, together with survey results, in appendix 3. Results are presented according to each research area, and the research questions which belong to these areas.

Overall, research objects were subject to highly similar interview and survey questions to ensure consistency among the research results, reinforcing reliability. Despite the underwhelming response to surveys, validity was enhanced by attempting to conduct at least two interviews per target group.

Limitations to Research

An underwhelming response to surveys undermined the breadth of research. As a result, an active choice was made to gather data enhancing the depth of the research, in order to ensure validity.

Research was conducted in four weeks, a short time for a project of this size. However, the consultant does not believe that the quality of this report has been largely affected by a lack of time. Due to full cooperation from the client organisation, the consultant was able to gather a sufficient amount of data within this limited time. Additional time would have allowed the consultant to conduct more interviews with each target group.

Although the client organisation showed full commitment to collecting data, the amount of survey responses remains underwhelming. The survey was distributed amongst an estimate of 200 German microbiology laboratories. A number of which were contacted personally, both in German and English. Frequent reminders were sent to potential customers. A total of 9 respondents is not entirely satisfactory, however Biosisto feels that this number is a realistic reflection of the amount of

customers it may gain in Germany in the coming months. The same limitation holds true for the Belgian market. Over 50 Belgian laboratories were contacted to take part in the survey and a subsequent interview. Only two potential Belgian customers responded to this request, also despite frequent reminders and an attempt to establish personal contact. It must be noted that Biosisto representatives themselves oftentimes sent the surveys to potential and existing customers hoping their names would encourage more recipients to respond. Overall, Biosisto provided the consultant with a large list of microbiology laboratories to send surveys to, whilst contacts from their time at the NVWA were contacted in a more personal manner, by both the consultant and company representatives.

Concerning data gathered through interviews, interviewees always consisted of head laboratory managers at each respective company, whilst all interviews were conducted in person. Therefore, their answers to the surveys and interviews are largely representative of the organisations they speak for. However, of course it must be taken into consideration that answers may somewhat be based on personal opinions, allowing for some level of bias. As for the German market, two interviewees cancelled interviews at the last minute, meaning that only one interview with this target group could be conducted by the deadline.

Chapter 8, Research Results

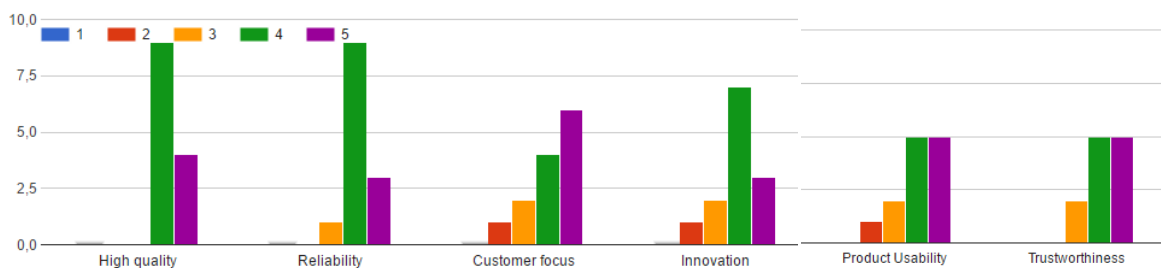
Area 1: Corporate Communication and Reputation

Central Question: What aspects of corporate communication does the target group attribute importance to?

Subquestion 1.1. Which organisational values and attributes does Biosisto primarily represent, according to existing customers in the Netherlands?

To answer the research question existing customers were asked to grade a number of listed organisational values, which have been deemed most relevant to Biosisto's operations. Listed organisational values were: high quality, reliability, customer focus, innovation, product usability, and trustworthiness. Survey respondents whom were subject to an interview were asked to elaborate on their answers.

As can be seen in Graph 1 (Appendix 3.1., Graph 1) the majority of Biosisto's existing customers which responded to the survey (13 respondents) agree that Biosisto represents high quality and reliability over other organisational values. Most respondents are unanimous that Biosisto also represents a relatively high degree of customer focus, innovation, product usability and trustworthiness. These values however received a number of lower ratings from existing customers. No survey respondents added any organisational values which were not already listed as options.



Graph 1. Organisational Values Represented by Biosisto according to Existing Customer in the Netherlands (On a scale of 1 to 5: 1=not represented, 5= strongly represented)

Upon asking interview candidates to comment on their individual survey responses and the overall consensus as presented in Graph 1, it became apparent that existing customers indeed predominantly associate Biosisto with high quality and reliability.

According to Frisia Foods, Biosisto is a customer focused organisation, which has notable innovative abilities. Bosma of Frisia Foods states that his laboratory is aware of Biosisto's innovation and customer focus due to his involvement with the development of a new product soon to be launched by Biosisto. Consistent with survey results, Frisia Foods is not necessarily of the opinion that customer focus and innovation is represented through Biosisto's general corporate communication efforts.

Pronk, of TLR International confirms that his laboratory affiliates Biosisto with high quality and reliability. According to Pronk, this is partially the result of Biosisto's connection to the NVWA.

Existing customers agree that the NVWA lacked in its customer focus, negatively affecting the experience of purchasing reference materials from the Dutch governmental agency. Existing customers agree that, so far, Biosisto has done much to tackle this image by exhibiting increased customer focus.

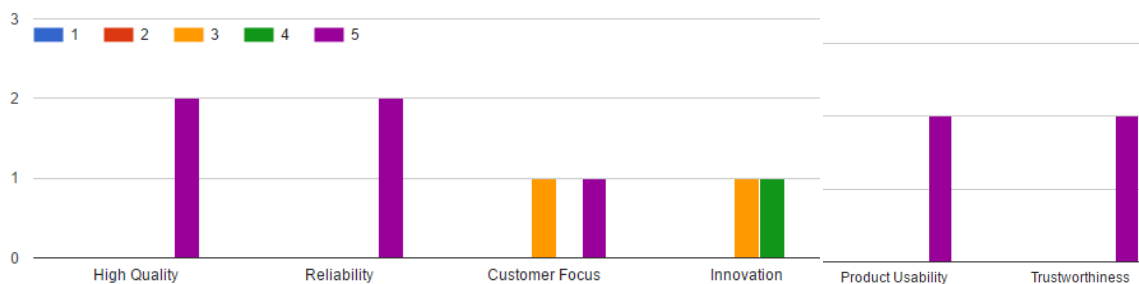
To answer Subquestion 1.1., existing customers are unanimous that Biosisto represents high quality and reliability through its corporate communication. A number of customers are aware of Biosisto's innovative abilities and customer focus through active cooperation with the organisation, however apparently these organisational values/attributes are not sufficiently represented through Biosisto's general communication activities.

Subquestion 1.2. Which organisational attributes and values do potential customers in Belgium and Germany prefer to see represented by reference material providers?

Similar to quantitative data presented in Subquestion 1.1., as can be seen in Graph 8 below potential customers from Belgium and Germany were asked to rate predetermined organisational values on a scale of 1 to 5, according to how important certain values and organisational attributes are for reference material providers to represent through their corporate communications.

Belgium

Belgian survey responses (Appendix 3.2. Graph 8) reflect the importance that is attributed to high quality, reliability, product usability, and trustworthiness on the Belgian market. Customer focus and innovation are still deemed as important by the Belgian target group, although noticeably less so than other values/attributes.

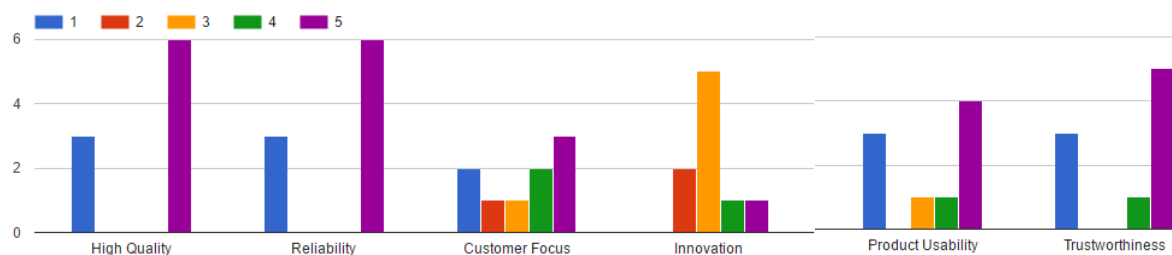


Graph 8. Potential Belgian customers' preferences concerning organisational values represented by reference material providers (on a scale of 1 to 5: 1=not important, 5=very important)

Consistent with the overall quantitative consensus, interview respondents agree that Belgian microbiology laboratories prioritise quality-related values over customer focus and innovation when selecting which reference material provider to purchase from. According to Ann Verbeke, Technical Manager at Lavetan, her laboratory simply will not purchase products from a reference material provider which does not guarantee high quality through its communications. In Lavetan's perspective a provider's tendency towards innovation is only perceived as favourable if the provider can guarantee that any risks taken to ensure innovation are subject to strict calculations, and there is no chance of quality suffering. An interview with De Smedt, confirms that Microsmedt holds the same perspective. In Microsmedt's case quality always has priority over innovation. Somewhat contrasting with survey results, qualitative data suggests that the Belgian market does look for providers which can assure customer focus. Both Microsmedt and Lavetan note that it is important to them that reference material providers engage in active cooperation with their customers, allowing for an environment in which customer input is welcomed.

Germany

Similar to survey results from Belgium, Graph 18 (Appendix 3.3.), represents the German market's lenience towards corporate communications which embody High Quality, Reliability, and Trustworthiness, over values/attributes such as Innovation, Customer Focus, and Product Usability. Customer focus and Innovation received particularly low ratings, with the majority of respondents rating both with a 3 or lower



Graph 18. Potential German customers' preferences concerning organisational values represented by reference material providers (on a scale of 1 to 5: 1=not important, 5=very important)

An interview with Kerstin Lerch of IBEN laboratories leads to comparable data. IBEN rates High Quality, Reliability and Product Usability as very important. Elaborating on IBEN's survey response, the laboratory's technical manager of microbiology, Kerstin Lerch, states that IBEN does not attribute great value towards innovation, as innovation has potential to undermine quality, and leads to uncalculated risks which obstruct a provider's reliability. Although IBEN attempts to represent customer focus to its own customers, it does not necessarily desire to see this organisational value/attribute represented by reference material providers. According to Lerch, the German market on the whole holds a negative connotation towards innovation. Among German microbiology laboratories innovation is associated with uncalculated risks, which lead to more negative than favourable outcomes. Customer focus is also oftentimes perceived as time consuming by German laboratories, potentially decreasing quality and the reliability of products.

Generally, Belgian and German laboratories are similar in their perceptions of the favourability of organisational values. High quality and reliability must take up a prominent position in a reference material provider's corporate communications. According to both markets innovation has potential to inhibit quality and reliability, however data suggests that the Belgian market is more open to innovation than the German market. The largest contrast between both markets is reflected in perceptions towards customer focus, with Belgian laboratories rating customer focus as relatively important, compared to German laboratories' perception of customer focus as an inhibitor of quality.

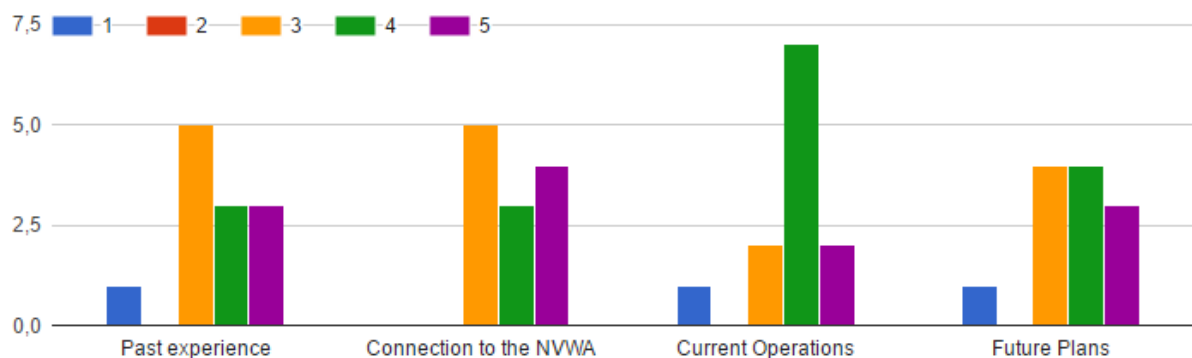
Subquestion 1.3. To translate corporate identity to a favourable corporate image, does the target group attribute most importance to a past-oriented, present-oriented, or future-oriented corporate story?

To ensure Biosisto presents its (potential) customers with a corporate story which is consistent with the preferences of targeted markets, research initially sought to confirm what current Biosisto customers think of the laboratory's corporate story at this moment in time. Consistent with

Dowling's theory (2006) that an organisation's storytelling methods should equally present an organisation's past, present, and future, existing customers were asked to state whether Biosisto primarily represents its past experiences, historical connections, present operations, or future plans through corporate communication. Based on this data, gathered through surveys and interviews, potential customers have been asked to evaluate whether a corporate story based on past experience, historical connections, present operations, or future plans is favoured most from their laboratory's perspective. Ultimately, the strategy to gather data from existing customers, to establish the perception of Biosisto's current corporate story, and from potential customers, establishing what is desired by the target group, allows for a clear overview of how Biosisto's current corporate story must change or remain the same to accommodate the wants and needs of Belgian and German laboratories.

The Netherlands/Existing Customers

According to existing customer in the Netherlands, as can be seen in Graph 2 (Appendix 3.1.) Biosisto's corporate communications represent a relatively equal corporate story, with all four aspects receiving relatively similar ratings. One may say that Current Operations is most prominently represented through Biosisto's corporate communications, however it must be noted that this particular aspect received the least amount of 5s (=strongly represented), while other values received a more equal evaluation from 3 (=neutral) to 5 (=strongly represented).



Graph 2. Netherlands-based Existing Customers' perception of Biosisto's Corporate Story (Based on a scale of 1 to 5: 1=not represented, 5=strongly represented)

Qualitative data suggests that existing customers are well aware of Biosisto's connection to the NVWA. According to Bosma, Frisia Foods was highly content with the quality of the NVWA's products at the time. He adds that Biosisto has done well to communicate that quality standards have remained the same thanks to the adoption of NVWA staff and equipment. Similar to Frisia Foods, TLR

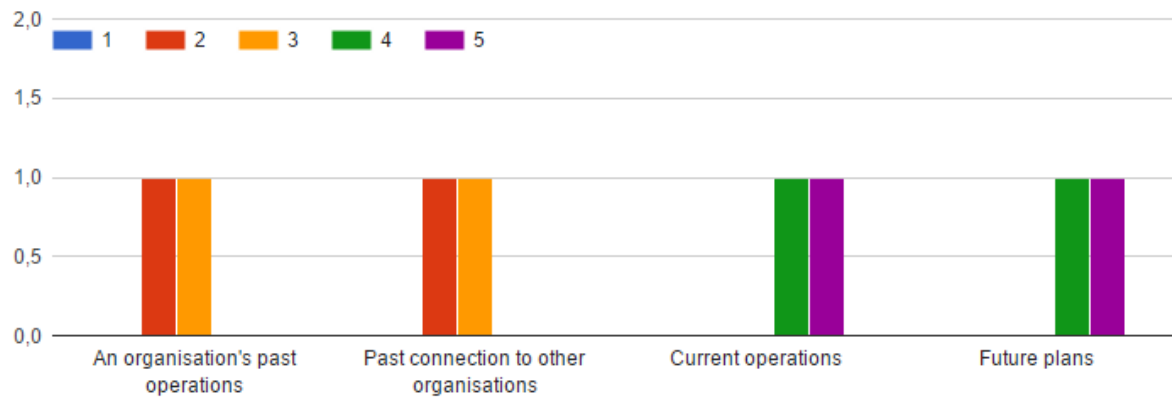
International trusts Biosisto's products due to the NVWA connection and how this has been represented through Biosisto's communications. TLR however still largely perceives Biosisto as part of the NVWA, rather than a separate organisation. According to Bosma, Frisia Foods is well aware that Biosisto is a complete different company than the NVWA. Further interviews should show whether Biosisto is perceived as a standalone organisation, or as a part of the NVWA by existing customers. Although both interviewees stated in the survey that current operations and future plans are well represented by Biosisto, both Bosma and Pronk add that their laboratories remain relatively unaware of Biosisto's current production processes, new staff, and the development of future products and services. According to existing customers, Biosisto's innovative abilities specifically are not sufficiently represented by its corporate story, as a result of the lack of portrayal of Biosisto's future plans.

Although quantitative data would suggest that Biosisto sufficiently communicates its current operations and future plans, based on qualitative data it can be argued that Biosisto's current corporate story has too much focus on the laboratory's connection to the NVWA, potentially obstructing Biosisto's attempts to communicate certain organisational values and attributes.

Similar to the survey distributed among existing customers, Belgian and German microbiology laboratories were asked through surveys to rate past experiences, historical connections, current operations, and future plans, based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=not important, 5= very important), according to what they look for in a reference material provider's corporate story. Survey results can be found in Graph 10 of Appendix 3.2. (Belgium) and Graph 20 of Appendix 3.3. (Germany)

Belgium

Survey responses from potential customers in Belgium reflect that more value is attributed to Current Operations, and Future Plans within a corporate story, than Historical Connections and Past Experiences, by the target group.

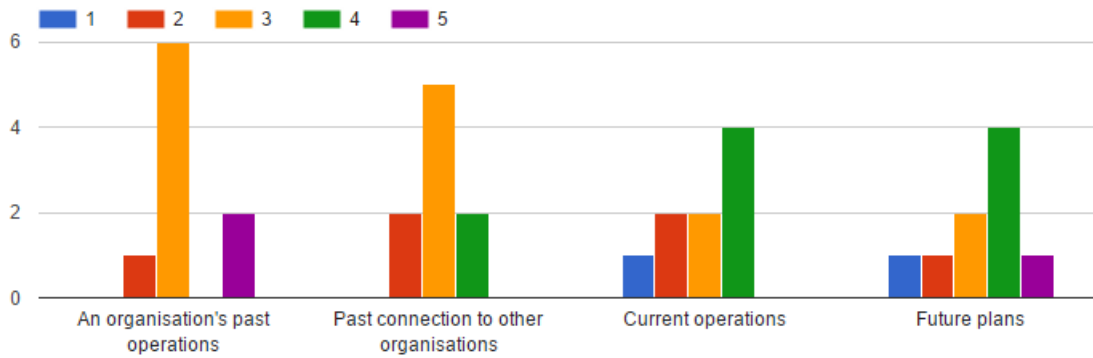


Graph 10. Potential Belgian Customers' preference concerning aspects of a provider's corporate story (Based on a scale of 1 to 5: 1=not important, 5=very important)

Consistent with the quantitative consensus, Verbeke states that an organisation's past can be an indicator of high quality, which is perceived as so important by the Belgian market, however, once a potential customer has been made aware of the provider's past, it is surplus to requirements to continue making the past a focal point within a corporate story. De Smedt at Microsmedt agrees that a clear representation of current operations and future plans must take precedent over the past and historical connections. According to both Verbeke and De Smedt, overall a portrayal of current production processes and currently available products and services is much more relevant to a potential customer in Belgium. Overall, the Belgian market admires the forward thinking mentality of foreign laboratories, due to the highly structured, somewhat old-fashioned nature of its domestic industry. Most important of all to the Belgian market, is that the high quality of *current* and potential *future* products is well illustrated by a provider's communications.

Germany

Survey responses from Germany, as can be seen in Graph 20 below, indicate that the target group places more trust in the communication of Current Operations and Future Plans, rather than an emphasis on Historical Connections and Past Experiences.



Graph 20. Potential German Customers' preference concerning aspects of a provider's corporate story (Based on a scale of 1 to 5: 1=not important, 5=very important)

Consistent with the overall consensus among German laboratories, Kerstin Lerch agrees that Current Operations and Future Plans must take precedent over communication surrounding a provider's past. According to Lerch, IBEN pays little attention to a reference provider's history. Lerch states that an organisation cannot change its past, and that historical connections, etc. therefore do not influence IBEN's decision where/whom to purchase products from. Reference material providers may introduce themselves to IBEN with an explanation of their past experiences, however, IBEN attributes much more value towards a corporate story focused on the present and future. Specifically, IBEN desires communication from its providers to explain which products and services are currently on offer, and to introduce developments to products and services well in advance. Overall, for the German market, historical connections and past experiences are not necessarily a guarantee of high quality, which is perceived as so important by the German target group. A clear representation of current operations and future plans have an increased potential to influence German laboratories' decision to purchase from organisations such as Biosisto, says Lerch.

The Belgian and German target groups show clear similarities in their preferences concerning the orientation of a corporate story. Although high quality and reliability are the most important organisational values for a provider to represent, according to German and Belgian laboratories, past experiences and historical connections are no guarantee that a provider can live up to such values. A clear representation of current operations and future plans has significant potential to influence Belgian and German laboratories' decision which provider to purchase products from. According to the Dutch market, Biosisto currently emphasises its past over the present and future. Based on collected qualitative and quantitative data this does not suit the preferences of the German and Belgian markets, while Dutch customers also show preference towards a corporate story based on Current Operations and Future Plans.

To answer the central question, as evidenced by an analysis of the corporate communications of the target group, surveys distributed among the target groups, and conducted interviews with members of the target group, qualitative and quantitative data reflect that Belgian, German, and Dutch target groups are most interested in a reference material provider's ability to provide high quality and reliability. Customer focus and innovation are also perceived as important values/organisational attributes for a provider to communicate, by Belgian laboratories. Belgian laboratories however, demand that any representation of innovation assures customers that no risks are being taken which may affect quality. In Germany, both customer focus and innovation are perceived as inhibitors to quality and reliability, reflecting the low level of importance which data suggests is attributed to these values in the country. Data collected among existing customers shows that Biosisto already represents high quality and reliability, more so than other values/attributes. Dutch customers add that Biosisto so far has not conveyed innovation and customer focus through its corporate communications. According to the target group, corporate communications should embody an orientation to a provider's current operations and future plans. Although, Biosisto currently somewhat evenly represents its past, present and future through its corporate communications according to existing customers' survey responses, qualitative data suggests that Biosisto's communications revolve around its connection to the NVWA more than is necessary and more than is desired by the German and Belgian markets.

Area 2: Intercultural Communication

Central Question: Which of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions are prominent in the targeted countries?

Proposed research set out to examine the difference between to what extent cultural dimensions defined by Hofstede (2016) as Uncertainty Avoidance and Long vs. Short Term Orientation differ between Biosisto's domestic market, the Belgian market, and the German market. To what extent these dimensions play a part in Dutch, German and Belgian culture and how this affects how microbiology laboratories in these countries prefer to be approached by providers of microbiological products, can be deduced from survey and interview responses concerning preferred organisational values and corporate story aspects.

Subquestion 2.1. To what extent is Uncertainty Avoidance prominent in the targeted markets?

The Netherlands/Existing Customers

Data collected concerning Dutch microbiology laboratories suggests that despite the value which is attributed to high quality in the Netherlands, existing customers desire that Biosisto represents more innovation-related values over values such as high quality, reliability, etc. suggesting a lower level of uncertainty avoidance in the country. Data suggests that Dutch microbiology laboratories in general oftentimes prioritise innovation when it comes to their own production processes and services.

Germany/Belgium

Research results suggest that both German and Belgian markets score high on uncertainty avoidance. Surveys responses, as can be seen in Appendix 3.2., Graph 8 (Belgium) and Appendix 3.3. Graph 18 (Germany) from Germany and Belgium both show that microbiology laboratories in these respective countries value high quality, reliability and trustworthiness over innovation. Upon questioning survey responses through interviews, it became apparent that exhibiting high quality, reliability and trustworthiness is important to ensure customers are sure that there no risks involved with purchasing products from a reference material provider. Verbeke and De Smedt specifically mention, that although innovation is admired, if the risk of innovation is not calculated, and there is even a small chance quality is inhibited as a result, their respective laboratories will certainly refrain from purchasing products. During interviews, both Verbeke and De Smedt add that overall, the Belgian microbiology market lacks in innovation. The Belgian industry is heavily structured and highly risk averse. Although Microsmedt and Lavetan tend to be keen to avoid risk, the interview candidates from the respective labs do not seem to agree with how risk averse and structured the overall Belgian market is. De Smedt notes specifically that the Dutch market is known for its less structured nature, and its higher impetus to encourage innovation. De Smedt confirms that he admires this quality, which is a reason for him to look for reference materials in the Netherlands. Verbeke explains that this is a reason why Lavetan looks to other countries for microbiological products.

Similar to Verbeke and De Smedt, and consistent with survey results, Lerch notes that IBEN, and the German market on the whole, prioritises high quality over innovation. Lerch confirms that overall IBEN is a highly risk averse organisation. No risks are taken by IBEN which may harm quality. Lerch confirms that the same holds true for the German market. The German microbiology industry is subject to a high level of control from the German government, to ensure German laboratories continue to achieve the highest possible quality of products. This has lead to an environment in which taking risks is very much discouraged and uncertainty avoidance is prominent.

Subquestion 2.2. To what extent is Long- term or Short-term orientation prominent in the targeted markets?

According to Hofstede (2016) long-term oriented cultures are more focused on the future and long-term investment, barely fixated on the past. Short-term oriented cultures emphasise the importance of historical connections, consistency and traditions. Data regarding the target groups' preference concerning corporate storytelling is a relevant indicator of whether the markets targeted by Biosisto adhere to a long- or short-term oriented culture.

The Netherlands/Existing Customers

In the Netherlands Microbiology laboratories show a tendency towards the long-term. Interviewees mention that they are more interested in a provider's future plans, rather than its history. Both TLR International and Frisia Foods express that reference material providers should prioritise the communication of future developments to products and services and the ongoing situation at the laboratory, rather than repeating the nature of the laboratory's background and former products and services. All in all, tradition and the past are deemed as irrelevant by the Dutch market. This suggests that the wants and needs of laboratories in the Netherlands are consistent with Long-term orientation.

Belgium

The Belgian market also advocates for an emphasis of current operations and future plans, rather than historical connections and past experiences. As can be seen under Subquestion 1.4. Belgian laboratories do place trust in past-oriented aspects of corporate storytelling, however interviewees make clear that it is more important for a reference material provider to communicate its current production processes and planned developments to future products and services. Upon being asked whether Belgian laboratories such as Lavetan are more focused on the long- or the short-term, Verbeke remarks that Lavetan always meets with laboratories, which it is looking to purchase products from, on a one to one basis to discuss a long-term plan detailing what cooperation between both parties will look like. De Smedt mentions that it is important that the laboratories Microsmedt buys from have a clear and succinct future plan which is well communicated. Overall, Belgian survey responses (Appendix 3.2. Graph 10) suggest that it is reasonable to conclude that the Belgian target group prefers forward thinking companies, while low value is attributed to tradition and the past.

Germany

German survey results (Appendix 3.3. Graph 20) suggest that a corporate story based on Biosisto's current operations and future plans is more appealing to the target group than an emphasis of its history and past experiences. Initially, this would suggest that the German market embodies a long-term orientation. Although not preferred by the target group, survey results in Graph 20 of 3.3.

would suggest that a representation of short-term orientation would receive a more favourable response in Germany, than in Belgium.

Consistent with survey results, Lerch of IBEN, confirms that her laboratory, and the German industry in general, attribute an increased level of value to communications with a focus of current operations and future plans. Lerch elaborates on this, stating that it is important to German laboratories such as IBEN that providers clearly communicate long-term plans concerning the development to products and services. According to Lerch, German laboratories see little to no point in consistently looking back at the past operations and historical connections of a provider; this is perceived as irrelevant to a cooperation between two parties.

Comparing gathered data to Hofstede's theory on the cultural dimension 'Long-term vs. Short-term orientation', similar to the Belgian microbiology industry, overall the German microbiology industry tends to embody a long-term orientation.

Overall, a provider's representation of aspects synonymous with short-term orientation does not influence a German, Belgian or Dutch microbiology laboratory's decision to purchase from a particular provider. Long-term oriented communication on the other hand would gain more traction in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, and has increased potential to sway laboratories in these markets to purchase from a provider which embodies communications of this nature.

Area 3. Direction of Communication

Central Question: Which of either a vendor/one-way oriented or a partner/two-way oriented relationship is preferred amongst (potential) customers?

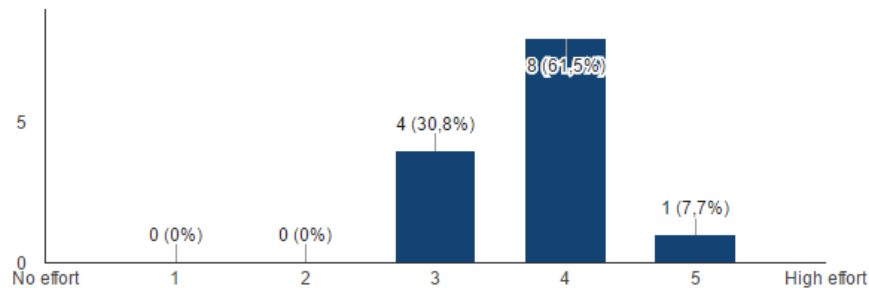
Subquestion 3.1. Which direction of communication is perceived as favourable or non-favourable by the target group?

To ascertain which direction of communication the target group shows preference towards, in line with Van Belleghem's (2012) 'Conversation Company' theory, research attempts to uncover whether potential customers prefer to conduct business with reference material providers such as Biosisto as a partner, implying a two-way oriented relationship with frequent follow-up contact, or as a vendor, entailing a more one-way oriented relationship with little to no follow-up contact.

The Netherlands/Existing Customers

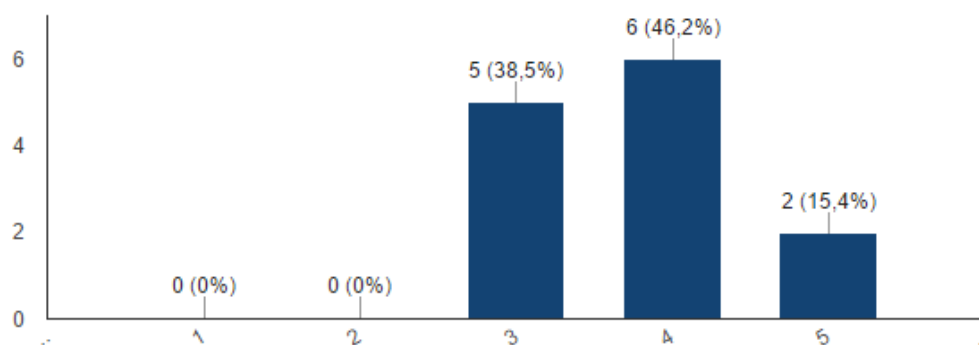
To first establish how current customers describe their relationship with Biosisto and whether this is perceived as favourable or not, surveys asked recipients to rate the amount of effort Biosisto puts

into remaining in contact with its customers. The results of which can be seen in Graph 5, below. The overall consensus among existing Dutch customers is that Biosisto puts a relative amount of effort into its contact with customers.



Graph 5. Existing Customers' perception of Biosisto's efforts to maintain in contact with customers (On a scale of 1 to 5: 1=No Effort, 5=High Effort)

To add to this data, as can be seen in Graph 6, survey recipients were asked to rate whether the level of effort Biosisto puts into communications is perceived as satisfactory or not.

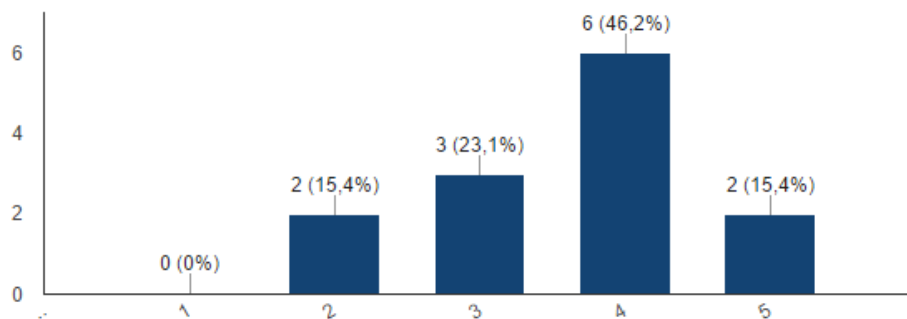


Graph 6. Existing Customers' satisfaction concerning frequency of communication with Biosisto (1=not satisfactory. 5=highly satisfactory)

On the whole, it can be stated that existing customers are currently satisfied with the frequency of communication with Biosisto. Graph 6 clearly represents that no existing customers are unsatisfied with Biosisto tendency to stay in frequent contact with customers.

To build on this, and to establish how existing customers define their relationship with Biosisto, dependent on the nature of communication between both parties, customers were asked to what extent they define Biosisto as a vendor or as a partner. As can be seen in Graph 7 below, the majority of respondents (61.6%) lean towards defining Biosisto as a partner rather than a vendor, once again reflecting the frequent interaction and high level of customer focus which Biosisto attempts to

embody through its daily operations. Only a small number of respondents claim to engage in essentially one-way communication with the laboratory.



Graph 7. Indicating whether existing customers perceive Biosisto as a vendor, or as a partner (1=vendor(no interaction, no customer focus) 5=partner(highly frequent interaction, high level of customer focus))

In-line with the above, qualitative data confirms that the Dutch market is positive about the level of contact which Biosisto maintains with its customers. The fact that Biosisto conducts itself as a partner with customers is also highly valued by existing customers. Due to Biosisto's practice of two-way communication, customers feel that there is room for them to have input into Biosisto's products and services. This is especially a welcome change to customers, compared to the communication activities of the NVWA. According to qualitative data the NVWA conducted itself as a vendor, ignoring the Dutch market's need to engage in follow-up contact with its providers. On the whole, Biosisto's tendency to engage in two-way communication with its customers is perceived as unique and favourable by the Dutch market.

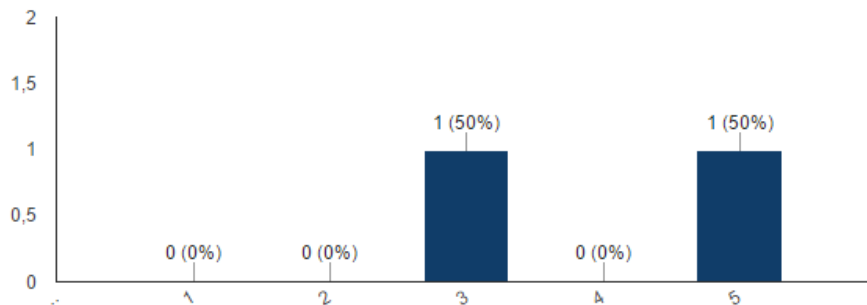
Asked to comment on quantitative data suggesting that Biosisto puts a relatively high amount of effort into its communications, interviewees suggest that more active communication concerning Biosisto's future products and services is welcome. TLR International in particular remarks that Biosisto does not always succeed in keeping customers updated about products which are soon to be launched. A consequence of this is that customers may look elsewhere for reference materials currently not available at Biosisto, but which the laboratory is looking to produce in coming weeks/months.

Belgium

Through surveys potential customers in Belgium were asked to rate their preferred frequency of communication with a reference material provider. Additionally, quantitative data indicates whether Belgian microbiology laboratories prefer a vendor-oriented or a partner-oriented relationship with

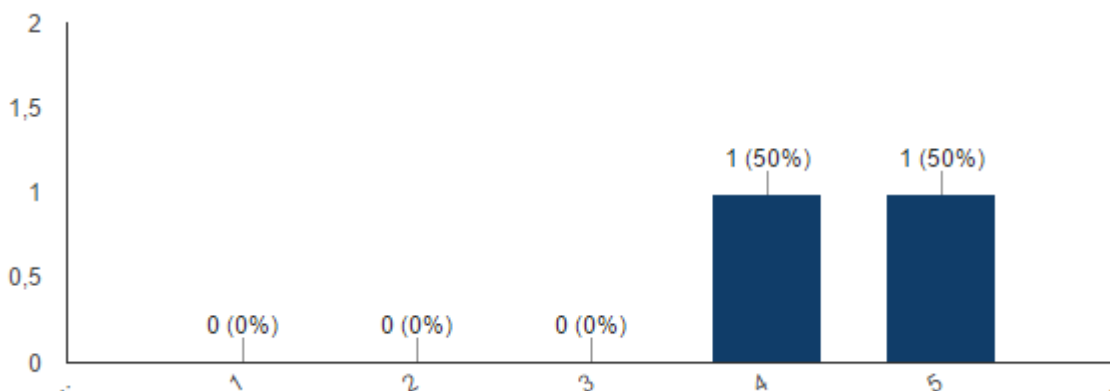
reference material providers. Interviewees were asked to build on trends which became evident through quantitative data.

Graph 15 proposes that the Belgian market is both neutral concerning frequency of communication, while survey responses also suggest that they prefer frequent communication with their providers.



Graph 15. Potential Belgian Customers' Preferred Frequency of Interaction with Microbiological Reference Material Providers (1=no contact. 5=highly frequent contact)

Graph 16 (as can be seen below) implies that the Belgian market prefers partner-oriented relationships with its providers, different from results in Graph 15, implying that Belgian laboratories do in fact show clear preference towards frequent communication with providers.



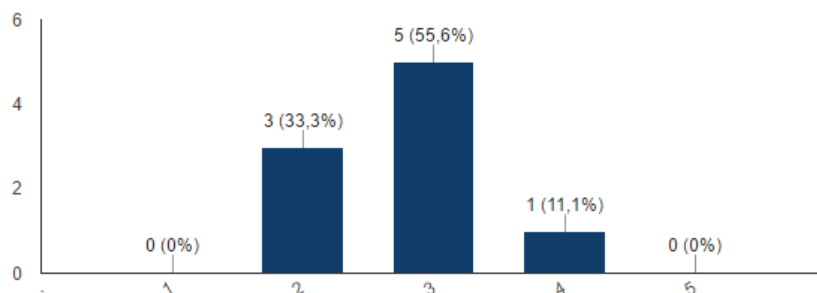
Graph 16. Potential Belgian Customers' Preferred Relationship with Microbiological Reference Material Providers (1=vendor(no interaction, no customer focus). 5=partner(highly frequent interaction, high level of customer focus))

Asked to build on the consensus, as can be seen in Graph 15 and Graph 16, it becomes apparent that Belgian laboratories indeed prefer frequent contact with their reference material providers. Lavetan's survey response suggests a neutrality when it comes to the laboratory's preferred frequency of communication (Appendix 3.2., Graph 15), however, Verbeke, technical manager at Lavetan, notes that her laboratory prefers active cooperation with its reference materials providers,

entailing relatively frequent communication between both parties. Both Microsmedt and Lavetan remark that their organisations expect to have relationships with providers which allow for active input concerning the development of products and services and that it is important to establish long-term collective plans. Overall, the Belgian market prefers a relationship in which there is room for active feedback, and in which the provider puts noticeable effort into keeping customers updated on developments to products and services, or whenever other changes or problems occur at the provider's laboratory. De Smedt adds that two-way communication between provider and customer allows for a more transparent relationship, which is also very much welcomed by Belgian laboratories. Qualitative data points out that potential customers in Belgium are against the tendencies of large, commercialised organisations to engage in one-way communication, as this undermines transparency and customer focus.

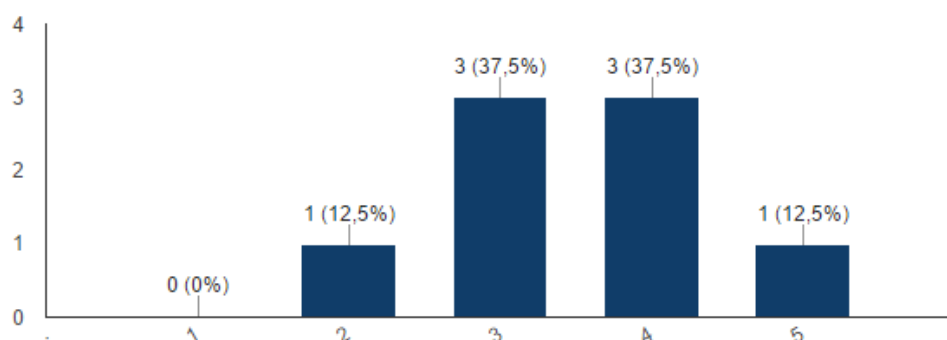
Germany

As can be seen below in Graph 25, 55.6% of German respondents rated preferred frequency of interaction with a reference material provider with a 3. This would suggest neutrality on the German market's behalf concerning whether or not providers put effort into maintaining two-way communication with their customers (Appendix 3.3., Graph 25).



Graph 25. Potential German Customers' Preferred Frequency of Interaction with Microbiological Reference Material Providers (1=no contact. 5=highly frequent contact)

Asked whether they prefer partner- or vendor-oriented relationships with their providers 37.5% of German respondents state to be neutral on which kind of relationship is more favourable. Another 37.5% of respondents show lenience towards a partner-oriented relationship. Only one respondent (12.5%) shows clear favour towards a partner-oriented relationship (Appendix 3.3. Graph 26.).



Graph 26. Potential German Customers' Preferred Relationship with Microbiological Reference Material Providers (1=vendor(no interaction, no customer focus). 5=partner(highly frequent interaction, high level of customer focus))

Overall, survey results suggest that although German laboratories do not necessarily desire to engage in frequent contact with a reference material providers, there does exist a inclination on the market towards partner-oriented relationships.

Representing IBEN, Lerch's survey results suggest that the microbiology laboratory opts for vendor-oriented relationships with its providers, wherein one-way flows of communication are prominent.

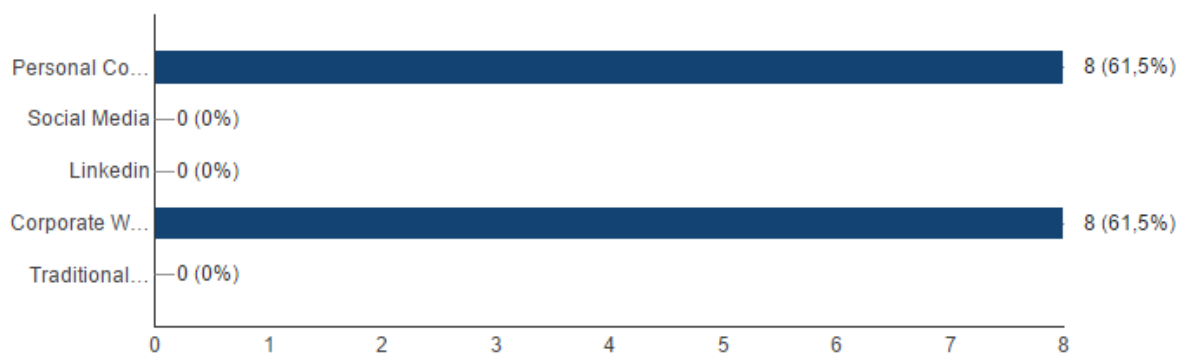
Elaborating on her survey response, Lerch states that IBEN attributes little to no importance in having input concerning the development of reference materials. Lerch states that, currently, the only communication which takes place between IBEN and a provider is correspondence to confirm the purchase of a certain product. Slightly contrasting with IBEN's preference towards one-way communication, and consistent with the apparent contradiction between Graph 25 and Graph 26 (Appendix 3.3.), Lerch adds that German laboratories look to establish partner-oriented relationships with their providers, to ensure these providers can be consistently relied on to deliver product which live up to high quality standards. Lerch indicates that laboratories such as IBEN are open to two-way flows of communication, stating that active communication from a provider, concerning the developments of new products and services is appreciated. IBEN remains insistent that two-way communication may not become time consuming, indicating that German laboratories only desire to be contacted by a reference material provider if an important message must be communicated.

To conclude, data suggests that partner-oriented relationships are appreciated across all analysed markets, however the Belgian market in particular attributes heightened importance to frequent contact with reference material providers. German laboratories also seemingly welcome frequent contact with providers, however less so than the Belgian market, with less need for input concerning product development, and as long as two-way communication does not become time consuming. According to the Dutch market Biosisto already conducts itself as a partner with customers, which is experienced as highly favourable, although customers sometimes feel left in the dark when it comes to the development of Biosisto's products and services.

Subquestion 3.2. Which communication channels are commonly used to facilitate preferred flows of communication on the reference materials market, according to potential and existing customers?

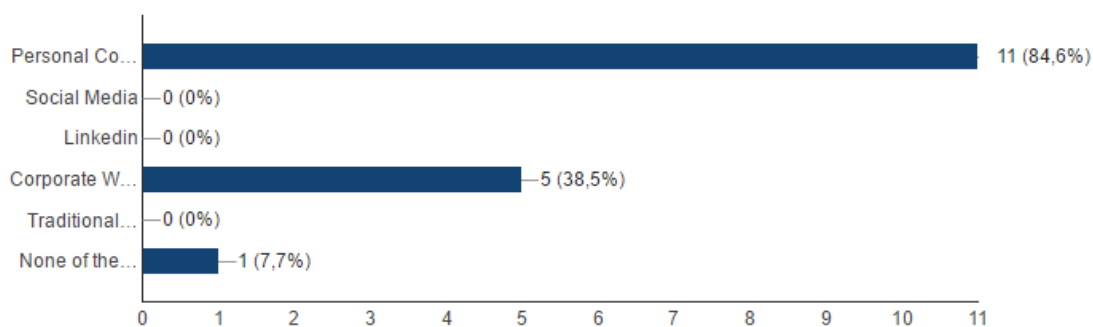
The Netherlands/Existing Customers

Existing customers were asked to select one or more communication channels through which they have been exposed to Biosisto so far. According to quantitative data, as can be seen below in Graph 3, Biosisto's existing customers have been predominantly exposed to the reference material provider through a combination of Personal Contact and the Corporate Website.



Graph 3. Channels through which Existing Customers in the Netherlands have been exposed to Biosisto

Asked which communication channels existing customers prefer to be contacted through, graph 4 below shows that 84.6% of respondents say that they prefer personal contact, whilst a remaining 38.5% percent prefer receiving information through a corporate website (Appendix 3.1., Graph 4)

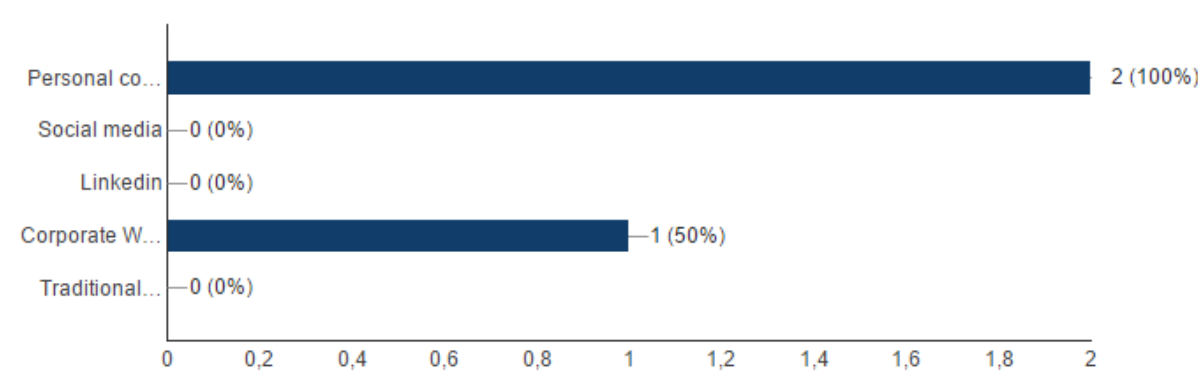


Graph 4. Existing Dutch customers' preferred communication channels

Qualitative data explains how existing customers were informed of Biosisto inception through personal channels. According to TLR International and Frisia Foods this consisted of personal visits and correspondence via email. Both interviewees pay attention to Biosisto’s corporate website, however they explain that they are most likely to be exposed to information through email. Face-to-face contact is valued by the Dutch market, so long as its purpose is to inform customers of significant developments to products and services. According to interviewees, this enhances the sense of involvement with Biosisto’s production processes and services, reinforcing the partner-oriented relationship between both parties.

Belgium

The Belgian market prefers being approached by reference material providers through personal contact, although corporate websites are also frequently reviewed by potential customers in Belgium.



Graph 17. Potential Belgian Customers’ Preferred Communication Channels For Interaction with Reference Material Providers

Verbeke explains that, at Lavetan, a predetermined process is set in motion, once a laboratory with potentially interesting products contacts the organisation. If Verbeke receives an email from an unknown laboratory, offering products relevant to Lavetan’s production processes, this information is sent to an individual who will check various online channels to gather more information on who this laboratory is, which products and services they provide, their background and future plans, etc. This includes observing the media and the provider’s corporate website. If, as a result of this process, Lavetan is interested in purchasing from the provider, contact will be established through email, or telephone when necessary. Face-to-face contact between both parties takes place during the testing

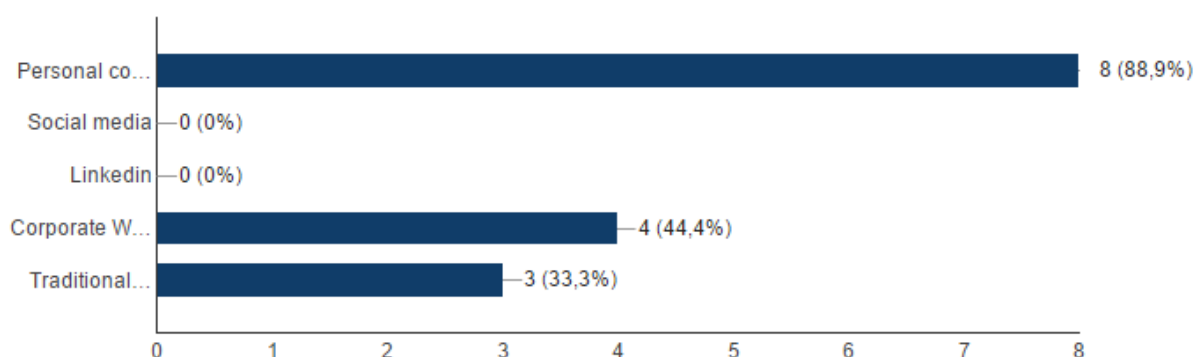
phase of the provider's products, and the development of a collective long-term plan detailing the prerequisites of cooperation between both parties.

It can be assumed that this is a typical process for a laboratory the size of Lavetan in Belgium, suggesting that a range of channels are observed by the Belgian market, before agreeing to the purchase of reference materials.

Microsmedt also mentions a clear preference towards personal contact, primarily through email. De Smedt adds that his laboratory is keen on searching for new providers and customers through the internet, exposing itself to information through corporate websites. Face-to-face contact is highly valued by Microsmedt, and is key to enhancing the sense of partnership with both providers and customers.

Germany

As can be seen in Graph 27 below, there exists an obvious preference among German laboratories to communicate with providers through personal channels. Corporate websites are also observed by the target group to an extent, while the German market also seems to pay attention to traditional forms of media.



Graph 27. Potential German Customers' Preferred Communication Channels For Interaction with Reference Material Providers

Qualitative data confirms the German market's preference towards personal contact. Email is specifically the preferred communication channel across the industry. According to Lerch, face-to-face contact is valued in order to establish initial contact with a provider, or when a provider has significant news to update its customers about. IBEN frequently observes the corporate websites of potential providers, in order to form an impression of the products and services on offer. Lerch confirms that social media is not a frequently used channel on the German market.

To conclude, all markets show an obvious preference towards personal contact, over the use of other channels social media, traditional media, etc. Corporate websites are also frequently observed by all target groups. It must be noted that, according to quantitative data, the German market is unique in its use of traditional media, when searching for information on reference material providers.

Overall, the use of personal contact is synonymous with the general desire to establish partner-oriented relationships between customer and provider, as is reflected under Subquestion 3.1., allowing for more input concerning product development. Belgian and Dutch markets specifically show appreciation towards two-way communication with providers. The German market likewise approves of two-way communication, as long as this does not become time consuming, with less need to have input concerning the development of products and services.

Chapter 9, Conclusions & Recommendations

The following chapter presents conclusions of relevance to Biosisto drawn from data collected from all research objects through interviews and surveys. The chapter culminates in recommendations regarding how Biosisto may communicate its corporate reputation to international clients to contribute to its international corporate communication strategy, specifically targeting German and Belgian markets. The conclusion section will be divided into a Netherlands/Existing Customers, Belgian, German, and comparison section, in order to clearly present conclusions which are specific to the respective markets and how these conclusions affect a comparison of each market.

Conclusion

According to Schultz, Hatch and Larsen (2002) organisational behaviour supporting corporate reputation must be ingrained in an organisation's corporate identity. To achieve a strong corporate identity, an organisation must define clear attributes and core values which it communicates to its target group(s). How this identity is communicated will eventually shape a corporate image (Borgerson, Schroeder, Magnusson and Magnusson, 2009). Consistent with these statements interviews and surveys set out to establish which organisational values and attributes Biosisto currently communicates to its customers, and which values and attributes targeted markets accredit importance to when selecting a reference material providers. Furthermore, research sought to confirm which aspects of a corporate story are trusted by the target group, testing Dowling's (2006) theory that corporate storytelling should equally represent an organisation's past, present and future, thus determining how corporate storytelling may communicate the organisational attributes, which shape Biosisto's reputation. Data suggests whether the adoption of reputation, as prescribed by Mahon, J., and Mitnick, B. (2010) is relevant to potential customers. Cultural differences between

the Dutch, Belgian and German markets based on Hofstede's (2016) cultural dimensions were uncovered, while data tested Van Belleghem's (2012) theory that two-way communication between buyer and seller has become essential in this day and age; determining the optimal flow of Biosisto's corporate communications. The following conclusion also presents which communication channels targeted markets show a preference towards, i.e. determining which communication channels are most suitable to facilitate preferred communication flows.

The Netherlands/Existing Customers

Data suggests that among existing customers Biosisto primarily communicates organisational values and attributes representing high quality and reliability. Existing customers are furthermore unanimous that Biosisto embodies a high level of customer focus. In line with literature by Borgerson et. al (2009) this would suggest that Biosisto's reputation revolves around the development of high quality, reliable products and services, which embody a high level of customer focus. To communicate corporate reputation, organisations may utilise corporate storytelling (Dowling, 2006). According to existing customers Biosisto's current corporate story is primarily based on its historical connections and past experiences, undermining the laboratory's representation of current operations, and future plans. Contradicting with literature by Mahon, J. and Mitnick, B (2010) historical connections and past experiences are irrelevant to Dutch microbiology laboratories, and not necessarily an indication of high quality, and reliability, thus not contributing to the communication of reputation. Due to the NVWA's lack of customer focus Biosisto's corporate communications' emphasis on the past certainly constricts the ability to communicate customer focus-related organisational values and attributes. Biosisto's past-oriented communications also undermine its innovative qualities. Both customer focus and innovation can be key to Biosisto's identity and reputation among Dutch customers. Consistent with Van Belleghem's (2012) theory, existing customers perceive Biosisto as a partner due to the two-way nature of communication with the provider. According to existing customers, this enhances transparency, and magnifies the perception of Biosisto as a customer focused organisation which prioritises high quality and reliability. The low level of uncertainty avoidance and long-term oriented nature of the Dutch market enhances the market's demand to see a reputation focused on innovation, and a corporate story based on the present and future. According to existing customers, to communicate the organisational values and attributes which shape its reputation and facilitate communication flows, Biosisto should make use of personal contact and its corporate website. This is consistent with Biosisto's current use of communication channels.

Belgium

It is obvious that the Belgian market looks for reference material providers with a reputation for high quality. To ensure Biosisto is perceived as reputable for the high quality of its products, as existing customers currently perceive Biosisto, it is important for the laboratory to communicate organisational attributes which are synonymous with high quality and reliability to the Belgian market. Although innovation is somewhat admired by the Belgian market, due to high uncertainty avoidance in the country, emphasising Biosisto's innovative capabilities may undermine the quality-related attributes of the organisation, making Biosisto's reputation less relevant to potential Belgian customers. Similar to the Dutch market, the Belgian market is unanimous that corporate communications focused on the past is a lesser guarantee of quality than present-, and future-oriented communications, consistent with the country's long-term orientation. In the eyes of the Belgian market, close cooperation with a provider increases assurances of quality, suggesting that a partner-oriented relationship, entailing two-way flows of communication, with laboratories in Belgium will enhance Biosisto's reputation of delivering high quality and reliable products and services. Seeing as uncertainty avoidance is high in Belgium, corporate communication overemphasising innovative attributes and values have potential to contradict a provider's reputation for delivering high quality. The long-term orientation of the country suggests that, indeed, current- and future-based corporate storytelling is the most suitable vehicle to communicate high quality- and reliability-related organisational values and attributes. The most relevant channels through which to communicate corporate to potential customers in Belgium consist of personal contact, and a company's corporate website.

Germany

Similar to potential customers in Belgium, German microbiology laboratories also choose to purchase from reference material providers with a reputation for delivering high quality products and services, rather than providers which are known for their innovative abilities. To communicate a reputation which is consistent with this preference, laboratories approaching the German market would do well to focus their corporate communications on values and attributes which reinforce the high quality of available products and services. Innovation is given a negative connotation on the German market, suggesting that organisational values and attributes focused on innovation may be detrimental to success in Germany. The German market is also of the opinion that corporate storytelling based on current operation and future plans is a more significant assurance of quality and reliability than an emphasis on past experiences and historical connections. German laboratories prefer providers to actively communicate information concerning developments to products and services, assuring customers of the fact that new products and services will be consistent with the quality standards, reinforcing a provider's reputation for high quality and reliability. High uncertainty avoidance in

Germany is consistent with data suggesting that innovation-related organisational values and attributes may not be communicated to the German market, as this could harm a provider's reputation for providing high quality. The long-term oriented nature of the German market reinforces that corporate storytelling based on the present and future has increased potential to effectively communicate corporate reputation to potential customers in Germany. The most suitable channels through which to facilitate the communication of reputation and two-way flows of communication to the German market are personal contact and corporate websites, while German laboratories will also observe traditional media to confirm a provider's reputation.

Comparison

Conducted research has confirmed how Biosisto is perceived by existing customers, reflecting the organisation's approach to a number of communication activities and what the laboratory's corporate reputation looks like at this moment in time. The following presents a comparison based on Biosisto's current conduct of communication and how the organisation's conduct adheres, or does not adhere, to the wants and needs of targeted markets. Also, the culture of Biosisto's domestic market and targeted markets is subject to a comparison based on how these countries seemingly rate regarding Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-term vs. Short-term orientation.

According to existing customers, Biosisto chiefly represents high quality, reliability, customer focus and trustworthiness through its communications. Innovation is also a trait which Biosisto attempts to portray, however the organisation's innovative abilities are not well known to all customers. Overall this suggests a consistency with the wants and needs of German and Belgian potential customers, with laboratories in both countries primarily desiring to see reference material providers embody high quality and reliability. This would indicate that a quality-related reputation is perceived as most favourable by these markets. Existing customers are unanimous that Biosisto represents a high level of customer focus. Data shows that this is also a desirable trait for reference material providers to represent when approaching the Belgian market. This may be enough reason for Biosisto to communicate its customer focus attributes and values to the Belgian market to enhance a favourable perception of its reputation. Although innovation may not hinder the quality and reliability of products according to the German and Belgian market, potential customers in Belgium agree that innovation is appealing, especially seeing as their domestic market is overly-structured, hindering innovation. As for potential German customers, innovation is not consistently perceived as a positive organisational trait, suggesting communicating innovative-related attributes to the German market may harm a provider's reputation. Potential customers in Belgium agree that the innovative nature

of the Dutch market is appealing, while German microbiology laboratories have little to no experience with the Dutch industry and are reluctant to comment on its qualities and/or deficiencies. Existing customers state that Biosisto's corporate story has an increased focus on the organisation's historical connections and its past experiences. Consequently customers are not fully aware of Biosisto's current operations and future developments to products and services. This undermines the innovative abilities of the organisation. This does not suit the German and Belgian markets' orientation towards current operations and future plans as an assurance of quality and reliability, and particularly the Dutch market's interest in innovation. Although it is likely that Belgian customers are aware of the NVWA (Belgian interviewees say to be aware of the NVWA), this may not hold true in Germany, making historical connections a less suitable vehicle for the portrayal of a quality-based reputation. Research has concluded that Belgian and German markets show lenience towards long-term rather than short-term orientation. The same can be said of the Dutch market. This is particularly evidenced by all three markets' preference towards a current, and future-based corporate story. Biosisto's customers perceive the organisation as a partner, consistent with the preferences of potential Belgian and German customers to utilise two-way directions of communication, although this desire is less prominent in Germany. Entering partner-oriented relations with laboratories in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands is an assurance of quality, and therefore a suitable tool to communicate a quality-related reputation. The preferred channels of communication throughout all three markets to communicate reputation and facilitate two-way communication are personal contact, primarily through email, and a corporate website. The only deviation from this preference is the German market's tendency to expose itself to potential providers through traditional media to gain an improved overview of a reference material provider's reputation. Overall, data shows that the Belgian and German target group show many similarities, both culturally and from a communication perspective. The Dutch market does show deviations from the German and Belgian market, however, these differences are to an extent admired by potential customers in Belgium, especially regarding levels of innovation in the Netherlands.

Recommendations

The following presents a number of recommendations, which qualitative and quantitative data have suggested are relevant for Biosisto to take into consideration when communicating reputation to potential customers in Germany and Belgium.

- To ensure communicated organisational values and attributes assist in communicating a corporate reputation which is in line with the preferences of targeted markets, it is

recommended that Biosisto prioritises communicating the high quality and reliability of its products and services to microbiology laboratories in Germany and Belgium.

- Approaching the Netherlands and Belgium, Biosisto may use corporate communications to highlight the specialised nature of its products and services, and how this allows products to be tailored to customer demands, to exemplify the organisation's customer focus and making it known to customers, both potential and existing, that their input is highly valued.
- Communicating a high level of customer focus to the German market may undermine Biosisto's quality-related organisational attributes and values in the eyes of German laboratories, and is therefore discouraged.
- Biosisto may communicate innovation-related values and attributes to the Belgian market, ensuring that assurances are given that quality will not be harmed as a result. The same approach may be applied when approaching new customers in the Netherlands, however communications may pay less attention to the calculated nature of risks taken to ensure innovation. Communicating Biosisto's innovative abilities to the German market is discouraged.
- Although Biosisto's historical connections to the NVWA are an indicator of the quality of its products to Dutch customers, seeing as historical connections are not perceived as relevant in Germany and Belgium, and are not necessarily perceived as evidence of quality, it is suggested that Biosisto avoids designing a communication strategy based on the name of the NVWA when entering Belgium and Germany. Particularly in the Netherlands Biosisto's connection to the NVWA has potential to undermine its own customer focus.
- It is advised that Biosisto's corporate communications magnify current operations - including currently available products and services, explanation(s) of current production processes , introduction new staff member(s) - and future plans - concerning the development of new products and services - aimed at existing and potential customers in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, with an emphasis on the company's long-term plans.

- It is recommended that Biosisto does not spend effort emphasising its connection to the Dutch industry when approaching the German market, due to German laboratories' general lack of experience with/knowledge of the Dutch microbiology industry. Biosisto's connection to the NVWA and the Dutch industry are no guarantee of quality from the perspective of the German market, and thus therefore irrelevant to communicating reputation.

- It is recommended that Biosisto continues to conduct itself as a partner with existing and potential customers across all target groups, actively keeping customers updated on developments at the company, ensuring two-way communication between customer and provider is facilitated through, primarily, personal forms of contact. The corporate website may be updated to implement recommendations.

Advisory Report for Biosisto

Introduction

The following section presents deliverables which Biosisto may look to utilise in an attempt to implement the preferences of its targeted markets towards corporate communication and reputation, direction of communication, communication channels, considering cultural differences between all three targeted markets. Presented deliverables are based on qualitative and quantitative data collected through interviews and a distribution of surveys amongst the targeted markets.

Consistent with the above recommendations to Biosisto, the Belgian and German markets are interested in communication products which represent and reassure customers of the high quality and reliability of products. The target group shows an obvious preference towards communication products which focus on Biosisto's current operations and future plans. Biosisto's communication products may represent innovation, however it is advisable that any representation of innovation ensures the customer that no risks are being taken which may inhibit the quality of products and services. Any of Biosisto's communication products must be illustrative of the organisation's tendency to establish partnership-oriented relationships with customers, incorporating a high level of customer focus. It is recommended that communication products are delivered through personal channels, whilst a corporate website is a medium which is frequently viewed by potential customers. All of which contribute to strengthening Biosisto's reputation for high quality.

The consultant advises Biosisto to implement a frequent newsletter which is sent to existing customers and potential customers. A survey may be attached to newsletters to pinpoint customer demands. Furthermore, it is recommended that Biosisto implements new vision and mission statements, to be included in all communications. Biosisto's corporate website may undergo changes to implement the above recommendations.

The advisory report presents three areas, as introduced in the research design, elaborating on why the recommended communication products adhere to the findings belonging to each area, and how findings will be implemented.

Corporate Communication and Reputation

In order to translate corporate identity to a favourable corporate image, ultimately contributing to a stronger corporate reputation, an organisation should select values it seeks to communicate to its target groups, which are aligned with what is important to both potential and existing customers (Borgerson, Schroeder, Magnusson and Magnusson 2009). Research has found that high quality and

reliability is what, in Biosisto's case, the target group desires to see reflected through communications. A newsletter has the capability to remind customers of the high quality and reliability of Biosisto's products and services. Taking into consideration that potential customers desire to see corporate communications reflect current operations, a Biosisto newsletter may explain the company's production processes and what the laboratory is doing to ensure quality is enhanced. For example, if Biosisto purchases new equipment, which will potentially enhance the quality of both single- and multi-strain reference materials, including this information in a newsletter keeps the recipient up to date on current operations, whilst emphasising Biosisto's goal to ensure quality-standards at the company are consistently improved. Seeing as a number of interviewees show an interest towards information concerning Biosisto staff, if the company is in the process of staff rotation, this may also be communicated to potential and existing customer: for example, by including an introduction page about a new member of staff when relevant. Building on the corporate story aspect of a potential newsletter, it is advised that future developments and products and services, and developments within the work space, are a focus of the communication tool. Potential and existing customers show a great demand to know which products they can expect to see on the market in coming months/year. This makes the process of planning which products to buy, and from which reference material provider, substantially easier for all (potential) customers: an incorporation of customer focus. Implementing a newsletter including content tailored according to the above, ensures that behaviour supporting Biosisto's corporate reputation of being a reliable provider of high quality references is embedded in corporate identity, thus forming a favourable corporate image, consistent with suggestions by Schultz, Hatch and Larsen (2002) as presented in the research design.

While, according to Dowling (2006), corporate storytelling must evenly represent the past, the present, and the future, data suggests that Biosisto's historical connections and past experiences are clearly not relevant to potential and existing customers. This advice discourages Biosisto from including past-related information in its newsletter and its corporate website. Consistent with this, although Biosisto has been rather reliant on an 'adoption' of the NVWA's reputation so far - a method of reputation 'shifting' which Mahon, J and Mitnick, B (2010) thoroughly describe in their literature - a section in the newsletter/on the corporate website, reminding customers of Biosisto's connection to the NVWA may have more negative than positive affects, as this undermines Biosisto's efforts to communicate its own reputation. Communicating its connection to the NVWA may notably hinder Biosisto's embodiment on customer focus, seeing as customer focus was not experienced as satisfactory at the NVWA by potential and existing customers. According to Fog, et. Al. (2010), by implementing corporate storytelling, instead of customers perceiving an organisation's values and

attributes as separate from each other with no interconnection, a corporate story allows an organisation to represent values and attributes as part of a “living core story” (2010). As a result, customers perceive values and attributes as interconnected, coherent, and together shaping the organisation’s corporate image, ultimately contributing to a strengthened reputation.

If Biosisto desires to promote customer focus as part of its living core story, promoting its historical connections through a newsletter may negatively affect the coherency of such a core story. In the eyes of the target group, Biosisto’s historical connections and past experiences are not coherent with customer focus and other organisational values/attributes which Biosisto is looking to represent.

According to literature by Fog, et. al (2010) a strategy to incorporate storytelling in corporate communications is the use of ‘Employee Stories’. Certainly to represent current operations it is recommended that Biosisto adds employee stories to a potential newsletter. Employee stories have potential to effectively communicate corporate identity to an external audience, in this case potential customers in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. An employee story would give readers an insight into the day-to-day operations at Biosisto, explaining how ensuring quality and reliability is central to the laboratories production processes, again emphasising quality-related organisational values and attributes. Depending on how frequently newsletters are sent to customers, employee stories may delve into developments at the company over the past month(s), building on what was reported in previous newsletters. If there is a clear overlap of employee stories in one newsletter to the next, this has potential to increase existing and potential customers’ exposure to Biosisto’s ‘core story’, which represents organisational values and attributes which are important to the target group. It is recommended that employee stories are featured on the front of each newsletter, as a clear and concise introduction to Biosisto’s current operations over the past month or so, and an explanation of what (potential) customers can expect from Biosisto in months to come.

Similar to the use of an employee story, to further communicate organisational values and attributes related to quality and reliability, Biosisto may add so-called customer stories to the newsletter. This too is a strategy common within corporate storytelling, which can provide potential customers with an insight into how cooperation with Biosisto has been experienced by existing customers. Biosisto may select two to three customers from its top 10 buyers, preferably from the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany, which are willing to write about their experience with Biosisto. It is important to add that customer stories should not focus too much on past cooperation with Biosisto, but rather emphasise the nature of current cooperation, and how this cooperation will look in the future. This reflects the target group’s desire to be exposed to present- and future-oriented corporate

storytelling. Adding a third person perspective concerning the quality and reliability of Biosisto's products may further reassure potential customers of the high quality values and attributes which Biosisto represents, contributing to the organisation's corporate reputation. Individuals exposed to corporate storytelling attribute a higher level of trust to what others have to say about an organisation, rather than what an organisation has to say about itself.

Besides containing an employee story and a customer story, Biosisto may also add a calendar to the newsletter, announcing the release of future products, future services, and any events which may be relevant to existing and potential customers. A calendar is an obvious manifestation of Biosisto's future-orientation, consistent with current- and future-based corporate storytelling.

To show customers, both existing and potential, that Biosisto invests a significant effort into ensuring that products and services live up to the highest quality standards, a survey form may be linked to newsletters. A survey concerning the quality of products and the demands of customers concerning the development of (new) products, illustrates that Biosisto is making active attempts to remain on top of the quality of its products and services, ensuring that the standards of customers are lived up to. Furthermore, a survey can be used as a tool to reflect Biosisto's focus on current operations, by asking what customers think of current products and services, and the importance of the future to the laboratory, by asking customers what they want to see from Biosisto in the future.

Dowling (2006) mentions that mission and vision statements are a highly suitable medium to communicate an organisation's corporate identity. Granted that Biosisto's corporate website already has a section dedicated to the company's ambitions, to facilitate a current, and future-based corporate story it is suggested that Biosisto constructs a new, clear and concise mission statement, and vision statement. These statements can be included in the newsletter, on the corporate website, and may be automatically attached to all Biosisto correspondence.

An example of an appropriate mission statement for Biosisto may be: "Biosisto is dedicated to the improvement of the quality of our partners' products, providing reference materials for now and for the future". A mission such as this exemplifies Biosisto's dedication to quality, and the laboratory's focus on the present and the future. Although this particular mission statement represents a focus on the future, it does not contain an obvious reference to innovation, thus contradicting with the negative connotation which is given to innovation by the German, and somewhat by the Belgian, market. The emphasis on "our" and "partner" furthermore lives up to the expectations of Dutch, Belgian, and German (potential) customers to be treated as partners.

It is recommended that Biosisto adopts a vision statement which also embodies quality, present- and future-orientation, besides exemplifying a partner-oriented approach towards customers. An example of an appropriate vision statement is: “Together with its partners, Biosisto has a responsibility to enhance the quality of microbiological analyses across the world, simplifying processes for all laboratories, improving the safety of consumer and non-consumer products for all”

Although the majority of targeted laboratories do not use social media themselves, the use of social media by Biosisto may show existing and potential customers that the organisation is forward thinking, and embodies long-term orientation. This coincides with cultural preferences in the targeted countries, and the target groups’ preference towards corporate communications of a forward-thinking nature.

Intercultural Communication

A potential newsletter must take the cultural differences which have been observed to exist between Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands into account. Hofstede (2016) defines a number of cultural dimensions which are deeply embedded in a country’s culture. Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-term vs Short-term orientation were deemed as relevant to Biosisto’s objective. Data shows that Belgium and Germany both rate rather high on Uncertainty Avoidance, whilst both countries are oriented towards long-term plans.

Regarding a newsletter sent to potential customers in either country, although future developments must certainly be highlighted by the content, when presenting planned developments to products and services, Biosisto must reassure customers that the risk of doing so is calculated and will not negatively affect the customers experience. In accordance with Rosenbloom, B and Larsen, T’s (2003) theory that the perception of corporate communication is affected by cultural differences, a newsletter sent to (potential) customers in the Netherlands may have an increased emphasis on innovation, due to the lower level of uncertainty avoidance in the country.

Overall, while the Belgian and Dutch microbiology markets seem rather similar from a cultural perspective, the German market shows a number of deviations. Due to high uncertainty avoidance in Germany, laboratories in the country attribute little to no importance to innovation; it is recommended that Biosisto avoids communicating innovative qualities to this market. Data suggests that Belgian and Dutch markets however somewhat appreciate innovation, making this a more

relevant value/trait to communicate to these markets. To counter the differing attitudes towards innovation, accounting for the German market's lesser level of English (which was experienced when approaching German laboratories when distributing surveys and arranging interviews), Biosisto's corporate website may contain an option for visitors to view the website in German. If/when this option is selected, the content of Biosisto's website may also change somewhat, with less mention of Biosisto's innovative capabilities than on the Dutch and English spoken version of the website.

All markets targeted by Biosisto, including the Dutch market, show a clear orientation towards the long-term. Based on this knowledge it is recommended that mission and vision statements, communicated through the corporate website and potential newsletter, are oriented towards the future. Biosisto may even dedicate a separate page on its website to its long-term plans. Long-term orientation across the targeted markets reinforces advice for Biosisto to avoid an emphasis on its historical connections through its corporate website and newsletter. Adding a calendar to a potential newsletter, announcing the launch of future products and services and/or relevant events, as described in the above, would further exemplify Biosisto's adaption to the long-term orientation of targeted markets.

As stated in the above, Biosisto may also increase its activity on social media, in particular through LinkedIn. Qualitative and quantitative data suggests that targeted laboratories do not pay attention to social media when searching for customers and/or providers. However, the use of social media may work as an indication to existing and potential customers that Biosisto is a forward-thinking organisation, which is ahead of current trends on the microbiology industry.

Direction of Communication

According to Van Belleghem (2012) in this day and age it has become essential for companies to engage in two-way flows of communication with its publics. Research results have shown that this theory holds largely true among Biosisto's target group, with the majority potential and existing customers valuing frequent interaction with reference material providers. A newsletter would be sent to (potential) customers on either a quarterly basis, or whenever Biosisto feels that it must announce the launch of a new product or service to (potential) customers. This shows an active attempt by Biosisto to engage and remain in touch with customers and other contacts. Active communication towards customers through a newsletter facilitates a relationship in which customers feel able to provide feedback on, or have input in Biosisto's operations. To promote an interactive environment, it is suggested that language in the newsletter is of an inviting nature, whilst contact

details should take up a prominent position on the email through which the newsletter is sent. Biosisto may also set up a designated email address for customer queries. A survey form can be attached to newsletters, asking customers to provide input and feedback about Biosisto's products and operations.

As can be seen in the above it is recommended that Biosisto implements so-called employee and customer stories in a potential newsletter. Having an introduction to recent developments and future plans explained from the perspective of an employee potentially provides existing and potential customers with a sense that they are inherently involved with Biosisto's operations, magnifying the partner-oriented characteristics of the relationship between both parties. Allowing existing customers to contribute to a potential newsletter, through means of a customer story, enhances the sense of influence/input customers feel they can have on Biosisto. This can possibly amplify the sense of partnership between Biosisto and its customers, while potential customers exposed to customer stories may clearly perceive that Biosisto commonly enters into partner-oriented relationships with its customers, which is perceived as so important by the target group.

Furthermore, proposed new mission and vision statements can emphasise Biosisto's goal to become partners with its customers.

Utilising a newsletter also allows information to be spread through personal contact. Email is the preferred business to business communication channel across the microbiology industry, and the most appropriate channel to facilitate two-way communication. The distribution of newsletters and surveys is highly compatible with the use of email, rendering it advisable for Biosisto to send both tools via this medium.

To enhance the partner-oriented relationship with customers, Biosisto may also decide to pay personal visits to customers which have queries which cannot be efficiently handled through digital channels.

Design

First of all, it is recommended that all media products mentioned above adhere to a dark blue colour scheme, consistent with Biosisto's current logo and corporate website. This allows for consistency across all media products, and adds to a feeling of consistency within Biosisto's corporate story, which Fog, et al. (2010) argue is vital to corporate storytelling.

To ensure further consistency across recommended communication channels it is advisable for Biosisto to use the same logo (image 1) for proposed media tools as it has done since the inception of

the company. This ensures that existing customers are not suddenly faced with a change to Biosisto's style. Furthermore, Biosisto's logo and slogan are already strong vehicles for the communication of quality- and reliability-related attributes/values, which data suggests is most important to Biosisto's targeted markets. The 'check' in the logo is synonymous with accreditation and quality checks. The logo, combined with the subheading "Certified Reference Material", is an obvious visualisation of quality and reliability.



Image 1. Biosisto Logo (Biosisto, n.d.)

The proposed newsletter would be 600 pixels in width, a common size for newsletters distributed by email, and would consist of a single page. The top of the newsletter would consist of the above logo and slogan, featuring Biosisto's new mission statement, "Biosisto is dedicated to the improvement of the quality of our partners' products, providing reference materials for now and for the future" underneath. The left side of the newsletter would be dedicated to an employee story, as described in the above, highlighting how Biosisto's operations and successes have been during the period since the previous newsletter. Above the employee story would be an image of an object synonymous with Biosisto's operations. The right side of the newsletter would be dedicated to a customer story, consisting of a summary by an important customers, providing readers with an insight into how cooperation with Biosisto has looked during recent months, and what the customer expects from the future. The bottom of the customer story would display the customer's logo. Displaying a customer's logo is free promotion for customers, heightening the likelihood that customers will want to contribute to the newsletter. The bottom left of the page would present a calendar, highlighting planned launches and/or developments of/to new and existing products and services and any events which may be relevant to customers. The bottom right of the newsletter would consist of bullet points detailing the characteristics of products and services which are currently available, and/or soon to be launched. The above sections would be written in black within white boxes, and/or in white within black boxes. The newsletter would contain a footer with a copyright statement for 'security' reasons. An example of what the newsletter may look like can be found below. It should be noted that information given to (potential) customers regarding production processes and product/service development may not give away details which may be undesirable for competitors to be exposed to, seeing as information contained in the newsletter becomes public knowledge once published. It is advised that Biosisto shares a sufficient amount of information, without giving away too much. It is up to the client to decide how much information it desires to make public.

Biosisto is dedicated to the improvement of the quality of our partners' products, providing reference materials for now and for the future



Employee Story

"Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Duis pretium purus id turpis luctus imperdiet. Nullam semper, est eget porttitor condimentum, nisi risus accumsan tortor, sed tempor velit sapien sed ex. Donec erat massa, porta vel libero vel, cursus lobortis sem. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas." - Tom Chapple, Biosisto Intern

Calendar

- Integer eu vehicula arcu
- Integer eu vehicula arcu
- Integer eu vehicula arcu
- Integer eu vehicula arcu
- Integer eu vehicula arcu

Customer Story

"Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Duis pretium purus id turpis luctus imperdiet. Nullam semper, est eget porttitor condimentum, nisi risus accumsan tortor, sed tempor velit sapien sed ex. Donec erat massa, porta vel libero vel, cursus lobortis sem. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas."

- TLR International



Explanation of currently available, and soon to be launched products/services

- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet
- In hac habitasse platea dictumst.
- Integer eu vehicula arcu
- Integer eu vehicula arcu
- Integer eu vehicula arcu
- Integer eu vehicula arcu

Budgeting

An advantage of the proposed media tools is they can be cost effective. Variations in costs will primarily depend on Biosisto's decision whether or not to make use of a graphic designer for the development of the newsletter. Seeing as Biosisto is still in its starting up phase, it is recommended that Biosisto utilises predetermined newsletter templates provided by MailChimp which are free of charge. The following presents a table outlining potential costs for Biosisto.

Media Tool(s)	Activity	Costs	Description
Newsletter & Survey, Corporate Website	1. Design 2. Distribution 3. Staff costs 4. Translation	1. €25 p. hour 2. €0 p. month 3. Biosisto's hourly wage 4. €300	1. Does Biosisto choose to utilise a graphic designer for the design of the proposed newsletter, this would cost the company an estimate of €25 p. hour (Freelance Graphic Designers, 2016). The development of a newsletter may take a graphic designer 8-10 hours, bringing total costs up to €200-€250. 2. It is recommendable for Biosisto to use MailChimp to distribute newsletters to customers. MailChimp is one of the market leaders when it comes to email services. If a company has under 2000 subscribers to its newsletter, MailChimp's services remain free of charge (Pricing, Growing Business, 2016). It is unrealistic to expect Biosisto to reach 2000 subscribers in coming months, rendering the costs of distributing the newsletter and survey €0 3. Biosisto staff would be responsible for writing the majority of the content of the newsletter and making changes to the corporate website, meaning hourly wages will also become part of the cost of designing and distributing the newsletter and survey. Hourly wages

			at Biosisto are unknown to the consultant 4. Would Biosisto decide to add a German spoken option to the corporate website, according to vertaalbureau-perfect.nl (2016) costs may run up to €300,- for 2000 words (the estimated number of words on the corporate website, accounting additions made based on the above advice)
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Implementation/Planning

It is recommended that Biosisto implements media tools one month after the advice has been received. This will provide Biosisto with sufficient time to discuss the advice and which elements to implement, and to develop new website content, besides designing the newsletter and survey questions.

It is advised that Biosisto sends newsletters and attached surveys on a quarterly basis; ensuring recipients are not overwhelmed by information concerning Biosisto, and there are enough matters, such as developments to products and services to report to existing and potential customers. June is the end of the second quarter of the year. It is recommended that Biosisto distribute the proposed newsletter and survey by July 4th, allowing the company to stick to a quarterly planning. The follow presents a table detailing the exact implementation of the media tools:

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6, and onwards
Implementation Phase	Discussions concerning advice	Discussions concerning advice Search for Graphic Designer Survey Designed	Design of Newsletter	Finalisation of Media tools	Distribution of Newsletter and Survey	Design of Newsletters and Surveys
Client Activities	Staff meeting to discuss advice Search for Graphic Designer	Staff Meeting to discuss advice Survey Questions Defined Website Content Defined Graphic Designer Selected	Staff Meeting to discuss Newsletter Newsletter Content Written Newsletter Designed by Graphic Designer	Newsletter finalised Survey finalised Recipients Selected Changes to Corporate Website implemented	Newsletter and Survey sent to existing and potential customers via MailChimp	Newsletters and Surveys Developed and Distributed each following quarter

Meetings	Meeting between Biosisto staff and consultant to discuss advice	Staff Meeting to discuss advice Negotiations with Graphic Designers	Staff Meeting to discuss Newsletter, Survey and Recipients Meetings with Graphic Designer	Staff Meeting to Confirm Finalisation of Media Tools		
Deadlines					4 th of July: Newsletter and Survey distributed	

Table 1, Media Tools Implementation

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Appendices

Appendix 1, Preliminary Research

2.1. Competitor analysis

Biomerieux: Emphasises the importance of a one to one relationship with customers. Deals with customers personally through phone. Products/services tailored accordingly. In 2012 CHEK paid 371,08 Euros for 20 bioballs. Delivery and administration costs of 45 Euros. No further costs are published by company.

Deutsches Referenzbüro für Lebensmittel-Ringversuche und Referenzmaterialien (DRRR): Customer does not have opportunity to make suggestions for DRRR's products and services. As of 2014, seemingly only active in Germany.

Quantitative reference materials cost 61 Euros; Qualitative Reference materials 88 Euros. Delivery costs to mainland UK, 14, 50 Euros. To UK isles 40 Euros.

Public Health England (HPA): Reference materials all cost 47 Euros per 10disc-pack. Larger orders lower this price to 39 Euros.

HPA is not clear about whether the organization is open to suggestions surrounding the production of new reference materials and further services.

IELAB: Prices vary from 69,95 Euros to 153,91 Euros. Quantitative reference materials, named BACuanti cost 153,91 Euros for five tablets. IELAB does not make clear whether it is open to customer input.

Delivery costs within Europe cost around 60 Euros for 3 BACuanti, including dry ice. IELAB is very wary of delivering outside of Europe with dry ice. Some of IELAB's delivery services are not authorized to leave the EU with products on dry ice.

Institute for Reference Materials and Measurements (IRMM): Vary in price, from 20 Euros to 103 Euros. Most reference materials cost 40 Euros. IRMM do not offer discount and do not promote being open to customer suggestions.

LGC Standards: LGC offer a wide range of reference materials which vary in price, from 41 Euros to 60 Euros. LGC notes that they are not open to customer suggestions. Reference materials are only available of sets of five to ten samples.

Microbiologics: Comparable with Biomerieux, Microbiologics also works with a network of local distributors. Microbiologics' pricing is not publicized on its website. All on sale micro-organisms are preserved on dry ice.

NSI Lab: Reference materials vary in price from 60 Euros to 200 Euros. NSI is open to customer suggestions regarding reference materials. NSI's product range contains five kinds of micro-organisms, all on dry ice. All products are available in a five or 20 sample kit

Delivery costs are 287 Euros in Europe and 238 Euros to the US. The materials on offer are freeze dried. Dry ice is therefore not necessary. Products are sent within a day of ordering

RTC Sigma-Aldrich: Offers reference materials ranging from 33,30 Euros to 37,40 Euros. Sigma-Aldrich is not clear whether the organization listens to customer suggestions.

Livsmedelsverket (SLV): SLV is comparable to the NVWA seeing as they belong to the Swedish government. Livsmedelverket in English means National Food Administration. Livsmedelsverket are not officially accredited but are adamant on the fact that their production processes are under strict scrutiny by the Microbiological Division of the National Food agency. It is not clear whether the SLV is open to customer suggestions.

SLV only sells five combinations of micro-organisms. All materials are freeze-dried. Delivery costs outside of Sweden amount to 31 Euros.

NVWA: When it comes to accreditation there is not much for the NVWA to improve. There is no observable difference in the accreditation of the NVWA compared to its competitors. No competitor is accredited in a way which the NVWA could be further benefited by. In comparison to competitors, the NVWA offers a cheap product with high delivery costs.

Microbiologics is the only competitor which offers a wider range of reference materials.

2.2. Meetings with Biosisto representatives

Minutes meeting with Maarten de Vries I

01/02/2016

Those present: Maarten de Vries, Tom Chapple

- Discussing Biosisto's progress so far and production methods
- Biosisto has been able to maintain 100 customers which used to buy from the NVWA
- Although Biosisto has had to increase pricing, production methods have remained almost identical
- Biosisto's customers understand the increase in price, while placing much trust in an organization which adheres to the NVWA's quality standards
- Biosisto now looking to enter the European market
- Due to connections and proximity and these countries, Biosisto initially will be targeting the UK, Belgium and Germany
- Biosisto understands that first awareness surrounding the organization must be created before sales to foreign countries can begin
- Not known how widespread awareness of the NVWA is abroad
- Biosisto prepared to give consultant access to participants to interview and survey from the targeted markets to find out what is of value to the target group
- Interview arranged with Mulder and Siccama to further discuss the industry and the project context
- Biosisto to send files to consultant concerning an NVWA competitor analysis and previous RUG research concerning how the NVWA creates value

Minutes meeting with Biosisto Microbiologists

04/02/2016

Those present: Andre Siccama, Annemarie Mulder, Tom Chapple

- Biosisto produces reference materials used for first-line and third-line controls. Biosisto is in the process of developing a web based control system
- Third line controls take place 2 to 3 times per year
- Reference materials are used in industries such as food safety, water safety and animal feed. Example: KBR, a water safety organisation
- Example of a large client and user of reference materials is Friesland Campina
- Customers include commercial laboratories, laboratories within a company and government labs
- Significant competitors are SGS, AlControl, IRL, Sigma Aldrich, Microbiologics
- Reference materials are produced in varying forms, e.g. Bioballs (produced in Australia, a very high quality product), Vitroids (produced by Sigma Aldrich), Lentequils (Public Health England)
- Sigma Aldrich is possibly acquiring Public Health England. Both participants note that this is purely speculation and that the industry is often times secretive. Have to rely on word-of-mouth and rumours.
- Why Belgium, UK and Germany?
- Belgium: Adheres to ISO Guide 17035: Biosisto has experience with this laboratory standard
- Germany: No first-line controls. Biosisto asks itself what is Germany's substitute for first-line controls; in which direction is the German industry heading?
- Biosisto sees demand in England. Been approached by potential customers
- What is important for Foreign companies? Communication with clients; an active approach
- Current communication with customers: Biosisto has a top 10 of customers. These customers warrant annual personal visits
- Biosisto is perceived by organizations as either strictly a distributor or a partner
- Communication channels used for personal contact are email and telephone
- Websites and LinkedIn are also common channels on the market
- Laboratory magazines achieve high level of exposure
- Branche organisations such as Symposia represent reference material producers
- Biosisto's priority is satisfying customers
- Biosisto envision being perceived as both an authority and a trustworthy partner on the market
- Ecoli and Salmonella are prime examples of what is often included in reference materials
- Belgium: Biosisto has 6 to 8 customers in country

- Germany: Biosisto is aware of interest from Umweltamt, Munchen/BFR Berlin (a government organization)
- England: Unilever
- Do foreign markets prefer a strong external image or are they more interested in the company's content?
- Which styles of approach does target group prefer? Two-way or one-way relationship?

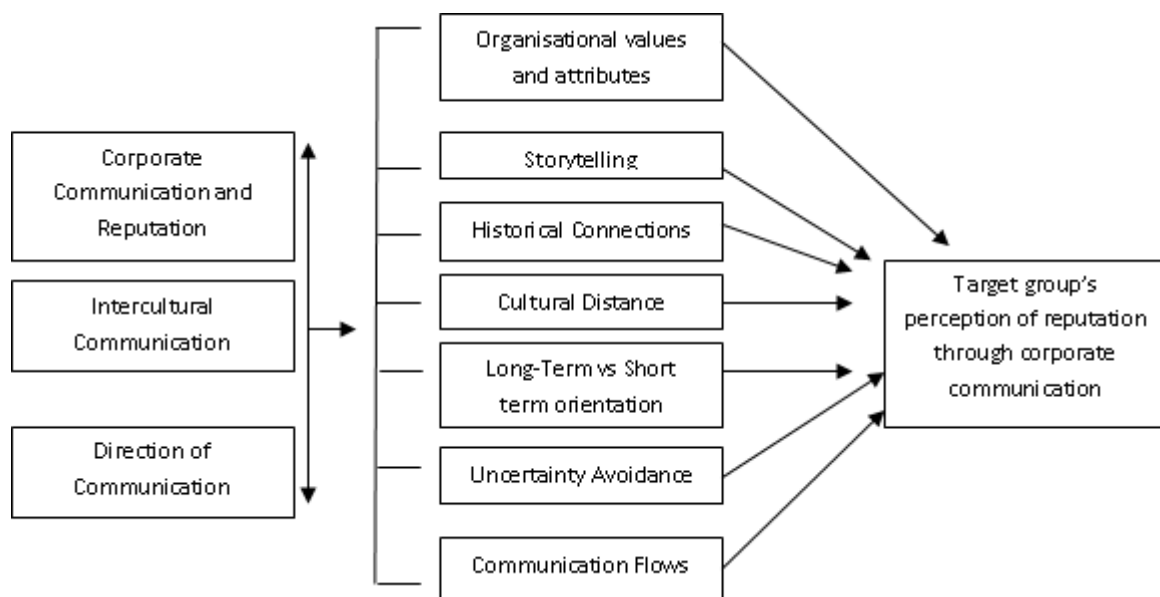
Minutes meeting with Maarten de Vries II

15/03/2016

Those present: Maarten de Vries, Tom Chapple

- Discussion of First version of Proposal
- In past weeks International Customers have been approaching Biosisto
- Biosisto is not aware why they have been approached by these international customers specifically
- Biosisto remains unaware of NVWA's reputation abroad
- Reiterates that current customers are very happy with Biosisto's product and its high quality
- Agreed that United Kingdom may not be feasible to research for this project

Appendix 2, Conceptual Model



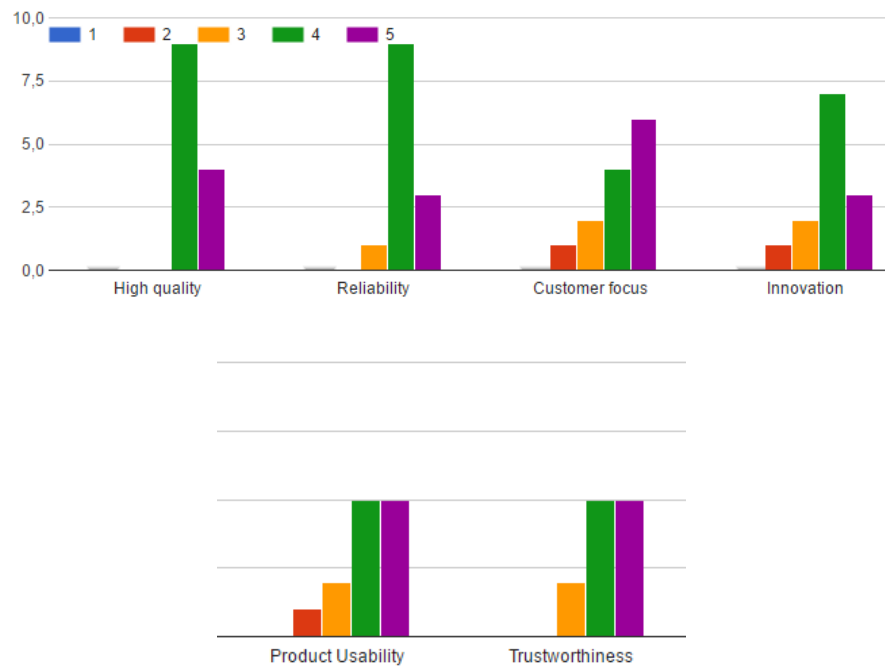
Concepts key to proposed research are based on the three research areas: Corporate Communication and Reputation, Intercultural Communication and Direction of Communication. All subsequent concepts are independent variables, affecting the dependent variable – Portrayal of reputation through corporate communications - to varying extents. Belonging to Corporate Communication and Reputation are the concepts: Organisational Values and Attributes, Storytelling, and Historical Connections. Testing these concepts amongst the target group through abovementioned research questions will lead to knowledge on which corporate reputation attributes are perceived as favourable by the target group, and how a future corporate communication strategy will be affected as a result. Although these concepts are independent, all of which may have an indirect effect on each other. For example, Biosisto's existing reputation is somewhat reliant on its historical connections to the NVWA. This is perceived as a positive attribute by the domestic market, hence why Biosisto bases much of its communications on this factor. It is however possible that due to both personal and cultural preferences the German and Belgian markets show less appreciation towards such connections. In turn, how Biosisto's reputation is told through storytelling may have to rely less on its connections to the NVWA. As a result of these findings the variable Organisational Values and Attributes may also somewhat be affected. Vice versa, the target group's perception of Historical Perceptions may be influenced by the other independent variables. Furthermore, proposed research places an emphasis on the Intercultural Communication variables: Cultural Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long- vs Short-term orientation. The degree to which a targeted market is reliant on Uncertainty Avoidance may predict how prominent a role promoting Biosisto's reputation for producing high quality, sustainable products will play. Long-vs short-term orientation of a culture may predict whether value is attributed to a company such as Biosisto's historical connections or not. Furthermore, as can be read in the theoretical framework, cultural distance between Biosisto's domestic and targeted markets shall likely influence the appropriateness of communication channels. Belonging to Direction of Communication, the variable Communication flows shall play a large part in determining whether establishing partner-oriented relationships should be the focus of corporate communication, or whether target groups show preference towards one-way communication methods and channels when conducting business with Biosisto. Overall, all variables shall influence how Biosisto may portray its reputation and organisational characteristics through corporate communication.

Appendix 3, Survey Questions & Results

Appendix 3.1.: The Netherlands/Existing Customers

Organisational Values

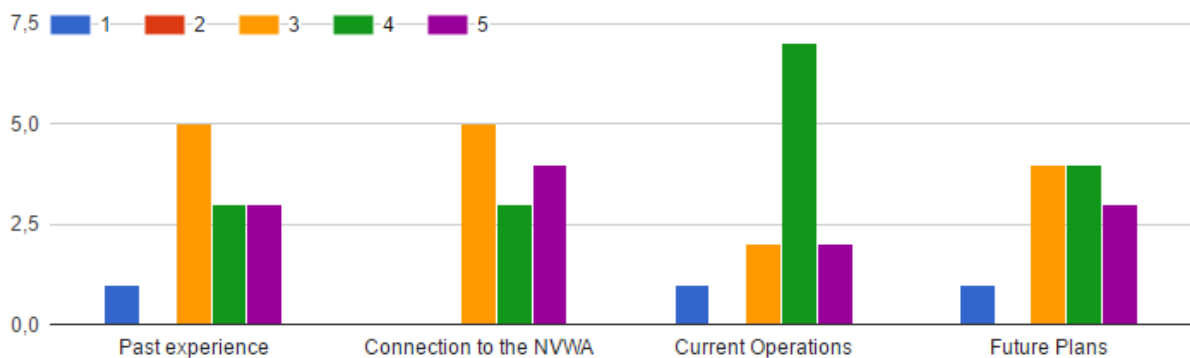
1. How would you rate Biosisto regarding the following values? Based on a scale of 1 (not represented) to 5 (strongly represented)



Graph 1. Organisational Values Represented by Biosisto according to Existing Customer in the Netherlands

Corporate Storytelling

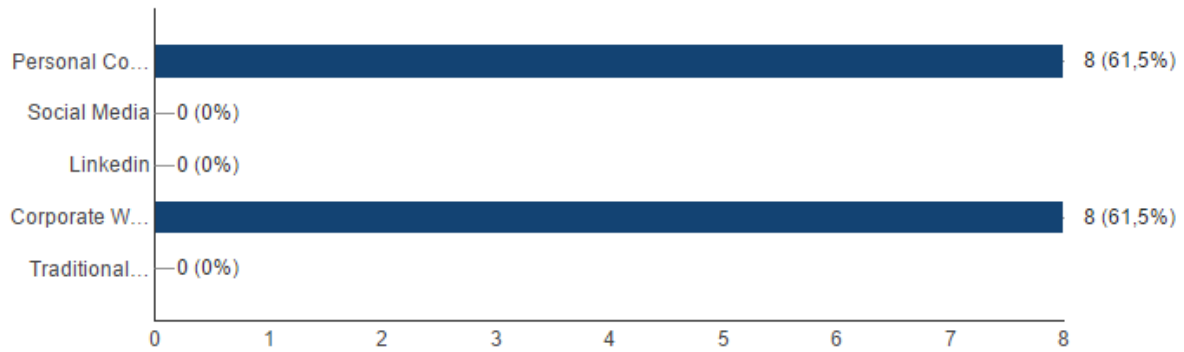
1.1. How well are the following aspects of Biosisto's corporate story represented by the organisation?
Based on a scale of 1 (not represented) to 5 (strongly represented)



Graph 2. Netherlands-based Existing Customers' perception of Biosisto's Corporate Story (Based on a scale of 1 to 5: 1=not represented, 5=strongly represented)

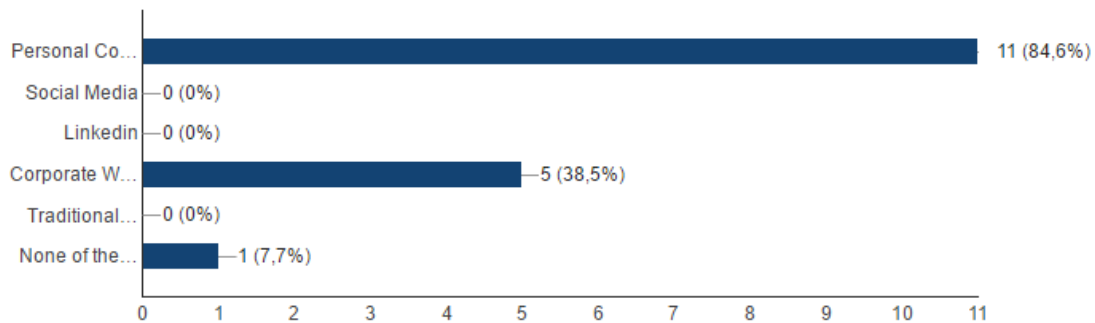
Communication Channels

2. Through which channels have you been exposed to Biosisto?



Graph 3. Channels through which Existing Customers in the Netherlands have been exposed to Biosisto

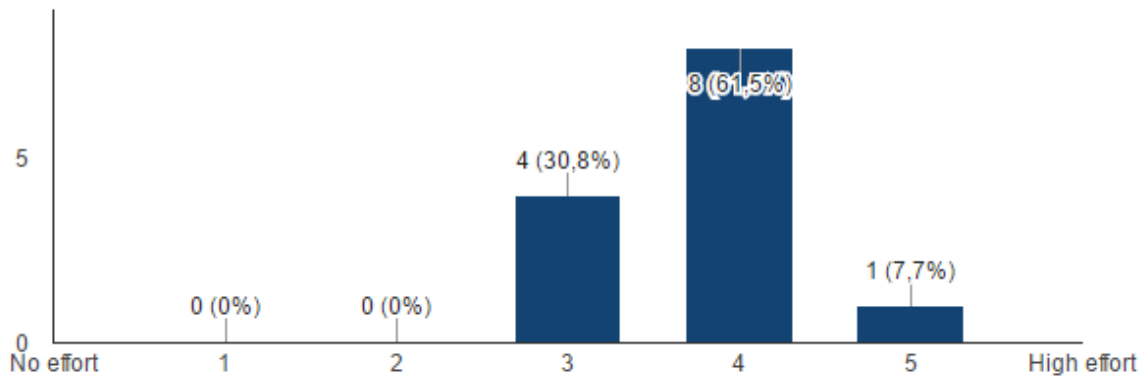
2.1. Through which channels would you prefer to be contacted by Biosisto in the future?



Graph 4. Existing Dutch customers' preferred communication channels

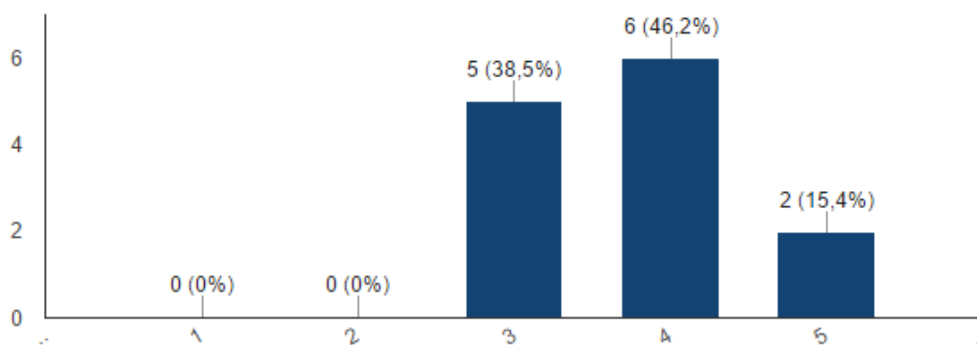
Direction of Communication

3. How do you rate Biosisto's efforts to remain in contact with your company?



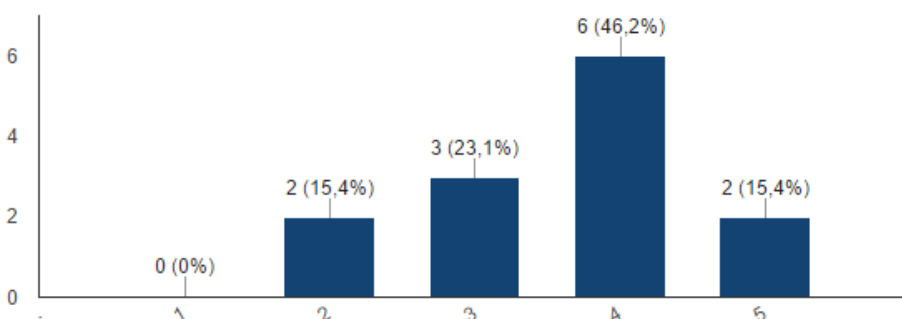
Graph 5. Existing Customers' perception of Biosisto's efforts to maintain in contact with customers

3.1. How do you experience the frequency of interaction with Biosisto?



Graph 6. Existing Customers' satisfaction concerning frequency of communication with Biosisto (1=not satisfactory. 5=highly satisfactory)

3.2. Would you define Biosisto as a partner, or as a vendor?

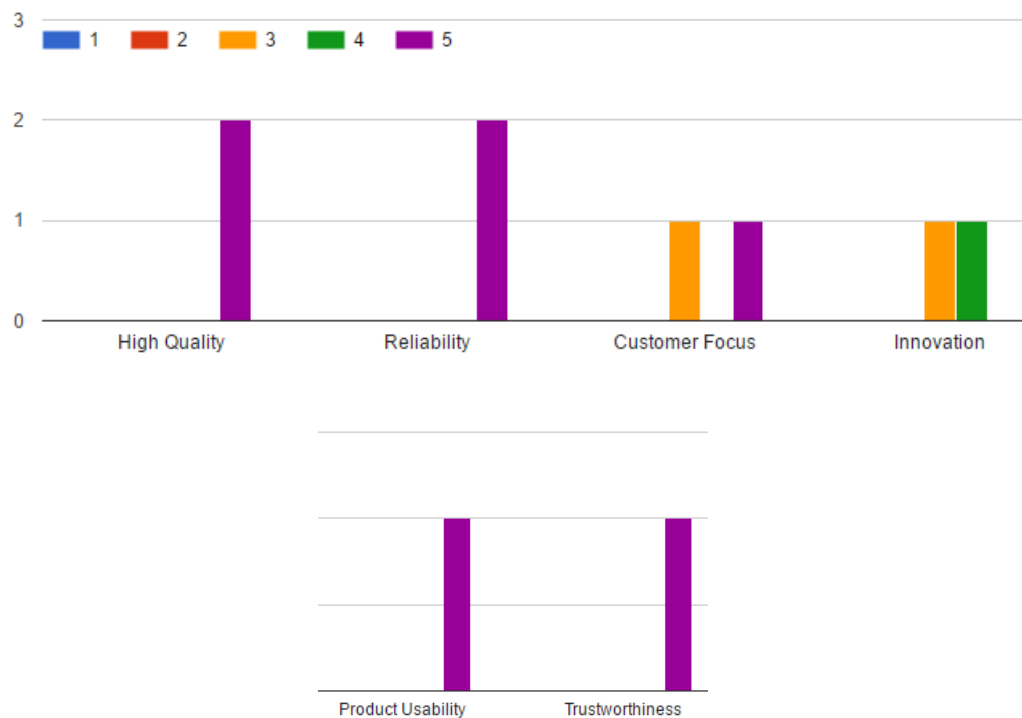


Graph 7. Indicating whether existing customers perceive Biosisto as a vendor, or as a partner (1=vendor(no interaction, no customer focus). 5=partner(highly frequent interaction, high level of customer focus))

Appendix 3.2.: Belgium

Organisational Values

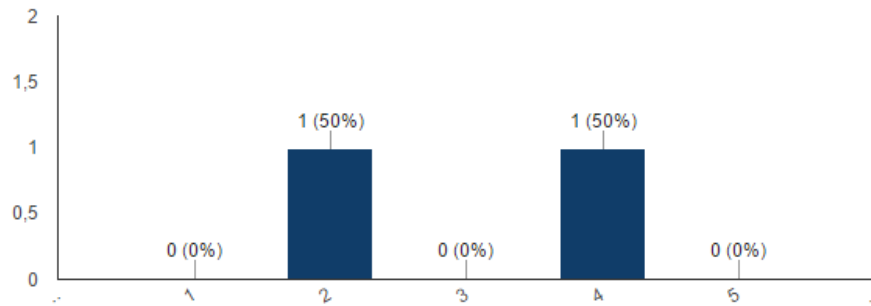
1. Which of the following organisational values do you look for in a microbiological reference material provider? Based on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important)



Graph 8. Potential Belgian customers' preferences concerning organisational values represented by reference material providers

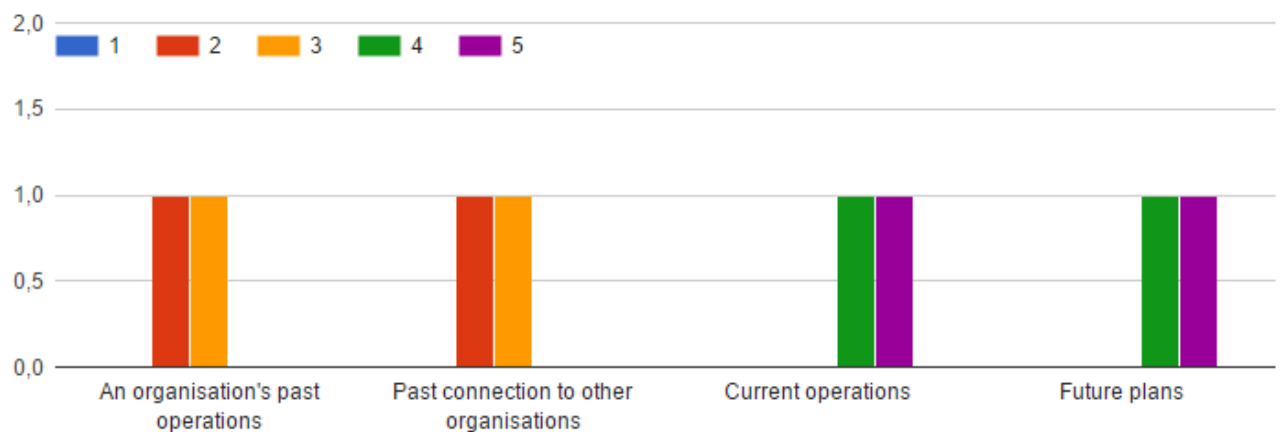
Corporate Storytelling

2. To what extent do you pay attention to an organisation's 'corporate story'? (an organisation's mission and vision, past achievements, future plans etc.)



Graph 9. Potential Belgian customers' tendency to pay attention to a provider's corporate story (1=no attention. 5=high level of attention)

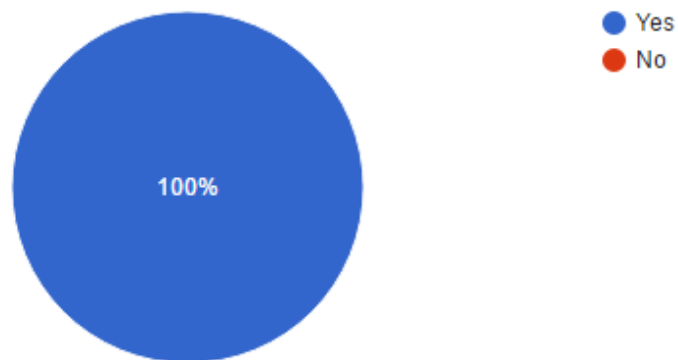
2.1.What do you look for in a microbiology reference material provider's 'corporate story'? Based on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important)



Graph 10. Potential Belgian Customers' preference concerning aspects of a provider's corporate story (Based on a scale of 1 to 5: 1=not important, 5=very important)

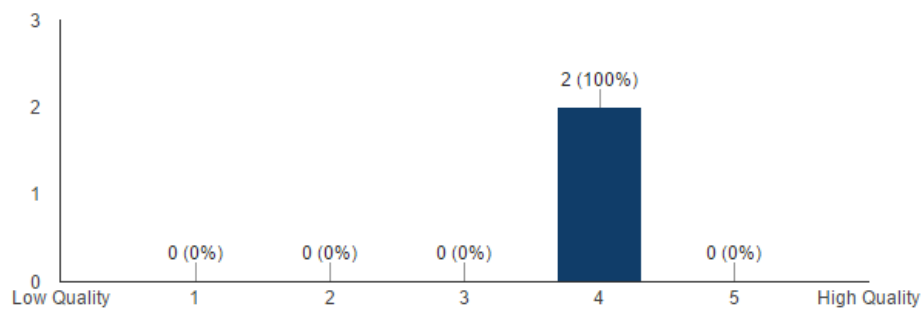
Awareness of the NVWA and the overall Dutch Microbiology Industry

3.Biosisto is the result of a spin-off of the Dutch government's Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA). Did you know that the NVWA previously produced reference materials?



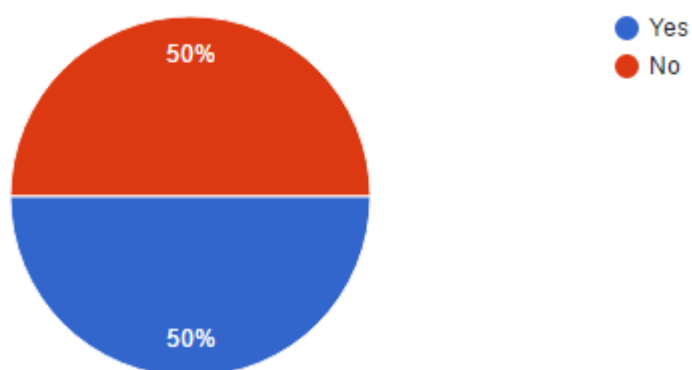
Graph 11. Potential Belgian Customer's Awareness of the NVWA

3.1.If applicable, what is your opinion of the quality of the NVWA's products?



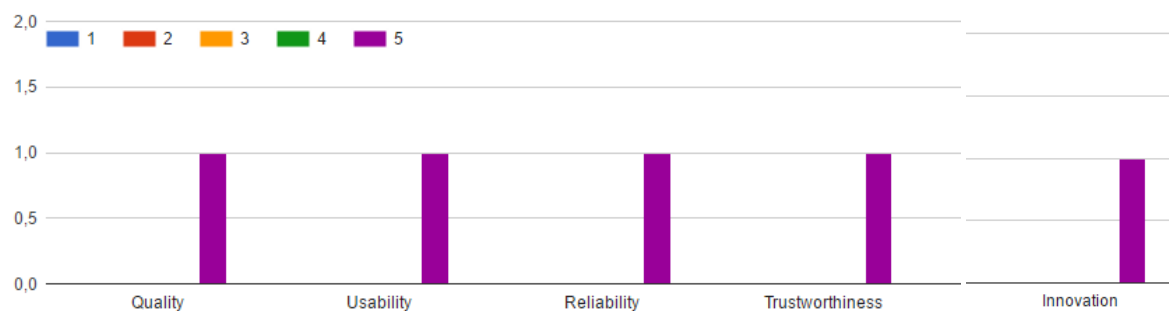
Graph 12. Potential Belgian Customers' Opinion of the NVWA's Products

3.2.Do you have any experience with Dutch microbiology laboratories?



Graph 13. Potential Belgian Customers' Experience with Dutch Microbiology Laboratories

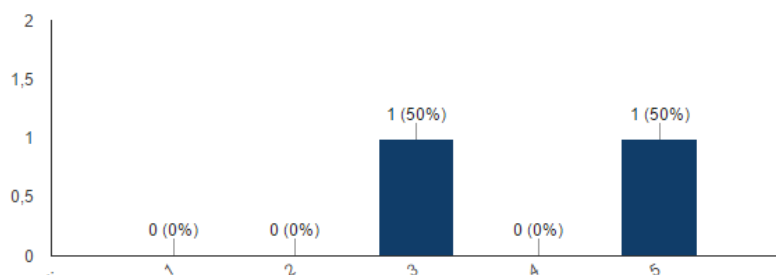
3.3.If applicable, what is your experience with Dutch microbiology laboratories concerning the following? Based on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high)



Graph 14. Potential Belgian Customers' Perception of Organisational Values/Attributes Represented by Dutch Microbiology Laboratories

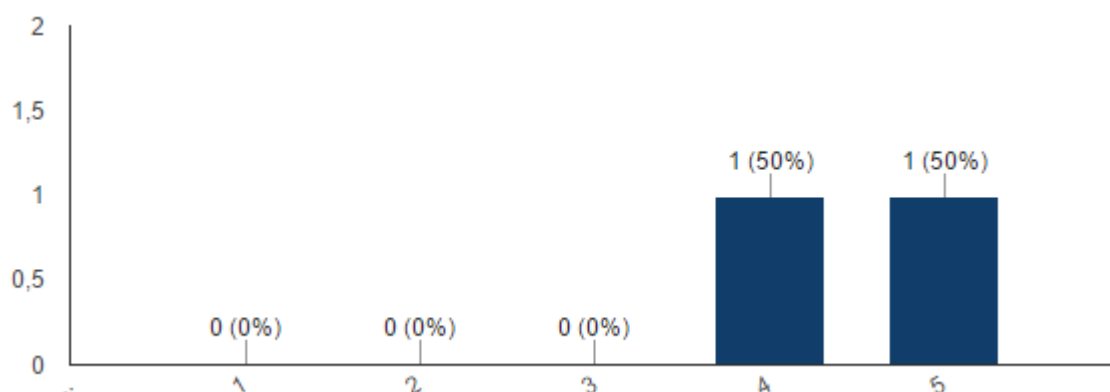
Direction of Communication

4.What is your preferred frequency of interaction with a microbiological reference material provider?



Graph 15. Potential Belgian Customers' Preferred Frequency of Interaction with Microbiological Reference Material Providers (1=no contact. 5=highly frequent contact)

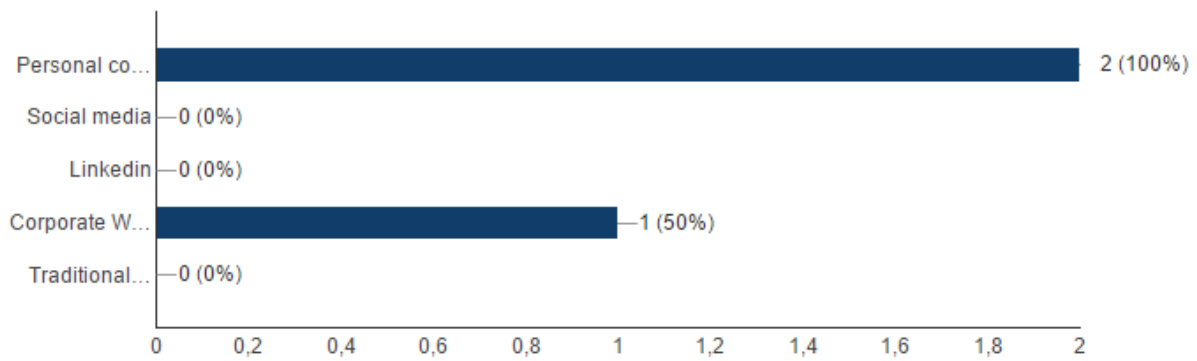
4.1. Which of the following relationships with a microbiological reference material provider do you prefer?



Graph 16. Potential Belgian Customers' Preferred Relationship with Microbiological Reference Material Providers (1=vendor(no interaction, no customer focus). 5=partner(highly frequent interaction, high level of customer focus))

Communication Channels

5. Through which communication channels do you prefer to be exposed to reference material providers?

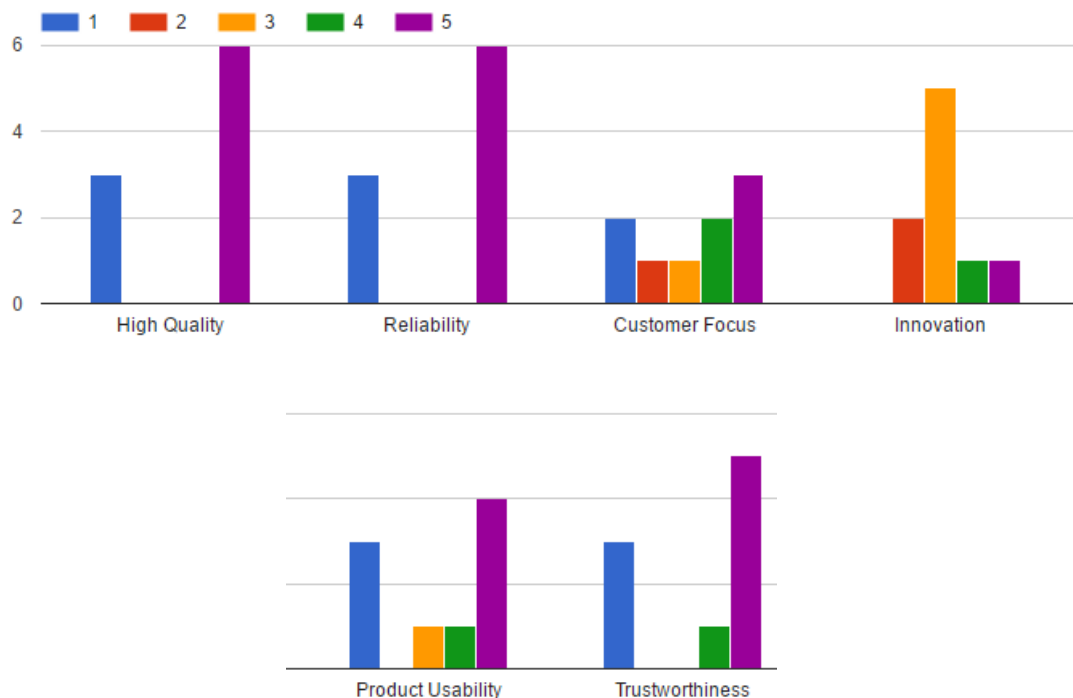


Graph 17. Potential Belgian Customers' Preferred Communication Channels For Interaction with Reference Material Providers

Appendix 3.3.: Germany

Organisational Values

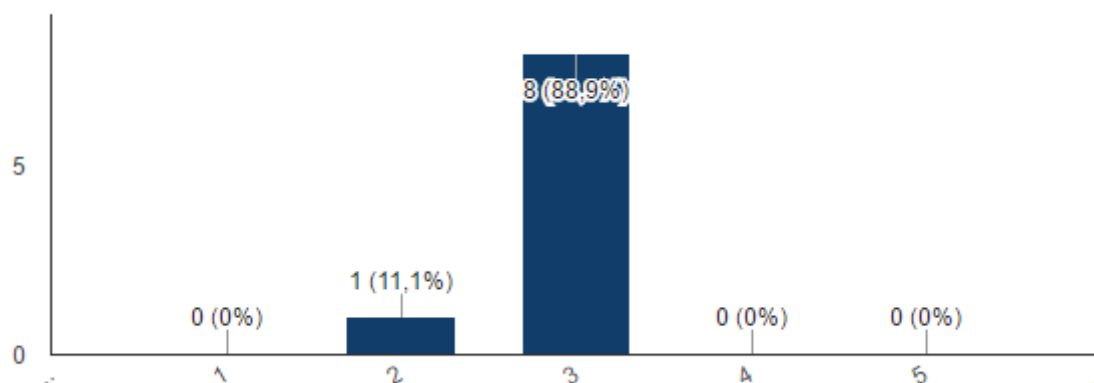
- Which of the following organisational values do you look for in a microbiological reference material provider? Based on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important)



Graph 18. Potential German customers' preferences concerning organisational values represented by reference material providers

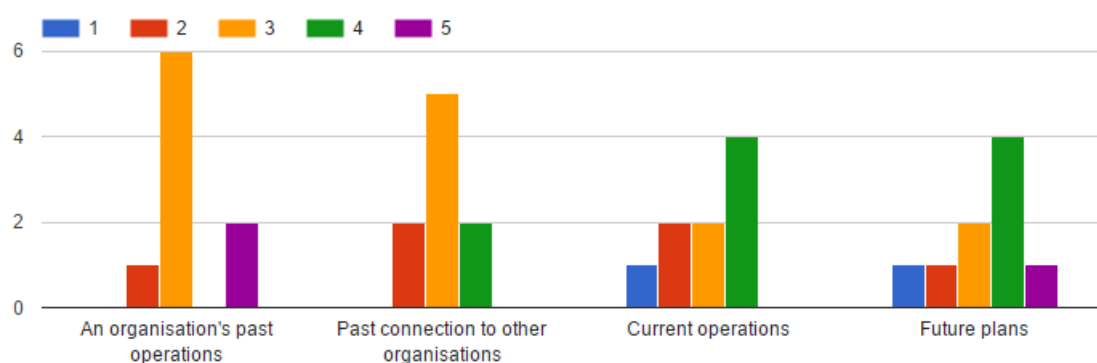
Corporate Storytelling

2. To what extent do you pay attention to an organisation's 'corporate story'? (an organisation's mission and vision, past achievements, future plans etc.)



Graph 19. Potential German Customers' tendency to pay attention to a provider's corporate story (1=no attention. 5=high level of attention)

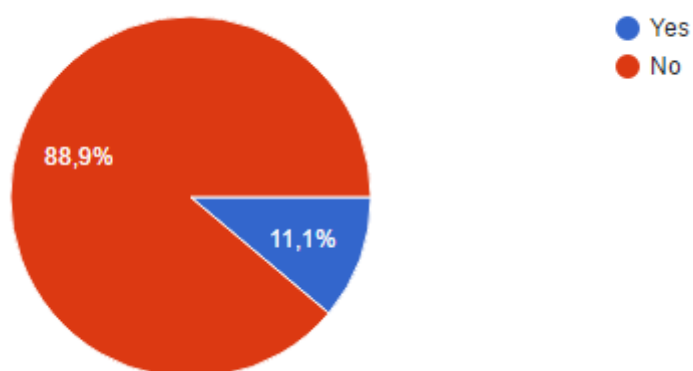
- 2.1. What do you look for in a microbiology reference material provider's 'corporate story'? Based on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important)



Graph 20. Potential German Customers' preferences concerning aspects of a provider's corporate story

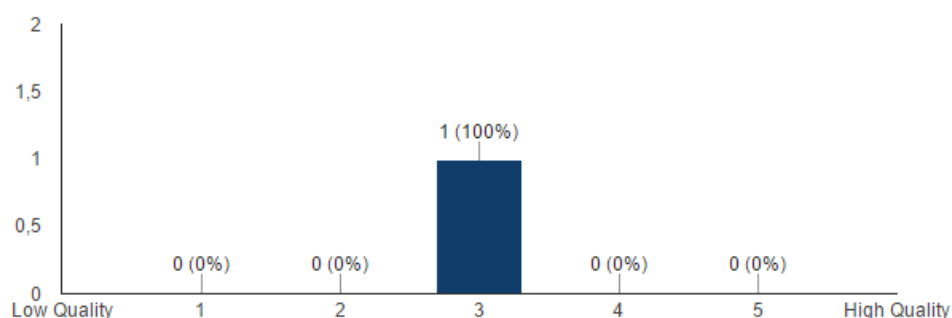
Awareness of the NVWA and the overall Dutch Microbiology Industry

3. Biosisto is the result of a spin-off of the Dutch government's Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA). Did you know that the NVWA previously produced reference materials?



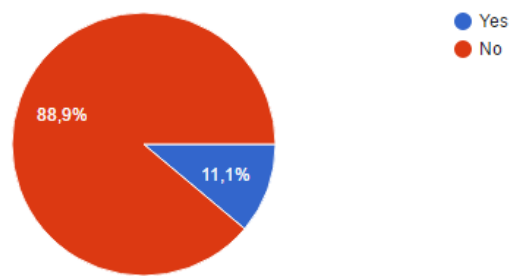
Graph 21. Potential German Customer's Awareness of the NVWA

- 3.1. If applicable, what is your opinion of the quality of the NVWA's products?



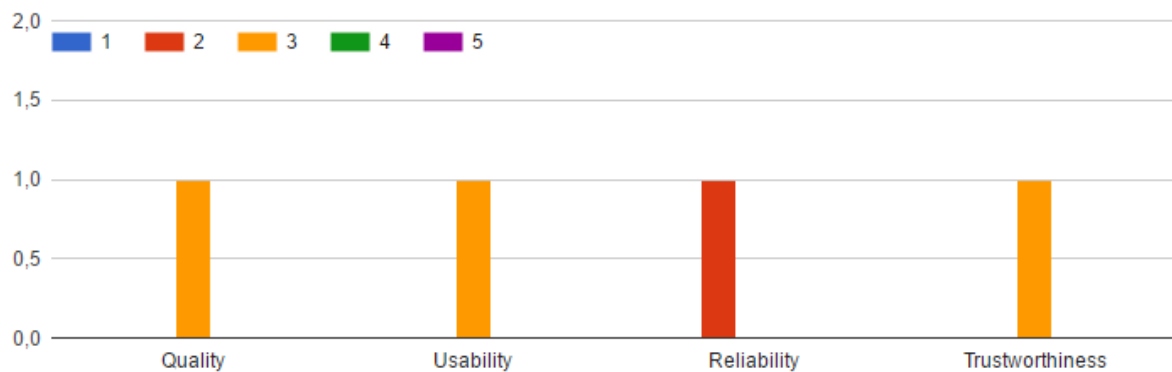
Graph 22. Potential German Customers' Opinion of the NVWA's Products

- 3.2. Do you have any experience with Dutch microbiology laboratories?



Graph 23. Potential German Customers' Experience with Dutch Microbiology Laboratories

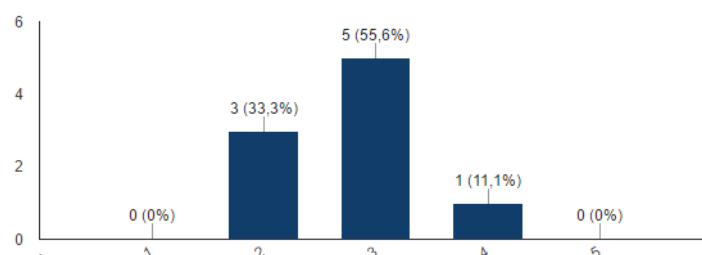
3.3. If applicable, what is your experience with Dutch microbiology laboratories concerning the following? Based on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high)



Graph 24. Potential German Customers' Perception of Organisational Values/Attributes Represented by Dutch Microbiology Laboratories

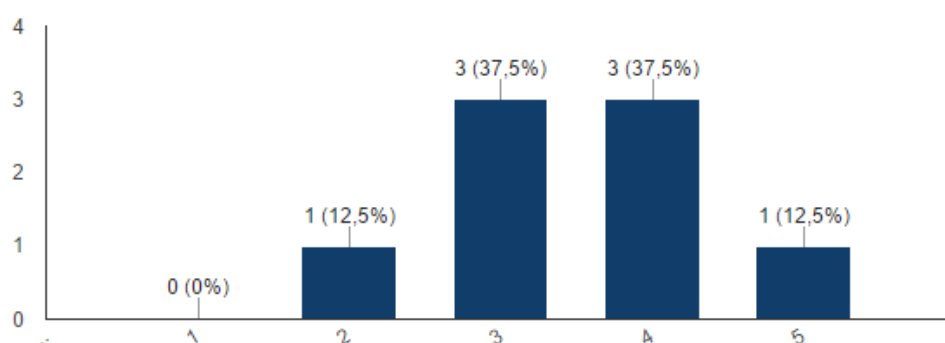
Direction of Communication

4. What is your preferred frequency of interaction with a microbiological reference material provider?



Graph 25. Potential German Customers' Preferred Frequency of Interaction with Microbiological Reference Material Providers (1=no contact. 5=highly frequent contact)

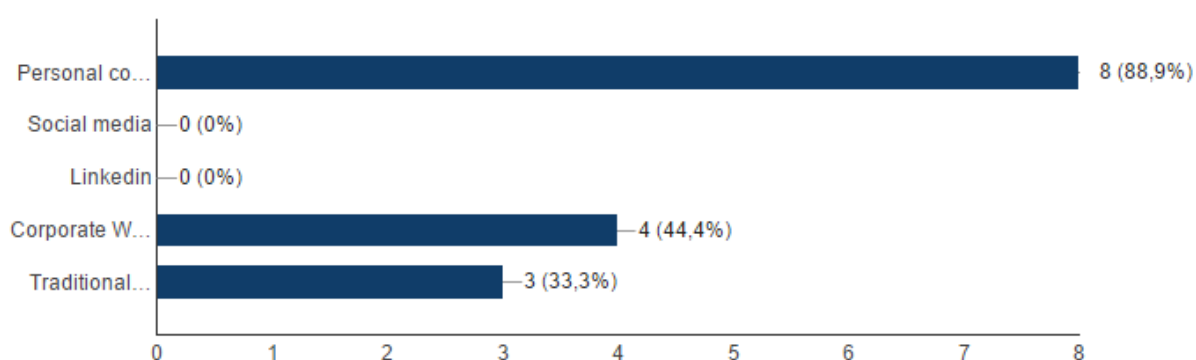
4.1. Which of the following relationships with a microbiological reference material provider do you prefer?



Graph 26. Potential German Customers' Preferred Relationship with Microbiological Reference Material Providers (1=vendor(no interaction, no customer focus). 5=partner(highly frequent interaction, high level of customer focus))

Communication Channels

5. Through which communication channels do you prefer to be exposed to reference material providers?



Graph 27. Potential German Customers' Preferred Communication Channels For Interaction with Reference Material Providers

Appendix 4: Interview Questions Existing Customers/The Netherlands

Appendix 4.1. Interview Questions, Ferry Pronk, TLR International

Organisational Values

1.1. Which organizational values do you see represented by Biosisto?

- 1.2. Your survey answers suggest that Biosisto primarily represents customer focus, receiving a 5. TLR supposedly rates Biosisto's representation of high quality, reliability, innovation, product usability and trustworthiness with a 4. Can you elaborate on this? How does Biosisto represent customer focus from TLR's perspective?
- 1.3. Which core values does TLR find important, to represent itself, and to see represented in providers?

Corporate Storytelling

- 2.1. Your survey results suggest that Biosisto primarily represents its connections to the NVWA through its corporate communications. Biosisto's communications are less focused on its past experiences, current operations, and future plans. Can you elaborate on this?
- 2.2. Does TLR prefer that a reference material provider is focused on its future, or on its past?
- 2.3. Does TLR look for high quality, or innovative abilities, when selecting laboratories to purchase from? Would you say that Biosisto represents high quality over innovation, or vice versa?
- 2.4. Is TLR likely to buy from providers you know, or look elsewhere for innovation?
- 2.5. To what extent is customer focus a deciding factor when buying from companies? Do you look for high quality, trusted products, or are you more concerned about an organisation's ability to develop according to your needs?
- 2.6. When you think of the NVWA, what do you think of?
- 2.7. What were favourable qualities of the NVWA; what were its deficiencies?
- 2.8. Which organizational values did the NVWA primarily represent?
- 2.9. Do you perceive Biosisto as a separate organisation, or as a part of the NVWA?

Communication Channels

- 3.1. Through which communication channels have you been exposed to Biosisto so far? How were you made aware of Biosisto's takeover of the NVWA's production of reference materials?
- 3.2. Does TLR pay attention to a provider's corporate website? Do you pay attention to Biosisto's corporate website specifically?
- 3.3. Which communication channels does TLR use to communicate with customers and/or providers?

Direction of Communication

- 4.1. In the survey Pronk rates Biosisto's efforts to remain in contact with TLR with a 4. Can you elaborate on this? What has contact with Biosisto looked like so far?
- 4.2. How much contact do you normally have with provider and/or customers?
- 4.3. In the survey you state that you are satisfied with the frequency of communication with Biosisto. Can you elaborate on why this level of contact is satisfactory for TLR?
- 4.4. Are two-way, or one-way forms of communication preferred by your organization?
- 4.5. In the survey, you indicate that TLR defines its relationship with Biosisto as partner-oriented, rather than vendor-oriented? Can you elaborate on this? What makes Biosisto a partner, rather than a vendor?

Appendix 4.2. Interview Questions, Klaas Bosma, Frisia Foods

Organisational Values

- 1.4. Which organizational values do you see represented by Biosisto?
- 1.5. Your survey answers suggest that Biosisto strongly represents high quality, reliability, customer focus, product usability and trustworthiness, receiving a 5. Innovation received a 4. Can you elaborate on this?
- 1.6. Which core values does Frisia Foods Find important?

Corporate Storytelling

- 2.1. Your survey results suggest that Biosisto evenly represents its past experiences, historical connections, current operations, and future plans. Can you elaborate on this?
- 2.2. Does Frisia Foods prefer that a reference material provider is focused on its future, or on its past?
- 2.4. Does Frisia Foods look for high quality, or innovative abilities, when selecting laboratories to purchase from? Would you say that Biosisto represents high quality over innovation, or vice versa?
- 2.7. Are you likely to buy from providers you know, or look elsewhere for innovation?

2.8. To what extent is customer focus a deciding factor when buying from companies? Do you look for high quality, trusted products, or are you more concerned about an organisation's ability to develop according to your needs? To what extent have you experienced Biosisto to represent customer focus?

2.9. When you think of the NVWA, what do you think of?

2.10. What were favourable qualities of the NVWA; what were its deficiencies?

2.11. Which organizational values did the NVWA primarily represent?

2.12. Do you perceive Biosisto as a separate organisation, or as a part of the NVWA?

Communication Channels

3.1. Through which communication channels have you been exposed to Biosisto so far? How were you made aware of Biosisto's takeover of the NVWA's production of reference materials?

3.2. Does Frisia Foods pay attention to a provider's corporate website? Do you pay attention to Biosisto's corporate website?

3.3. Which communication channels does Frisia Foods use to communicate to customers and/or providers?

Direction of Communication

4.1. In the survey Bosma rates Biosisto efforts to remain in contact with Frisia Foods with a 3. Can you elaborate on this? What has contact with Biosisto looked like so far?

4.2. How much contact does Frisia Foods normally have with providers and/or customers?

4.3. In the survey you state that you are satisfied with the frequency of communication with Biosisto. Can you elaborate on why this level of contact is satisfactory for Frisia Foods?

4.4. Are two-way, or one-way forms of communication preferred by your organization?

4.5. In the survey, you indicate that Frisia Foods defines its relationship with Biosisto as partner-oriented, rather than vendor-oriented? Can you elaborate on this? What makes Biosisto a partner?

Appendix 5: Interview Nexus' Existing Customers/The Netherlands

Appendix 5.1.: Interview Nexus: TLR International

Present: Ferry Pronk, Manager KAM, Marieke Mulder, Tom Chapple

Date: 25/04/2016

Main topic: Establishing current customers' opinion of Biosisto and its communications.

Primary Research Question(s): What aspects of corporate communication does the target group attribute importance to?; Which communication channels are perceived as favourable or non-favourable by the target group?

Place: Bankwerkerstraat 16, 3077 MB Rotterdam

Name of interviewer: Tom Chapple

Name of interviewee(s): Ferry Pronk

Role of interviewee: Manager Microbiology and microscopy

Sub topics: TLR wants and needs regarding future communication with Biosisto

Reason for interview: Data collection for research project

Topic 1 (Which organisational values are strongly represented by Biosisto?)

Based on Pronk's response to the survey distributed among existing customers, he confirmed that Biosisto represents high quality and reliability. Customer focus however is where Biosisto's strong point lies. In Pronk's opinion the NVWA always delivered high quality products to TLR. This has not changed now Biosisto has adopted NVWA staff and production processes. Pronk has rarely experienced difficulties with Biosisto's product. Pronk is clear to state that the NVWA represented very little customer focus. Pronk emphasises however that this so far does not seem to hold true for Biosisto. He has experienced a satisfactory level of two-way communication with Biosisto, which highlights Biosisto's customer focus. High customer focus has allowed for a transparent relationship where customer input is encouraged by Biosisto, feels Pronk.

Topic 2 (Which aspects of Biosisto's corporate story are prominent according to the target group?)

Pronk is quick to suggest that TLR is a highly future-oriented organisation. Pronk's manager states that "an organisation cannot change its past, but it can change its future", suggesting organisations

should focus resources on the future. Pronk is clear that TLR still perceives Biosisto as the NVWA. Meaning that Biosisto's products are also linked to the high quality which the NVWA was known to deliver. Upon mentioning the NVWA Pronk and Manager CAM were quick to point out a lack of customer focus from the NVWA. The NVWA did not engage in two-way communication with customers, strictly selling standardised products which were not subject to client input. TLR is unaware of Biosisto's future plans and innovative ideas, which are appealing to the client.

Topic 3 (How do you assess the current frequency and nature of communication with Biosisto?)

Pronk reiterates that Biosisto engages in more two-way communication than the NVWA was previously known to do. Overall Pronk senses that Biosisto embodies a higher level of customer focus, allowing customers to have input in the development of new Biosisto products. As stated in the above however, TLR desires more communication from Biosisto concerning its future plans. TLR currently perceives Biosisto as having a more passive approach to communication, whilst a more active approach is appreciated. Every now and then TLR would appreciate some form of proactive communication to inform customers of developments within Biosisto.

Topic 4 (Through which communication channels have you been exposed to Biosisto?)

TLR became aware of Biosisto through personal contact. Biosisto representatives personally visited TLR to discuss the changes as a consequence of the takeover of production from the NVWA. As of now TLR appreciates frequent email contact with Biosisto. Pronk's manager is clear that face-to-face contact is only desired if Biosisto needs to inform customers of significant developments to products and services. Overall current amount and frequency of personal contact through email is appreciated.

Appendix 5.2.: Interview Nexus: Frisia Foods

Present: Klaas Bosma, Marieke Mulder, Tom Chapple

Date: 26/04/2016

Main topic: Establishing current customers' opinion of Biosisto and its communications.

Primary Research Question(s): What aspects of corporate communication does the target group attribute importance to?; Which communication channels are perceived as favourable or non-favourable by the target group?

Place: Leeksterweg 59, 8433 KW Haulerwijk

Name of interviewer: Tom Chapple

Name of interviewee(s): Klaas Bosma

Role of interviewee: Microbiology laboratory technician

Sub topics: Frisia Foods wants and needs regarding future communication with Biosisto

Reason for interview: Data collection for research project

Topic 1 (Which organisational values are strongly represented by Biosisto?)

Bosma associates Biosisto innovative character. Bosma mentions that the NVWA previously did not engage in customer focus/adaptability. Since Biosisto adopted the NVWA's production processes Bosma has noticed a clear effort to closely involve customers with product development. This to Bosma is very positive and a reason for him to choose to purchase from Biosisto over any competitors. Furthermore Bosma is pleased with the quality of Biosisto products. Bosma states that the quality does not stand out, but that he places trust in Biosisto employees and their expertise. Bosma tests products he purchases himself as a quality check. The quality of Biosisto products so far has been satisfactory. Bosma mentions that Biosisto comes across as a highly specialised company, with not too broad a product range, meaning Biosisto is more capable of maintaining quality and adhering to customer needs in the eyes of Frisia Foods. According to Bosma the NVWA had a wide range of products, with a lack of specialisation.

Topic 2 (Which aspects of Biosisto's corporate story are prominent according to the target group?)

According to Bosma, Biosisto's connection to the NVWA is clear and perceived in a positive manner. Bosma trusts Biosisto to adhere to the same quality as the NVWA did. Bosma knows the NVWA to be less focused on customers than is optimal, however he is quick to mention that this did not negatively impact his perception of the NVWA, thus not affecting how he perceives Biosisto in any way or form. Bosma is well aware that Biosisto does not belong to the NVWA, but that it has strictly employed and purchases former NVWA employees and equipment to form its own company. As stated in the above, Bosma feels that Biosisto is a highly innovative organisation, which is very promising and appealing to Frisia Foods. Bosma states that he is often made aware of future developments at Biosisto, however Biosisto could make more effort to promote its innovative capabilities. Furthermore, Bosma lacks knowledge of Biosisto's current structure (staff, production processes). This does not trouble Bosma.

Topic 3 (How do you assess the current frequency and nature of communication with Biosisto?)

Throughout the interview it is clear that Bosma perceives Biosisto as a partner. Bosma values two-way communication and the fact he can have input in a company such as Biosisto's operations. Bosma has experienced one-way communication with companies similar to Biosisto in the past; this has been a problem for Bosma. Bosma has noticed that Biosisto makes a clear effort to stay in personal contact with its customers, which is greatly appreciated.

Topic 4 (Through which communication channels have you been exposed to Biosisto?)

Bosma has been exposed to Biosisto through personal contact (primarily email). This has led to satisfactory cooperation between Biosisto and Frisia Foods. Bosma greatly appreciates personal visits from Biosisto representatives as this makes him feel more involved in the company's production processes, reinforcing the partner-oriented nature of the two companies' relationship.

Appendix 6: Interview Questions Potential Customers/Belgium

Appendix 6.1. Interview Questions, Dr. De Smedt, Microsmedt

Organisational Values

- 1.7. Which values do you like to see represented by reference material providers? / Do you see represented by Biosisto?
- 1.8. In the survey you rated all preferred organisational values with a 5, except for innovation, which received a 3. Can you elaborate on this?
- 1.9. Which core values does Microsmedt attempt to represent?

Corporate Storytelling

- 2.1. In the survey De Smedt rates the importance of Past experience, Historical Connections, Current Operations and Future Plans with a 5: Can you explain your decision to give all a 5? In your opinion, must a reference material provider represent these aspects of a corporate story evenly?
- 2.2. To what extent do you pay attention, or attribute trust to an organization's corporate story, through their communications?
- 2.3. Does Microsmedt prefer that a reference material provider is focused on its future, or on its past?
- 2.4. Does Microsmedt look for high quality, or innovative abilities, when selecting laboratories to purchase from?

- 2.5. As a company, are you more focused on the long-term or the short-term?
- 2.6. Is the Belgian microbiology industry more focused on the long-term or the short-term?
- 2.7. Are you likely to buy from vendors you know, or look elsewhere for innovation?
- 2.8. To what extent is customer focus a deciding factor when buying from companies? Do you look for high quality, trusted products, or are you more concerned about an organisation's ability to develop according to your needs?
- 2.9. When you think of the NVWA, what do you think of?
- 2.10. What were favourable qualities of the NVWA; what were its deficiencies?
- 2.11. What does De Smedt think of the Dutch industry? How does the Dutch industry compare to Belgium?
- 2.12. Does it make any difference to yourself whether you work with Belgian or with international companies? Why yes or no?

Communication Channels

- 3.1. De Smedt mentions to have been exposed to Biosisto through its corporate website: Can you explain the process of this?
- 3.2. According to survey results, Microsmedt prefers contact through personal channels and the corporate website; can you elaborate on these preferences?
- 3.3. Does Microsmedt pay attention to any other channels?
- 3.4. Which communication channels do you use to communicate to customers and/or providers?

Direction of Communication

- 4.1. How have you experienced Biosisto's efforts to remain in contact with yourself to have been so far?
- 4.2. On the survey you highly rate the importance of two-way communication with providers: What is Microsmedt's ideal amount of contact with a provider?

4.3. How much input do you desire to have into the production processes of a provider?

4.4. Can you define your ideal relationship with a provider?

4.5. Are two-way, or one-way forms of communication preferred by your organisation?

Appendix 6.2. Interview Questions, Ann Verbeke, Lavetan

Organisational Values

1.10. Which values do you like to see represented by reference material providers? / Do you see represented by Biosisto?

1.11. In the survey you rated all preferred organisational values with a 5, except for innovation and customer focus, which received a 3. Can you elaborate on this?

1.12. Which core values does Lavetan attempt to represent?

Corporate Storytelling

2.1. In the survey Verbeke rates the importance of Past experience, Historical Connections with a 3. Verbeke gives Current Operations and Future Plans with a 4: Can you explain your decision behind the ratings?

2.2. To what extent do you pay attention, or attribute trust to an organization's corporate story, through their communications?

2.3. Does Lavetan prefer that a reference material provider is focused on its future, or on its past?

2.4. Does Lavetan look for high quality, or innovative abilities, when selecting laboratories to purchase from?

2.5. As a company, are you more focused on the long-term or the short-term?

2.6. Is the Belgian microbiology industry more focused on the long-term or the short-term?

2.7. Are you likely to buy from vendors you know, or look elsewhere for innovation?

2.8. To what extent is customer focus a deciding factor when buying from companies? Do you look for high quality, trusted products, or are you more concerned about an organisation's ability to develop according to your needs?

2.9. When you think of the NVWA, what do you think of?

2.10. What were favourable qualities of the NVWA; what were its deficiencies?

2.11. What is Lavetan's opinion of the Dutch industry? How does the Dutch industry compare to Belgium?

2.12. Does it make any difference to yourself whether you work with Belgian or with international companies? Why yes or no?

Communication Channels

3.1. According to survey results, Lavetan prefers contact through personal channels; can you elaborate on these preferences? Do you prefer contact through email, or face-to-face meetings?

3.2. Does Lavetan pay attention to any other channels?

3.3. Which communication channels does Lavetan use to communicate to customers and/or providers?

Direction of Communication

4.1. Verbeke gives a 3 for the amount of contact she wants with a provider; Why a 3? How would you define this amount of contact?

4.2. How much contact do you have with current reference material providers?

4.3. What is your ideal amount of contact with a provider?

4.4. How much input do you want into a providers production processes?

4.5. Can you define your ideal relationship with a provider?

4.6. Are two-way, or one-way forms of communication preferred by your organization?

4.7. In the survey, you rated the show lenience towards a partner-oriented relationship with providers. Can you elaborate on this? What does a relationship between Lavetan and a reference material provider look like?

Appendix 7: Interview Nexus' Potential Customers/Belgium

Appendix 7.1. Interview Nexus: Dr. De Smedt, Microsmedt

Present: Jeffrey de Smedt, Marieke Mulder, Tom Chapple

Date: 02/05/2016

Main topic: Establishing potential customers' opinion of Biosisto and its communications.

Primary Research Question(s): What aspects of corporate communication does the target group attribute importance to?; Which communication channels are perceived as favourable or non-favourable by the target group?

Place: Vennen 4 bus 1 - B-2200 Herentals

Name of interviewer: Tom Chapple

Name of interviewee(s): Jef de Smedt

Role of interviewee: Technical Manager/Company owner

Sub topics: Microsmedt's opinion of the NVWA and the Dutch industry

Reason for interview: Data collection for research project

Topic 1 (Which organisational values does the interviewee prefer to see reflected in a provider's communications?)

De Smedt is clear that for him, when selecting a reference material producer to purchase from customer focus and accessibility are the key qualities/organisational values which should be represented through communication. De Smedt states that Microsmedt itself stands for high quality, customer focus, flexibility and accessibility. This can be realised due to the small size of the company's laboratory and product line. De Smedt, already aware of Biosisto, states that Biosisto reflects the same values and strengths through its communications. De Smedt states that on the other end of the spectrum many reference material providers make use of very large laboratories, focusing on quantity over quality. Consequently these providers are less capable of offering customer-friendly products; customer focus is ignored. De Smedt states that large laboratories take too long to engage with customers through communication channels, as the result of a long 'communication line'. Small companies, such as Biosisto, on the other hand are quick to reply to customer enquiries due to the short line of communication. Overall, high quality takes precedent over innovation for De Smedt, as long as the product line and communication activities embody customer focus; strong customer focus is most important of all. De Smedt is more likely to purchase

from a provider known for its high quality, rather than an unknown company making claims about its innovative abilities.

Topic 2 (Which aspects of a corporate story are important according to the target group?)

De Smedt states that, although a company's history and past experiences are important to know of, what he wants to see from providers is a clear representation of current operations and the products currently on the production line, whilst maintaining and representing a clear vision concerning future plans. De Smedt states that when it comes to Biosisto, the organisation's connection to the NVWA is important to know of, however once this fact has been made known to the client, Biosisto's communication efforts should not focus too much on historical connections, but rather highlight the high quality of its current products and future plans. De Smedt notes that the representation of a clear corporate story through an organisation's corporate communications is highly important to him. De Smedt emphasises the importance of a well presented vision. When asked whether an organisation's corporate story, in particular an organisation's vision, should underline short- or long-term plans, De Smedt tells that short-term plans are more relevant to him, as this represents an organisation's flexibility. A clear long-term plan can be perceived by customers as non-feasible and overly structured, hampering adaptability.

Topic 3 (What is the interviewee's perception of the NVWA and/or the Dutch microbiology industry?)

When purchasing from the NVWA De Smedt perceived a low level of customer focus and adaptability; this however was not experienced as problematic. De Smedt accepted this was normal for the NVWA when conducting business. Elaborating on Microsmedt's relationship with the NVWA, De Smedt notes that communication from the producer to customer was of a highly commercialised nature, lacking a personal touch. The NVWA's products clearly adhered to high quality standards, which was one of the main reasons for De Smedt to purchase the producer's products. Speaking of the Dutch microbiology market, De Smedt explains that Dutch microbiology laboratories have more experience than similar Belgian labs, whilst innovation is a strength of the Dutch microbiology industry. According to De Smedt the Belgian industry is too structured, hampering innovation and accessibility.

Topic 4 (Through which communication channels does the target group prefer to be exposed to potential reference material providers?)

Already aware of Biosisto, De Smedt was exposed to the NVWA spin-off through email contact and the company's corporate website. De Smedt says to be keen on searching for customer and providers through google on a regular basis, in order to keep up to date with market developments. Engaging with its own customers Microsmedt utilises email and a corporate website. The latter is soon to be updated. Having a clear corporate website is very important for Microsmedt. De Smedt personally does not use LinkedIn. The company also does not have a LinkedIn page. Microsmedt is not active on any other social media channels.

Topic 5 (What is the target group's preferred frequency and nature of communication with reference material providers?)

Microsmedt is positive about Biosisto's efforts to remain in contact with the organisation. De Smedt states that it is important for Microsmedt's providers to conduct themselves as partners. This entails frequent two-way communication, allowing room for customer input and feedback. De Smedt states that with his own customers he actively engages in two-way communication, promoting a relationship which allows for customer input, frequently keeping customers up to date on developments at Microsmedt. De Smedt desires companies such as Biosisto to be transparent about future developments to products and services, ensuring customers are kept up to date on a frequent basis. De Smedt adds that he does not expect providers to bend over backwards to adhere to customer needs. De Smedt is clearly against the tendencies of large, commercialised organisations to engage in one-way communication. Communications from provider to customer must embody transparency and customer focus.

Appendix 7.2.: Interview Nexus: Ann Verbeke, Lavetan

Present: Ann Verbeke, Marieke Mulder, Tom Chapple

Date: 02/05/2016

Main topic: Establishing potential customers' opinion of Biosisto and its communications.

Primary Research Question(s): What aspects of corporate communication does the target group attribute importance to?; Which communication channels are perceived as favourable or non-favourable by the target group?

Place: Veedijk 56, 2300 Turnhout

Name of interviewer: Tom Chapple

Name of interviewee(s): Ann Verbeke

Role of interviewee: Technical Manager

Sub topics: Lavetan's opinion of the NVWA and the Dutch industry

Reason for interview: Data collection for research project

Topic 1 (Which organisational values does the interviewee prefer to see reflected in a provider's communications?)

According to Verbeke high quality has priority over most other organisational values when selecting reference material producers to purchase from. If a provider's products are not up to the quality standards which Lavetan demands they will not hesitate to discontinue the purchase of products. However, providers do not necessarily have to promote themselves based on high quality. Lavetan admires innovation and transparency, as long as both factors do not inhibit quality. Verbeke states that Lavetan itself does attempt to be innovative, however it is wary of products and production techniques which have not yet been thoroughly tested. Lavetan takes risks of a very calculated nature.

Topic 2 (Which aspects of a corporate story are important according to the target group?)

Verbeke states that high quality is largely the result of a provider's experience. Therefore, a provider's past and historical connections are certainly factors which Lavetan pays attention to. However, if a provider is perceived as innovative, with clear future ambitions which suit Lavetan's needs, a lack of past experiences and historical connections does not mean Lavetan will not purchase from this organisation. Verbeke explains the decision process when selecting reference material providers. If a potential provider contacts Lavetan, a dedicated individual will conduct an extensive analysis of the company's corporate communications and all other media which concerns the provider. If the provider is seen as interesting by Lavetan it is invited to the laboratory to test its products, assessing whether quality is up to Lavetan's standards. If the provider's products are up to standard a meeting is arranged to design a long-term plan detailing future cooperation. Verbeke reiterates that high quality is what Lavetan primarily looks for during the process, however, this is not completely dependent on a provider's past experiences and historical connections; a clear representation of the provider's current operations and future plans are a priority for Lavetan.

Topic 3 (What is the interviewee's perception of the NVWA and/or the Dutch microbiology industry?)

Verbeke notes that Lavetan was satisfied with its relationship with the NVWA. According to Verbeke, the NVWA delivered consistently high quality products, which were in line with Lavetan's needs. From a communication perspective however, the NVWA lacked visible customer focus. There was a long response time when communicating with the NVWA, whilst the Dutch governmental agency's responses were of a highly academic nature. Verbeke notes that this was most likely a result of the NVWA's tendency to engage in strictly one-way communication. Verbeke would have preferred a two-way line of communication, however this was not detrimental to the relationship between both parties.

Verbeke has little to no experience with the Dutch microbiology industry besides purchasing products from the NVWA. Verbeke is clear that Lavetan prefers to purchase from non-Belgian companies. The Belgian market does not contain any reference material providers which are relevant to Lavetan. Verbeke notes that the Belgian reference material industry is overly structured, heavily controlled by the government, consisting primarily of university laboratories.

Topic 4 (Through which communication channels does the target group prefer to be exposed to potential reference material providers?)

Lavetan has a predetermined process used to assess a potential provider's potential. Verbeke prefers potential provider's to contact Lavetan through email, after which she appoints an individual whom assesses the potential provider's potential through a variety of channels, such as corporate websites, mentions in the media, past experiences with the potential provider's staff documented by Lavetan and social media platform LinkedIn. Lavetan conducts any follow-up communication with (potential) providers through email, and telephone where necessary. Face-to-face contact takes place during the testing phase of a provider's products, and the development of a collective long-term plan concerning the relationship between both parties.

Topic 5 (What is the target group's preferred frequency and nature of communication with reference material providers?)

According to Verbeke, Lavetan seeks active cooperation with any reference material provider. Lavetan expects reference material providers to engage in two-way communication. Verbeke finds it important to be consistently kept up to date on a provider's current operations and any future plans. As stated in the above, once a relationship has been established with a provider, both parties meet to develop a collective long-term plan. Lavetan desires to have a certain level of input concerning a provider's products. Verbeke prefers a partner-oriented relationship with providers, which includes

room for input and feedback. According to Verbeke, communication from provider to customer must embody clear customer focus, whilst correspondence is preferably of a non-commercialised nature.

Appendix 8: Interview Questions, Potential Customers/Germany

Appendix 8.1.: Interview Questions: Kerstin Lerch, IBEN Laboratories

Organisational Values

- 1.1. Which values do you like to see represented by reference material providers?
- 1.2. Can you elaborate on your survey answers? (Lerch gives customer focus and innovation a 3; trustworthiness a 4; high quality, reliability, product usability a 5:)
- 1.3. Are there additional values which a provider must represent in your opinion?
- 1.4. Can you give some examples of how the aforementioned values should be represented in practice?
- 1.5. Wherein lie a provider's deficiencies?
- 1.6. Which core values does IBEN look to represent itself?

Corporate Story

- 2.1. In her survey answers, Lerch rates past operations and historical connections with a 3; IBEN gives current operations and future plans a 4: Why is a representation of past operations and historical connections less relevant to IBEN than a present, and future-based story
- 2.2. Have you rather that a reference material provider is focused on its future, or on its past?
- 2.3. Does IBEN look for high quality, or innovative abilities, when selecting laboratories to purchase from?
- 2.4. As a company, are you more focused on the long-term or the short-term?
- 2.5. Is IBEN likely to buy from providers its knows, or look elsewhere for innovation?
- 2.6. To what extent is customer focus a deciding factor when buying from companies? Does IBEN look for high quality, trusted products, or is the organization more concerned about an organisation's ability to develop according to its needs?

2.7. Would you define IBEN as risk averse, or the opposite?

2.8. Can you tell me more about the German market? Is the German microbiology market generally risk averse, or the opposite? Is the long-term (forward looking, pragmatic solutions, innovation) emphasised, or the short-term/the past (emphasis on traditions, history, etc.?)

2.9. According to survey results Lerch has no experience with Dutch labs: what is IBEN's collective perception of the Dutch industry? Compared to Germany?

2.10. Does it make any difference to yourself whether you work with German or with international companies? Why yes or no?

Direction of Communication

3.1. Lerch gives a 2 for the amount of contact she wants with a provider; Why a 2? How would you define this amount of contact?

3.2. How much contact do you have with current reference material providers?

3.3. What is your ideal amount of contact with a provider?

3.4. How much input do you desire to have concerning a provider's production processes?

3.5. Can you define IBEN's ideal relationship with a provider?

3.6. Are two-way, or one-way forms of communication preferred by your organisation?

3.7. In your survey answers you show lenience towards a vendor-oriented relationship with your providers. Does IBEN prefer to approach reference material provider as vendors, entailing little to no follow up communication, or as a partner?

Communication Channels

4.1. According to the survey, Lerch prefers contact through personal channels; Why these preferences? Does IBEN prefer the use of Email, face-to-face contact, or otherwise?

4.2. Survey answers suggest that Lerch also pays attention to corporate websites: What does IBEN look for in a corporate website?

4.3. Does IBEN pay attention to any other channels?

4.4. Which communication channels does IBEN use to communicate with customers and/or providers?

Appendix 9: Interview Nexus' Potential Customers/Germany

Appendix 9.1.: Interview Nexus: Kerstin Lerch, IBEN Laboratories

Present: Kerstin Lerch, Marieke Mulder, Tom Chapple

Date: 18/05/2016

Main topic: Establishing potential customers' opinion of Biosisto and its communications.

Primary Research Question(s): What aspects of corporate communication does the target group attribute importance to?; Which communication channels are perceived as favourable or non-favourable by the target group?

Place: Am Lunedeich 157, 27572 Bremerhaven, Germany

Name of interviewer: Tom Chapple

Name of interviewee(s): Kerstin Lerch

Role of interviewee: Technical Manager Microbiology

Sub topics: IBEN's opinion of the NVWA and the Dutch industry

Reason for interview: Data collection for research project

Topic 1 (Which organisational values does the interviewee prefer to see reflected in a provider's communications?)

Lerch states that IBEN looks for organisational values reflecting high quality amongst its providers. High quality and reliability take precedent over any other organisational values and attributes. Customer focus and innovation are not important to IBEN as, according to Lerch, both have potential to hinder quality. In its own communications towards customers IBEN tries to embody high quality and reliability. Lerch adds that, when purchasing reference materials, IBEN simply selects products from a preferably wide range of products. IBEN does not expect these products to be tailored to their

own needs, so long as high quality is ensured. Lerch adds that, in the future, IBEN would not be against having more input concerning the development of its provider's products.

Topic 2 (Which aspects of a corporate story are important according to the target group?)

Lerch mentions that from IBEN's perspective one cannot change the past. In other words, a corporate story focused on a reference material provider's past is meaningless to IBEN. Lerch notes that, although IBEN does not mind a slight introduction to a provider's past and historical connections, a provider's communication must represent current operations and future plans. According to Lerch, a provider's past and historical connections certainly does not influence IBEN's decision, whom to purchase products from. Ideally, IBEN's provider's communications emphasise the development of products and services which are soon to be launched.

Topic 3 (What is the interviewee's perception of the NVWA and/or the Dutch microbiology industry?)

According to Lerch, IBEN has no knowledge of or experience with the NVWA. IBEN also has no experience with the Dutch microbiology industry/Dutch microbiology laboratories, so far. Lerch does however elaborate on the nature of the German microbiology industry. Lerch states that the German microbiology industry is old-fashioned. Innovation and taking risks is discouraged as a result of the German government's high level of control over the production processes of microbiology laboratories. Apparently, the industry is subject to a high level of control to ensure high quality is consistently achieved. Lerch notes that, this high level of control is reassuring for companies as IBEN as it does minimise risk and maximise quality. IBEN has little to no concerns that this high level of control inhibits innovation.

Topic 4 (Through which communication channels does the target group prefer to be exposed to potential reference material providers?)

According to Lerch, the majority of communication with potential and existing providers is conducted through personal channels, predominantly email. To establish initial contact or when a provider announces significant developments or has problems with its reference materials, IBEN does value face-to-face meetings. Lerch explains that when IBEN is approached by a potential provider, a board meeting takes place to discuss the pros and cons of engaging in business with the potential provider. Based on the outcome of the board meeting an interview is sent to the potential provider to establish further contact. IBEN does not actively use social media, including LinkedIn, to search for potential providers and/or customers. Lerch adds that IBEN does pay attention to the corporate

websites of potential providers to find out more about their products and services on offer, and to establish a better idea of the provider's production processes and what the laboratory stands for.

Topic 5 (What is the target group's preferred frequency and nature of communication with reference material providers?)

According to Lerch, IBEN prefers one-way flows of communication with its providers. Ideally, IBEN selects products from a provider's list of products. Communication takes place to confirm the purchase of the product, but no follow-up communication is established unless there are problems with the purchased product. This is somewhat due to IBEN's lack of desire to have input concerning a provider's production processes. Lerch states, that this is the general nature of IBEN's communication with a provider, however, she adds that it is desirable to establish a partnership with providers and customers. Lerch states that this is consistent with IBEN's tendency to remain loyal to whom it purchases from. Lerch notes, that when it comes to its own customers, IBEN actively informs them of the development of new products and services. Lerch adds that IBEN would show appreciation towards providers which do the same. Communication in the form of a newsletter, from (potential) reference material providers, is very much welcome, says Lerch. Overall, IBEN finds that two-way forms of communication are time consuming and not always welcome. Follow-up contact from provider to customer should only be established when significant developments to products and services are to take place.