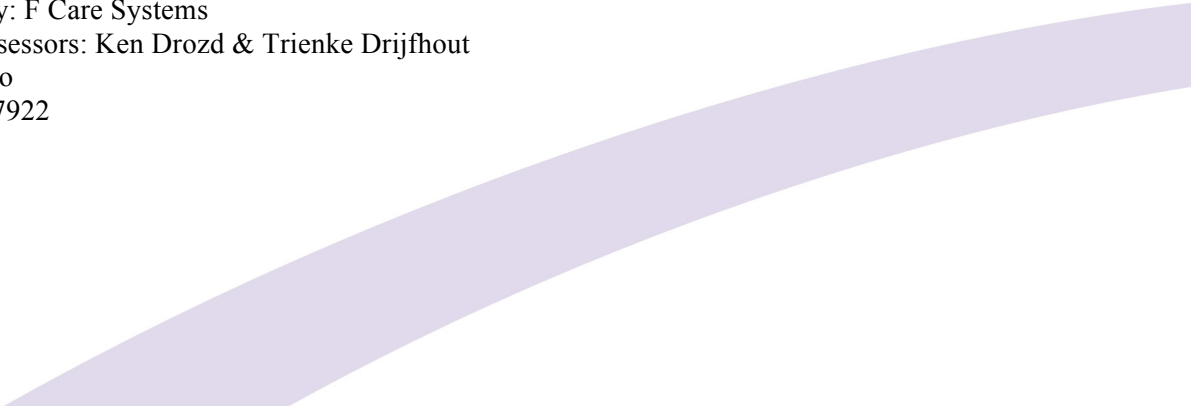


# Graduation Assignment

Marketing the Viridex RF in the Netherlands and Belgium – an  
Advisory Research Report

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## **Executive Summary**

This advisory research report was commissioned by the management department of F Care Systems in order to assist in the creation of a successful marketing strategy for the Viridex RF in Belgium and the Netherlands.

The Viridex RF is a revolutionary medical device that is equipped to treat a wide variety of superficial skin conditions using radiofrequency.

The report provides recommendations to overcome the marketing and communication problems with the desired outcome of convincing more members of the target group to purchase the Viridex RF. In order to come to valid recommendations, the report outlines the current marketing strategy and considerations that have been made regarding influential factors, such as cultural values, chosen communication channels and message content in order to identify the root of the marketing issues that the client is experiencing with the present strategy.

Research methods used include desk research as well as empirical research in the form of qualitative and quantitative data gathering in the fields of marketing strategies for the medical field and behavioural theories. A competitor's analysis has been done to identify the main competition for the Viridex RF in the Dutch and Belgian market, and to gain an understanding of their current marketing strategies. Furthermore, two surveys have been conducted amongst the current target group of professionals in the medical field and amongst the potential new target group of end users in the form of potential patients with the purpose of identifying behavioural and cultural factors, amongst these two groups of people, that influence the decision making process regarding willingness to purchase the Viridex RF.

Research results indicated that the Viridex RF currently only encounters indirect competition from various companies. There are many differences between F Care Systems and its competition, but there are also companies that have a similar approach in terms of product development, distribution and marketing strategy.

Amongst other things, the research questions aimed to provide clarity regarding consumer needs with regards to preferred content and channel for business proposals, and what external factors have an influence on the decision making process on the group of professionals. Research results indicated that medical professionals would prefer to be approached with business proposals at medical congresses or via email. A lack of previous awareness of the brand or technique applied does not necessarily negatively affect the decision to invest in a new product. Information that is considered essential in the decision making process is clinical evidence supporting the medical device as well as product features (e.g. technical specifications, user friendliness). Patient requesting certain treatment types have an influence on what method the professional would consider investing in.

Furthermore, end users mostly do independent research after getting diagnosed with skin conditions and most will share the results with the professional responsible for treatment. This fact in combination with their requests having an influence on what products are invested in makes it possible to create a pull effect. End users look for information online through search engines, social media and forums. Highly valued information includes patient experiences and clinical evidence.

The outcome of desk research indicates that many cultural differences exist between the Netherlands and Belgium. There are several language barriers through the common use of French, Flemish and Dutch in the two countries. Also, time management expectations, different habits of divisions between social and work life and differences between hierarchic expectations as well as a different approach to uncertainty avoidance indicate that cultural differences between Belgium and the Netherlands should not be underestimated.

Recommendations that were made as based on the research results include investing in the company website and updating printed promotional materials to ensure there is no discrepancy between internal company values and what is brought across to customers. Another recommendation is that F Care System should update the current social media strategy in terms of message content and language use to make it more appealing to a wider audience. It was also advised that the client invests in gaining additional clinical evidence for the Viridex RF as a whole.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Project Context.....	5
Chapter 2: Organisational Context.....	8
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework.....	10
3.1 Marketing Strategies in the Medical Sector.....	10
3.2 Behavioural Theories.....	12
Chapter 4: Research Design.....	16
4.1 Intervention Cycle.....	16
4.2 Research Objective.....	16
4.3 Research Framework.....	17
4.4 Conceptual Model.....	18
4.5 Research Objects.....	18
4.6 Research Questions.....	19
4.7 Research Strategy & Methodology.....	21
4.8 Research Limitations.....	22
Chapter 5: Research Result.....	23
5.1 Client and Competitor Analysis.....	23
5.2 Survey Results.....	31
5.3 Desk Research Results.....	36
Chapter 6: Conclusions.....	39
Chapter 7: Advice .....	46
7.1 Recommendations.....	46
7.2 Implementation Plan.....	56
References.....	62
Appendices.....	65

## **Chapter 1: Project context**

F Care Systems offers the international medical community innovative solutions and treatment methods for various medical skin and vein related conditions. These solutions are made possible through several devices and accessories that were developed by F Care Systems. The company aims to sell the devices to as many medical practices and hospitals as possible. There are two main devices the company has based its success on, namely the EVRF (Endovenous Radiofrequency) and the Viridex RF. The EVRF can be used for certain surgical treatments, whereas the Viridex RF can only be used for superficial and aesthetic skin problems. Although these two products share many functions and treatments they can be used for, they have different target groups. Therefore, the EVRF is targeted at surgeons and proctologists and the Viridex RF at dermatologists and skin therapists in large European markets.

The issue for the organisation is that it is hard to market the product successfully and to attract new customers. This is mirrored by lack of response and enthusiasm to marketing activities. The following activities are organised to reach Viridex RF's target group: a website is currently being developed for the product, and the Viridex RF is also explained on the main website. Furthermore, free workshops are being organised to give professionals information and to instruct them on the use of the device. Few professionals express an interest in participating in these workshops. Apart from these activities, the company has social media accounts where the product is also occasionally being promoted, but the focus lies mainly on other products and procedures developed by F Care Systems. Posters and brochures have also been developed. However, these materials are rarely distributed amongst the target group. This wide variety of communication activities has so far not lead to the desired outcome of making more members of the target group willing to purchase the Viridex RF, indicating that the because the communication efforts lack a clear vision the product's main attributes and Unique Selling Proposition (USP) is not communicated in the most effective manner regarding message content and channel.

F Care Systems has been successful in marketing and distributing the EVRF, mainly through the publication of clinical trials. Sales have been somewhat disappointing for the Viridex RF, so that is what this research project will be focused on.

The client does not have a defined marketing strategy for the Viridex RF; marketing activities are organised but a clear vision is lacking. This leads to difficulties in reaching the target group; this is reflected in disappointing sales figures, which is the main issue the client would like to solve through a new and improved marketing strategy. Due to the success of the EVRF and the different nature of its target group, the problem of not reaching the target group, with the desired outcome, has not been encountered before by the client, and as such the client does not have a clear idea how to improve the current marketing strategy. Another aspect of the problem lies in the fact that despite its unconventionality, the product does encounter indirect competition in the form of various different products and treatment methods. These forms of indirect competition are usually rather successful because most members of the target group are aware of them and their effectiveness.

It is also worth mentioning that the target group for the Viridex RF is divided into different groups of professionals; dermatologists in both the Netherlands and Belgium, but the profession of skin therapist is only recognised in the Netherlands, because the people performing the same of treatments are called beauty specialists in Belgium. There is also another group of professionals that treat conditions treatable with the Viridex RF; these are beauticians in both the Netherlands and Belgium. The target group therefore consists of four main groups that are active in different markets: dermatologists, skin therapists, beauty specialists and beauticians. This distinction has been made since these four groups have different wants and needs, since they operate in a different market with different clients.

The need for a marketing plan aimed at the Viridex RF springs from the fact that the present marketing plan does not offer different strategies for various products and/or target groups, despite diverse natures of these factors. One of the factors explored in the research in the following chapters is whether these different target groups need a segmented marketing approach.

The purpose of this project is to devise a marketing strategy for F Care Systems for the Viridex RF, so it can be marketed more successfully (i.e. more willingness from target group to purchase the product, leading to higher sales numbers) by enhancing marketing activities, based on empirical data, targeted at dermatologists and skin therapists in Belgium and the Netherlands. The creation of a marketing strategy will be realised by doing a more in-depth analysis of the client's current marketing approach and by doing a competitor analysis, in addition to conducting market research on the target group's preferences with regards to how, where and when to reach them, in order to persuade more dermatologists, skin therapists and beauty specialists to use and purchase the product. This in return aims at increasing sales figures for F Care Systems.

## Chapter 2: Organisational context

F Care Systems is a small to medium-sized Belgian company that was founded by Rudi Devers in 2001. Its focus lies on the development; production and distribution of medical and medical-aesthetic products, which mostly aim to offer treatments for varicose veins and haemorrhoids based on the principle of thermo coagulation. Headquarters are in Antwerp, Belgium, and branch offices are located in France, USA, Germany and South-East Asia.

As the client has been successful in his mission “*to establish a stable and profitable medical device company where innovation and globalization play a crucial role*”, the products are now sold in over nineteen countries worldwide through an extensive network of distributors.

The client has not updated its marketing or communication plan since 2011, but the vision at the time was “*F Care Systems aims to become a well-known company in the medical device market within 3 years.*” Both the mission and vision statement are reflected in the core values of the company; *innovation, customer satisfaction, globalisation and effectiveness.*

The EVRF, the client’s most profitable and most successful product, has mainly been marketed through the publication of clinical trials through press releases. These press releases containing clinical evidence are important in expressing the value of *innovation* and *effectiveness* of the product to the medical community by informing a large group of medical professionals of the efficiency of using a rather unconventional technique to treat various conditions. This might be applicable for the Viridex RF but treatments are of different nature and fewer clinical trials have been done, so it is currently difficult to base a marketing strategy on clinical evidence.

The other company values of *customer satisfaction* and *globalisation* are expressed through the customer service the client provides to both potential and existing customers through extensive user manuals, warrantee on products, availability of knowledgeable staff to provide support and by extensively informing customers of the devices via personal conversations and by distributing flyers and brochures. The value of globalisation is expressed in this process through the possibility of receiving information regarding the products in English, Dutch, French and German, and the client having branch offices in many different parts of the world.



F Care Systems focuses on developing, producing and distributing medical devices that use the concept of radiofrequency to treat various conditions. The application of this technique is somewhat unconventional and differs from more commonly used methods. Therefore, it is important to consider this unconventionality when developing a marketing strategy for the Viridex RF in the medical market of dermatologists and skin therapists.

Although the treatment methods of the devices offered by F Care Systems are considered unconventional, because they are relatively new and innovative, a threat (SWOT analysis, appendix I) encountered is competition that offers comparable devices using the similar treatment options. There is also indirect competition in the form of conventional treatment methods, which both professionals and patients are more aware of, such as laser treatment and electrocoagulation, which is a relative weakness due to the fact that the target group is more aware of the techniques used by the indirect competition. An advantage, and added brand value, that is pointed out is that the client is capable of communicating with its audience on a professional level in four languages; French, English, Dutch and German.

Furthermore, other strengths include the experience the client has in selling medical devices, and that the Viridex RF offers treatment for various common skin conditions in a more effective and cost-efficient manner. Weaknesses that need to be taken into consideration are the limited staff and budget available for marketing activities, as well as the Viridex RF website that is still under construction.

Despite previous difficulty in reaching the target group in such a way that many professionals are convinced to buy the Viridex RF, dermatologists and skin therapists that are brought in contact with the product generally express an interest and react positively, so there are opportunities to successfully market the product and the difficulties encountered could be caused by something other than unconventionality. There are various factors that could influence the currently lower than expected sales figures of the Viridex RF (e.g. communication channels, message content, unconventionality of product), as such these factors will be explored in the following chapters.

### Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

In order to create a feasible marketing strategy for the Viridex RF, two research fields have been identified through preliminary research. These fields are *marketing strategies in the medical sector* and *behavioural theories*. These fields have been chosen because theories and strategies within these fields clearly interconnect with each other and the purpose of creating a marketing strategy for the client's product. These fields are interconnected since behaviour is the driving force behind consumerism and marketing influences behavioural buying patterns. Doing research on the two research fields enables a thorough analysis of the client's current situation and the desired situation with regards to the Viridex RF's marketing strategy. (Wood, 2007)

#### 3.1 Marketing Strategies in the Medical Sector

Marketing strategies in the medical sector are extremely important in the research process to provide additional theoretical knowledge on possible applicable techniques for the marketing of the Viridex RF.

First, it is important to gain an understanding of what a marketing strategy entails. Lees (unknown) defines a marketing strategy as follows:

*"A marketing strategy is a process or model to allow a company or organization to focus limited resources on the best opportunities to increase sales and thereby achieve a sustainable competitive advantage."*

Baicoianu (2015) uses the metaphor of comparing a marketing strategy to a road map that can be used to guide the company to achieve goals and objectives such as company growth, higher brand recognition and higher market shares. All communication efforts should be based on the marketing strategy. He continues by listing several reasons that make having a marketing strategy crucial. For example, a marketing strategy provides a company with a focus, guiding towards reaching goals by having identified profitable opportunities as well as possible threats, in addition to having identified tools to be used in terms of communication channels, message content and timeframes. Lastly, an effective marketing strategy will enable an organisation to work cost- and time efficiently. In order to create an effective strategy, it is important that it is based on market research.

An important tool in medical marketing is gathering data on different stakeholders in the market: both the patients and professionals. This enables the company to understand different needs in the market, know how to influence behaviour, and therefore use this knowledge for commercial advantage. (Medical Marketing, 2008)

It is important to note that the medical sector's customer base consists of a complex relationship between the *prescribers of a product* (e.g. hospitals, general practitioners and physicians), and the *end consumers* (e.g. patients), as both groups have influence on the final decision of treatment and both generally have different needs and expectations of what a product must offer, with the prescriber of a product mostly being concerned with what is best for the patient, but also with what is the easiest solution/treatment method that offers the fastest results. The patient tends to be focused on the treatment that offers the quickest and cheapest possible recovery. The relationship between the prescribers of a product and the end consumers is complex in the sense that both groups have different needs and expectations and different levels of education and expertise, so it can be difficult to please both groups. However, it is also stated that patients in Europe generally have little influence over treatment decisions. (Waaga, 2013)

Smith (2003) builds on this theory by stating that excellent marketing for medical devices is customer-need-oriented and he affirms the importance of taking possible threats into consideration from the macro environment. Also, successful marketing is based on knowing which segments to target, knowing what the *Unique Selling Proposition* (USP) is, to generate more brand awareness, and including the entire customer experience in the marketing mix, instead of just 'product' and 'promotion'.

In order to successfully position or market a product, the client needs to realise that this process may take several years, but that the continuity of it will ascertain the entire company's identity in the eye of the public. (Mazzucato, 2001)

It can be said that competitive advantage is strongly related to the company's ability to attain and observe strategic initiatives and apply these to their specific needs. (Cespedes & Piercy, 1996) It is therefore important for the client to become aware of the competitor's strategies through a competitor analysis, so the product's positioning can be adjusted accordingly.

MaGee (2015) suggests that a thorough competitor analysis is one of the most important components of a market analysis, and she defines a competitor's analysis as an *in-depth analysis and investigation* of competitor companies in the marketplace that will provide insights into forming and implementing a marketing strategy based on the analysis of the competitors' strengths and weaknesses.

A competitor's analysis aims to answer the following main questions (a more comprehensive list can be found in appendix IV): Who are the competitors, what products or services do they offer and at what target groups are they aimed? Does the competition have a competitive advantage and how? What is the size of the competition?

These questions are answered by conducting research using mainly secondary sources such as company advertisements, brochures, websites, annual reports and social media. Results of investigating such platforms can then be organised into SWOT analyses of each competitor to create an easy overview. (MaGee, 2015)

A company's branding is widely recognised as one of the most valuable assets that, when executed well, is unique and portable. (Balmer, 2012) This brand can define the product and firm it stands for and is what stakeholder and customers encounter. (Aaker, 2004) It is important that the client takes branding into consideration, as this could eventually be a useful tool.

### 3.2 Behavioural theories

Knowledge on behavioural theories is important in the research process, as anticipating the target group's reactions and knowing how to influence behaviour can be useful for creating a marketing strategy.

According to Sah et al. (2013) companies selling medical devices across the world frequently apply their knowledge of social psychology in marketing strategies to change the consumer's behavioural patterns. One aspect of applying this knowledge is strategically using Key Opinion Leader's (KOLs) in the form of respected physicians to represent and endorse their product in order to influence their peers.

F Care Systems uses this method to promote one of their successful products; the EVRF. It might be beneficial to look into using a similar strategy for the Viridex RF.

Moreover, social judgment theory by Sherif et al. (1961) indicates that messages are immediately judged according to the present viewpoint and placed on a so-called mental attitude scale. Three latitudes are presented, namely; *Latitude of acceptance*, when ideas fall in the range of accepted, *Latitude of rejection*, when ideas fall in the range of unreasonable and the *Latitude of non-commitment*, referring to the ideas that are seen as neither acceptable nor unreasonable. Ideas generally are placed on the latitude of non-commitment when an individual is not personally involved in the topic. This is called *ego-involvement* and means that people generally care more about subjects that affect their life in a way. It is important to develop a marketing strategy with messages that will mostly be placed on the latitude of acceptance by the target group.

This theory can be of use due to the nature of the product and the field it is marketed in. It concerns an innovative product using a different technology than most of the competition, so it is important to communicate this in such a manner that the target group accepts it as valid and reliable and is persuaded of the product's efficiency and an added value to a medical practice.

In addition to these behavioural theories, cultural aspects need to be taken into consideration, because culture plays a role in the decision making process. (Briley, 2007) This is highly relevant because the target group consists of different cultures (Dutch and Belgian) and the client mainly employs Belgians at the F Care Systems headquarters in Antwerp, who could lack knowledge regarding cultural differences between the two countries.

Not taking cultural factors into account when creating marketing material could lead to unnecessary confusion and unsuccessful business transactions.

Hofstede's (1983) cultural dimensions will be one of the models that will be consulted for this.

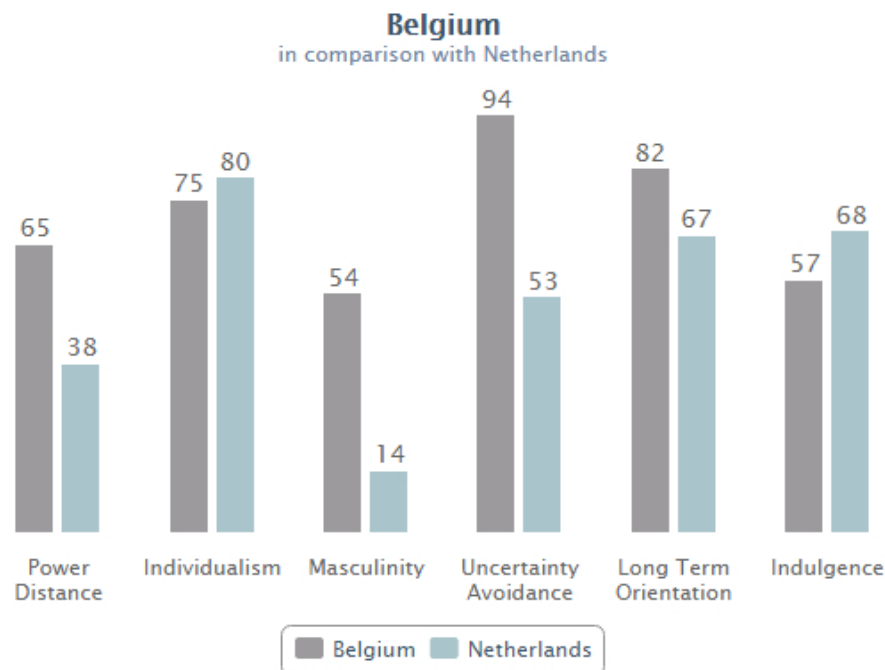


Figure as based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1983)

The figure above is a comparison of Belgium and the Netherlands as based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. It can be seen that Belgium and the Netherlands score significantly differently on the dimensions of "Power Distance", "Masculinity" and "Uncertainty Avoidance".

The two countries handle certain situations that involve social hierarchy, ambiguity and competitively driven environments differently. Belgian people will be more likely to accept a stricter hierarchy in both professional and social life, meaning that communication generally flows hierarchically and power is distributed unequally, whereas in the Netherlands power is generally decentralised. Managers often consult lower level employees and rely on their expertise.

Belgium scores relatively high on the masculinity dimension. Meaning that the Belgian society is driven by competition and success is highly valued. This starts in schools and flows through to companies. The Netherlands on the other hand scores very low in this dimension and is therefore a feminine society. Feminine societies place importance on a balance between the professional and social life, and decision-making is usually done by involving everyone and discussing possible outcomes extensively.

Another distinct difference between the two countries is how its inhabitants tend to manage ambiguity of the future. Belgium scores very high at 94, which means that in Belgium there is a constant need for rules in every situation. Another aspect of scoring high on this dimension is not accepting unorthodox behaviour and thoughts. The Netherlands scores 53 in this dimension, which indicates that it also leans towards a preference of avoiding uncertainty. However, unorthodox behaviour and thoughts will be much more widely accepted in the Netherlands.

All in all, when comparing Belgium with the Netherlands, a distinct difference becomes clear between the score of power distance, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, so these three dimensions could be of particular interest when designing communication products and strategies in the form of a marketing strategy.

## **Chapter 4: Research Design**

### 4.1 Intervention Cycle

Based on the theory provided by Verschuren & Doorewaard (2010), the research project described is identified as a practice-oriented approach and of a diagnostic nature. An analysis of the client's problem will be conducted in order to understand the underlying causes of the problem encountered by the client, and to be able to make recommendations for a new marketing strategy. This analysis and eventual recommendations is aimed at leading to an increased market share for the Viridex RF in the Netherlands and Belgium.

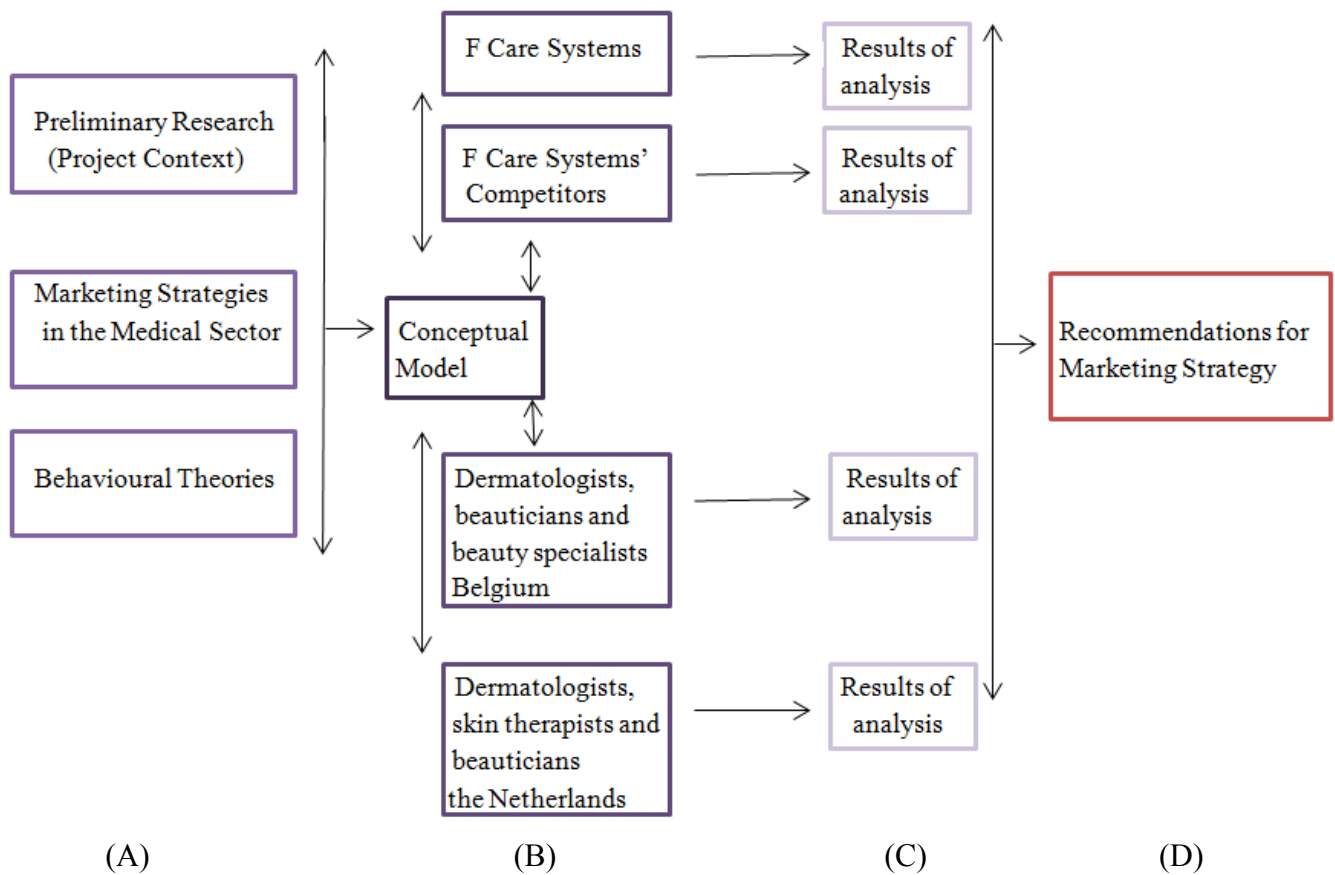
### 4.2 Research Objective

The following research objective has been developed for this research project:

The research objective is to create strategic recommendations for a new marketing strategy to the managerial and marketing departments of F Care Systems for the Viridex RF with the purpose of marketing the product more effectively in the field of medical beauty devices used by dermatologists, skin therapists, beauty specialists and beauticians in the Netherlands and Belgium by collecting data on current marketing and behavioural theories, competitors' strategies and consumer needs.

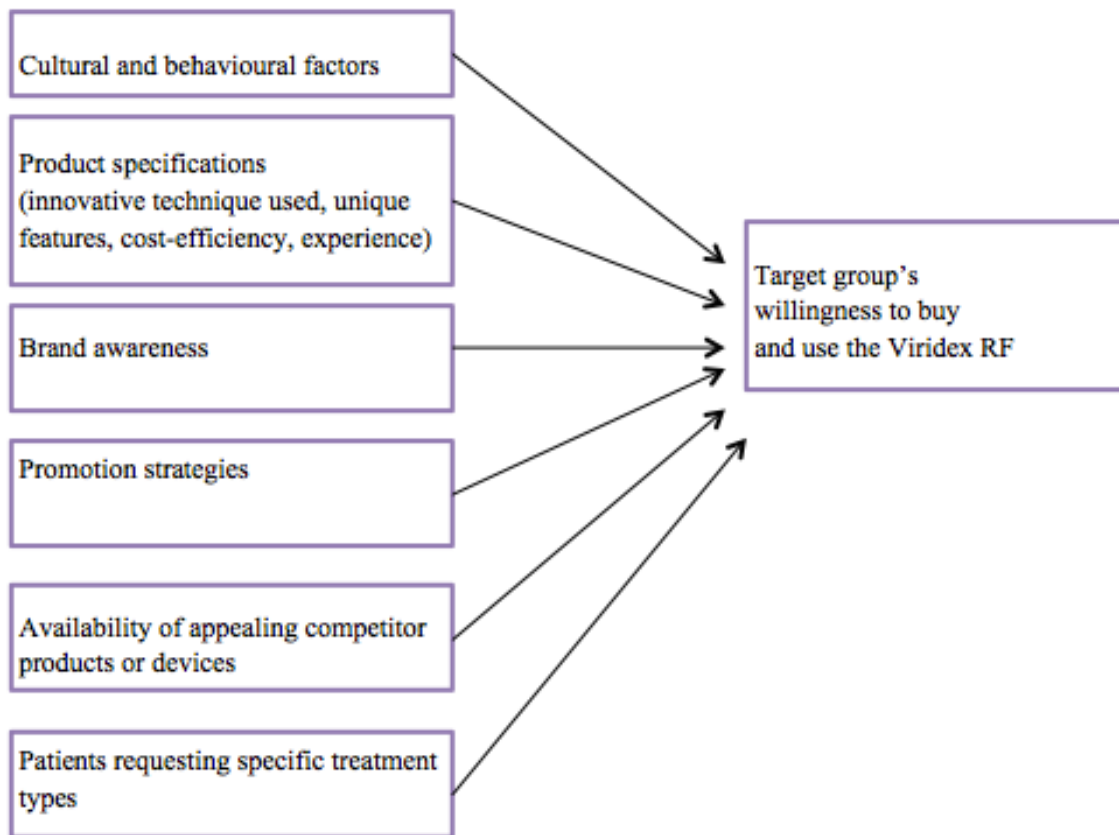


### 4.3 Research Framework



The research framework as pictured above is the visual representation of the research process that will follow. (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). It consists out of four main phases; the first phase (A) is built out of the preliminary research that was done on the project context, marketing strategies in the medical sector and behavioural theories that could be useful. The second phase (B) shows the Conceptual model, and its variables, in relation to the different research objects; namely F Care Systems, F Care Systems' Competitors, Dermatologists and skin therapists in Belgium and Dermatologists and skin therapists in the Netherlands. The third phase (C) shows the results of the analyses, which will lead to the final phase (D) recommendations for the Marketing Strategy.

#### 4.4 Conceptual Model



#### 4.5 Research Objects

Four research objects have been chosen for this project. (1) F Care Systems, the client, (2) F Care Systems' competitors, because it is important to analyse both the client's and the competitors' current strategies in relation to the research fields. Part of the research will be analysing the different strengths and weaknesses in each marketing strategy. (3) Dermatologists, beauticians and beauty specialists in Belgium and (4) Dermatologists, skin therapists and beauticians in the Netherlands, because together they form the target group for the product. It is important to differentiate between research objects 3 and 4 because they are different cultures, so eventual recommendations might be different in order to create an optimal advice.

#### 4.6 Research Questions

In order to come to feasible recommendations for a marketing strategy for the Viridex RF, several central and sub research questions have been formulated.

Main focus research question:

*What marketing strategies can be developed and implemented for the Viridex RF in order to persuade the target group to purchase the product by increasing the product's brand awareness and making the offer more appealing?*

1. What kind of marketing strategy is F Care Systems currently using for the Viridex RF in the medical device market in Belgium and the Netherlands?

1.1 Which communication channels are used?

1.2 What is the frequency of activities aimed at the target group?

1.3 How has a distinction been made between the different cultures of the Netherlands and Belgium in terms of messages?

2. What kind of marketing strategies are the client's competition currently using to market its products in Belgium and the Netherlands?

2.1 Which communication channels are used?

2.2 What is the frequency aimed at the target group?

2.3 How has a distinction been made between the different cultures of the Netherlands and Belgium in terms of messages?

2.4 Which gaps in application of marketing activities can be identified between F Care Systems' approach and the approach of competitors?

3. What behavioural aspects play an important role, amongst Belgian and Dutch dermatologists and skin therapists, concerning willingness to purchase an innovative and unconventional medical device in their practice?

3.1 How do cultural factors such as language, nationality, time management, division between personal and professional life and Hofstede's cultural dimensions play a role in the decision making process?

3.2 Does the target group have a specific set of specifications that new treatment methods need to adhere to before the product is considered a good investment?

3.3 To what extent does the level of brand awareness, regarding the level of the market's familiarity with certain treatment types and specific products, have an impact on the target group's willingness to buy the Viridex RF?

4. What communication methods would be best to reach the target group in terms of message, content and channel?

4.1 What type of content needs to be included in the message to generate brand awareness and make it appealing to the target group?

4.2 What communication methods are preferred by the target group to be approached?

4.3 What cultural aspects need to be taken into consideration when formulating promotional messages?

5. Would it be beneficial to expand the aim of the marketing activities towards potential patients?

5.1 Do people diagnosed with skin conditions take the initiative to do research on available techniques and request certain treatment types from the professional?

5.2 Do patient requests have an impact on the professional's willingness to purchase or invest in a new device or product?

5.3 What channels should be utilised in reaching potential clients, and what are important factors in terms of message creation?

#### 4.7 Research Strategy & Methodology

The research that will be conducted for this project is of a deductive nature and has used a mixed-methods approach in order to gather all necessary data. The mix of methods consists of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, and both primary and secondary data has been accessed to create an advice with strategic recommendations concerning the marketing strategy. (Saunders et al., 2009) (Burns et al., 2014)

Firstly, the secondary data that was utilised mainly consists of *literature review* of academic journals, books, client's previous research on customer satisfaction and any other data available in the client's database on relevant subjects such as; information on competitors. This method of data gathering was applied because it offers useful insights on both the client's organisation and the competitors' marketing strategy, resulting in a competitor's analysis and an analysis of the client's current marketing strategy. Therefore, qualitative data gathering was used to address the first research question.

Moreover, quantitative data was gathered for the second and third research question through a *survey* that was dispersed amongst the target group of Belgian and Dutch dermatologists and skin therapists. This survey explored the target group's preferences concerning the channels, timeslots and content to approach them, in order to convince the target group to invest in the product and to make recommendations that aim to successfully market the Viridex RF. Other aspects this survey explored is the impact external factors have (e.g., patient requests) on the professional's choice of treatment method, and whether dermatologists and skin therapists have a specific set of expectations new methods have to adhere to before considering to start using them, and if brand awareness plays a role in this decision making process. Along with the quantitative data, qualitative data was also used to answer this question by accessing secondary sources on how cultural aspects, which were identified through primary research, affect needs of the target group and therefore how this will affect how the Viridex RF should be marketed.

Last, more quantitative data was gathered through a *second survey* aimed at potential Viridex RF patients in order to get insights into behavioural aspects of patients requesting treatment types from their medical specialist. This information includes patient behaviour regarding doing research on treatment types for skin conditions, where this research is done, what information is looked for and whether this will eventually be shared with the professional responsible for treating the condition the patient was diagnosed with.

#### 4.8 Research Limitations

The previous sections of this chapter concluded the research objective, theoretical framework, conceptual model, research questions and research methodology, so the following paragraphs will move on to focus on the research limitations encountered by the researcher during the completion of this report.

First of all, both surveys were conducted in Dutch, so the data gathered is based on opinions from members of the target group who speak Dutch. The researcher's inability to translate the surveys to French means that the French speaking subgroup within the target group has not been approached to take part in the research, and as thus the research results and conclusions drawn as a result of the surveys are only based on opinions given by the Dutch and Flemish Belgians.

Secondly, the researcher's inability to comprehend extensive French texts with medical terms made it impossible to successfully analyse any of the client's French versions of promotional materials such as website content, brochures, flyers and posters. It was impossible to draw conclusions on the quality of any of these products.

Thirdly, forty people participated in the survey aimed at medical professionals, making the sample size somewhat small and this negatively affects the ability to generalise findings and the conclusions based on these findings. Also, as it proved to be a rather challenging task to convince many members of the target group to participate in a survey, so the accessibility to members of the target group was limited, which means the survey had to be kept as concise as possible in order to persuade more people to take part in it.

Lastly, the researcher worked at F Care Systems' as a marketing intern for the duration of one semester and received all training concerning the understanding and treatment methods of skin conditions from the client. This could have resulted in a slight bias in favour of the client's products and treatment methods, and despite the researcher's efforts to maintain an objective point of view; this bias could affect the formulation of certain sentences and interpretations and therefore research outcomes.

## Chapter 5: Research Results

### 5.1 Client and Competitor Analysis

#### *The Client*

In order to come to a feasible advice and recommendations for the marketing strategy of the Viridex RF, it is important to analyse current activities and strategies implemented. This in combination with desk research and the survey results will help identify the problems encountered by the client when trying to reach the target group and come to feasible recommendations to solve the issues.

It is important to include a more in-depth analysis of the client's current marketing activities than given in the project and organisational context chapters because a wide variety of channels are used for different purposes, and they all reflect different values, so an in-depth analysis is necessary to identify the cause of the issues encountered by the client. After analysing each of these activities they can be compared to the competitors' strategies.

The client has informed the researcher that there is currently no specific marketing or communication strategy for the Viridex RF or any of its other products. Nevertheless, the client does organise marketing activities despite the lack of a concrete strategy.

One aspect of the marketing approach taken by F Care Systems is a presence on various Social Media. The company's *Facebook* page has 223 likes and mainly contains updates on events organised or attended by F Care Systems and published newsletters. There is no planning as to when posts are created. (Devers, 2015) In addition to Facebook, the client also has a *Twitter* account with 141 followers, but new tweets are not frequently added and have not been added since October 2015. The client's *LinkedIn* page has 78 followers, and updates are mainly posted when the company has attended a congress, which results in an irregular posting timeline.

The client has been trying to build a prominent presence on social media through a variation of posts that mainly focus on informing followers of events the company is organising or has attended. However, there is a clear lack of bringing across values the client stands for (*innovation, customer satisfaction, globalisation and effectiveness*).

The photos posted on social media are often of a relatively low quality (e.g. blurry or dark), creating a less professional feel, and very little attention is focused on the *innovativeness* of the techniques used by the devices, when this is one of the main factors that differentiates the client from its competition.

Moreover, F Care Systems has a website that offers potential clients extensive information on all its products and the technology behind it. It also offers access to old newsletters, information on upcoming events, clinical evidence, a members-only area for technical support and contact information. A link to the website dedicated to the Viridex RF is prominently featured in the sidebar, as is the possibility to sign up for the F Care Systems newsletter. The website is available in English, Dutch and French, so its information is accessible to a large group of people. However, the information is not adapted to the different cultures associated with these different languages, but it is simply translated, so the Belgian market and Dutch market receive the same information in the same format. The website does not feature an online shop. (F Care Systems, 2011a)

All in all, the website offers relevant information on the products and their *innovative* nature; some products are supported by clinical evidence provided by medical professionals to prove the *effectiveness*. The decision to offer information and technical assistance to potential clients in three different languages fits in well with the value of *globalisation* and could lead to more *customer satisfaction*. Nevertheless, there is a gap between the innovativeness of the product and the manner in which it is displayed on the website, because the layout and design are outdated, and the researcher found grammatical and spelling errors in both the English and Dutch versions. The target group consists of highly educated people, since they all work in the medical sector, so it is important to ensure an error free and visually appealing website because it reflects the company as a whole.

In addition to the main website, a website designated to the Viridex RF has been created. This website is visually more appealing than the main website and features fewer language related errors. It provides the audience with information on each treatment possible with the Viridex RF, promotional material, upcoming events, some clinical evidence, videos of treatments and company contact information. The information currently featured matches the company values quite well, but there is room for improvement in many sections, because the text is rather short and could easily be extended by adding additional information.



The newsletter that the client distributes usually includes all the upcoming congresses and events and publications that F Care Systems or its products are featured in. It is always written in English and is therefore mainly sent to English-speaking clients, and during the time present at F Care Systems, the researcher realised that most French-speaking clients do not receive the newsletter, despite showing an interest in receiving a French version of it. As most social media activity is also done in English, there is a lack of communication with the French-speaking members of the target group.

The client has informed the researcher that the current strategy of acquiring new customers greatly relies on telephoning potential clients to request appointments in order to provide information on a product. In addition to this, initial contact at congresses often leads to follow up appointments. The client's website features the option for people to directly send the client a message in the form of an email, and professionals often request a meeting with the client because they are interested in a products. The website is available in both Dutch and English, but cultural considerations have not been made regarding culture because the content is identical.

An important aspect of the client's marketing strategy is attending international medical congresses, and informing potential clients on the use of radiofrequency treatment. When meeting clients at such congresses, or via personal meetings, brochures and flyers are distributed featuring the product and relevant information about treatments. It is at these congresses that the client succeeds best in communicating its main values of *innovation*, *customer satisfaction*, *globalisation* and *effectiveness*. This is done in the following manner: the booths used to showcase the different products have a professional and modern look and usually offer potential clients the opportunity to see and hold the product while talking to a member of the sales team to receive useful information on the treatment method used, as well as clinical evidence. The company's international presence, which showcases the innovation, effectiveness and globalisation values, is also conveyed at such events. Depending on the product that is being promoted at such congresses, the client uses Key Opinion Leaders in the form of doctors who have an agreement with F Care Systems to use and promote certain products, which positively supports the values of customer satisfaction and effectiveness.

Supportive marketing materials exist in the form of printed flyers, brochures and posters for nearly all the client's products and its features. Printed material is often distributed at congresses. There are different styles used for printed materials, depending on the product it represents. This is due to the different years in which each product was created.

Overall the printed materials have a professional look and feel, but when carefully reading through the information some grammatical and spelling errors can be found. This negatively attributes to the client's corporate image and having error-free marketing material would benefit the client.

A tool that is actively used by the client to promote its other products is the use of Key Opinion Leaders in the form of medical professionals that use and endorse the products. The medical professionals are often involved in clinical studies done on the effectiveness of the technique and products, and they often present their positive findings about the *effectiveness* and *customer satisfaction* at workshops and presentations organised by F Care Systems. This approach is currently not applied on a large scale to the promotion of the Viridex RF, but could possibly be a good approach in the future.

### *The Competition*

The following section is focused on F Care Systems' different kinds of competition. As many different techniques exist that enable treatment of skin related conditions, it is important to create an overview of all possible types of competition the client may encounter in the Dutch and Belgian markets. The most prominent ones are identified and analysed in the following paragraphs, after which two main competitor companies and their marketing strategy are analysed.

After a thorough investigation of the Viridex RF's competitors, the conclusion can be drawn that there currently is no direct competition in the form of companies in either Belgium or the Netherlands that produce devices that can be used for the treatment of all conditions that can be treated with the Viridex RF using radiofrequency.

However, the main competition that is encountered are companies distributing products/devices purchased abroad. These devices mainly use other treatment methods than radiofrequency applied by the Viridex RF, such as electrocoagulation and lasers. (Pierre, 2016)

Devices using electrocoagulation can be used to treat several conditions that can also be treated with the Viridex RF but they are generally limited to; fibromas, telangiectasia, rosacea and age spots.

Furthermore, Electrocoagulation provokes a chemical burn, which is more painful than thermo coagulation and there are also more side effects for patients after treatment. One device sold by a prominent company in the Netherlands using electrocoagulation is the “WindPoint” sold by “MegaPoint”.

Laser treatment has been identified as the main competition by F Care Systems. This includes both ND:YAG lasers and Diode lasers used for the treatment of veins, age spots, telangiectasia and tattoo removal. Despite being successful in the treatment of conditions mentioned above, it does not offer treatment of angiomas, wrinkles or fibromas, making them more limited devices. A definite drawback of laser therapy is the pricing of the products, as most devices are expensive to purchase, which will be reflected in treatment costs. (Pierre, 2016) Moreover, there are painful physical symptoms associated with laser treatments as well. (Side Effects, 2011) A relatively new type of laser treatment is treatment with the *elos* method. This method combines laser therapy with radiofrequency signals, and it can be used to treat a relatively wide variety of skin conditions. (Cosmetique Totale, unknown)

Last, indirect competition can also be found in the form of Botulin Toxin (botox) and fillers used for the treatment of facial wrinkles. Botox is widely considered as relatively safe when administered by a capable doctor, but like with most drugs there are possible side effects. Botox and fillers both involve inserting chemicals into the body and do not offer definite solutions, which might be drawbacks for potential patients. (Risks, unknown)

All in all, there are many forms of indirect competition for the client’s Viridex RF. Many devices and techniques on the market offer similar solutions to conditions that can also be treated with the Viridex RF.

However, most products are limited to treating only a few or one condition(s) that the client's product can treat, and these techniques are often expensive or come with many side effects. The main advantage for the Viridex RF is that it is the most complete product on the market because it offers solutions for a wide variety of conditions without disadvantages of high costs or painful side effects.

#### Competitor Companies:

In the following part of this competitor analysis two companies, which have been identified as relevant competition for the Viridex RF in the Dutch and Belgian market, will be analysed based on their presence in the market and its marketing and communication strategy. This part of the analysis is based on MaGee's (2015) suggestions on what aspects of the competition's strategy and presence are important to consider when conducting a competitor's analysis.

#### **1. Megapoint**

MegaPoint is a company that has grown a lot in the ten years since its establishment. There are currently around fifteen people working across different internal departments. The company sells a wide variety of medical equipment aimed at different target groups ranging from dermatologists, skin therapists, beauticians to massage therapists and dentists. They do this from a large building, which includes a large showroom where customers can see and test products. Megapoint also has an online shop through which customers can place orders. (Informatie, 2016)

It is noteworthy to mention that MegaPoint offers combination discounts for customers purchasing several products, and that an extensive repair-service is in place for their larger products at the customer's location. Furthermore, MegaPoint offers various workshops on different topics in order to attract more customers. (Over MegaPoint, 2016)

Another aspect of their communication strategy is a social media presence. MegaPoint currently has 11,762 Facebook likes, indicating that public is very aware of MegaPoint and its services. The company mainly shares updates on special sales or discounts. MegaPoint currently has no presence on other social media.

MegaPoint does not offer potential clients the chance to sign up for a newsletter via the website. Also, the website is completely in Dutch, because the company focuses on the Dutch market, and the website looks somewhat out-dated and lacks interactive features but does have relatively good SEO. (Over MegaPoint, 2016)

All in all, MegaPoint should be considered significant competition, due to its current position in the market. It offers a cost-friendly electrocoagulation device and the target group seems to be aware of the company's presence. The company is presented in such a way that it comes across as a professional entity in the medical product market. An important characteristic for Megapoint is that it has established itself in the market as being knowledgeable about many different products for different target groups, meaning that they are not specialised in one line of products like F Care Systems is. This could be an advantage for F Care Systems, because the client is probably able to give potential customers a more elaborate and detailed explanation than Megapoint is, because F Care Systems is also responsible for the development of their products and not only the distribution and therefore has more expertise.

## **2. Syneron Candela**

Syneron Candela is a large global company, which was founded as Syneron Medical in 2000, that markets and sells medical products for aesthetic conditions such as hair and removal, wrinkle reduction, rosacea, cellulite and varicose veins. It has developed a large global presence through offices in North America, Europe, Australia and Asia. In addition to this it has developed an extensive international distributor network. Therefore, it will form a significant presence in the Dutch and Belgium market. (About Syneron Medical, 2016)

Syneron Candela is the company that manufactures and sells devices using the *elos* (Electro-Optical Synergy) technique. This includes a range of different products that can be used to treat different skin conditions. Currently the *elos* technique is mainly used for hair removal in the Netherlands and Belgium, but it is important to consider the company as significant competition because of its presence in the market and the many different applications its devices can be used for whilst using a technique (laser) that most professionals and patients are more aware of.

Also, the company has recently developed the *elos* Plus, which uses a combination of optical and radiofrequency energy to treat aesthetic skin conditions. (Elos Plus, 2016) This product can treat many conditions that the Viridex RF can also treat, and it uses a similar technique as the Viridex RF, making it direct competition.

In addition to a large physical international presence, the company also has a noteworthy online presence. The main international website is written in English and features much information on the company, its products, the technique used, clinical evidence, conditions that can be treated, news items, events and investor information. In addition to a designated website aimed at potential patients, separate country specific websites are also mentioned on the international website. These websites offer similar information but are adapted to the target country (e.g. language and local events) and target group (e.g. medical professionals and potential patients). The websites itself are presented in a highly professional and feature a modern layout and design, making it appealing to browse through.

Moreover, the *elos* method is mentioned and explained on [www.elos.info](http://www.elos.info), which is part of a Dutch Health Institute's website with certified skin therapists that offers treatments at 65 locations throughout the Netherlands.

Not only does the company have product and company specific websites, it also has a social media presence. With 8733 likes it has a successful Facebook presence. The content shared on this platform is similar to content shared by F Care Systems (i.e. mainly the company's presence at congresses and information on upcoming events). Furthermore, the company has 1485 followers on twitter and regularly tweets information regarding upcoming events and dermatological news. The company's Youtube account is actively used as well, and its videos are frequently watched (200,000+ views).

As mentioned above, Syneron Candela's products are currently mainly used for hair removal, but due to its knowledgeableness, product line and presence in the Dutch and Belgian market, it should be considered potential serious competition in the foreseeable future.

## 5.2 Survey Results

As mentioned in the research methodology, two surveys were done in order to gather relevant data from both the professionals and potential end users (patients) with regards to preferences concerning communication methods, channels, and content. This section of the research results will summarise the data gathered with the surveys.

### Survey for Professionals

The survey distributed amongst the target group of dermatologists, beauticians, skin therapists and beauty specialists in Belgium and the Netherlands was sent via email. Respondents received the link to the survey accompanied by a short text explaining the purpose of the research and guaranteeing anonymity.

*A total of forty* professionals took part in the anonymous online survey. Nineteen participants were Dutch and twenty-one were Belgian. The first part of the survey focused on ensuring the respondent was part of the target group that treats medical skin conditions treatable with the Viridex RF. All respondents indicated being either Dutch or Belgian and treating at least one or more of the following conditions: Stretch marks, telangiectasia, angiomas, fibromas, wrinkles and age spots. Many respondents also indicated treating many other skin conditions besides the ones treatable with the Viridex RF.

The survey then moved on to explore the target group's preference regarding manner of being approached by companies with information regarding new products and business proposals. 80% (15 Dutch, 17 Belgian) of the participants stated preferring to be approached by companies at medical congresses. Many respondents (78%, 17 Dutch, 16 Belgian) also prefer being approached via an informative email. However, the researcher found that most clinics, hospitals and other institutes that employs members of the target group often do not provide visitors to the website with personal email addresses, making it difficult to act on this preference. The third most popular manner of receiving information from medical suppliers is a letter via regular mail (25%, 4 Dutch, 6 Belgian). Participants were given the option to select multiple channels, and this resulted in being able to draw the conclusion that most members of the target group prefer to be approached either at a congress or via email.

Supporting the claim that most professionals would like to be approached at congresses is the nearly 63% of the participants that claim they do not wish to be directly approached on business days during working hours with information about new products.

The timeslot that was most frequently suggested to receive informative marketing material or have contact with a new medical supplier/developer was between 9:00am and 12:00noon, so it would be most beneficial to send out emails in the morning when contact at congresses cannot be established.

It can be stated that, based on this part of the survey, there is no indication to assume that the Dutch and Belgian members of the target group prefer different channels for the initial contact with new companies, meaning that this complies with the client's current approach of not differentiating between the two nationalities in this respect and seeking contact with both Dutch and Belgian members of the target group in the same manner. However, as the client currently mainly relies on making contact via telephone to request an appointment in person, as well as establishing contact at medical congresses, there is a discrepancy between the target group's preferred channel of communication and the client's preferences.

After establishing the target group's channel of choice when receiving information on business opportunities, the survey aimed to explore the necessary content to make a message more appealing to catch the recipient's attention and eventually persuade more professionals to purchase the product. The outcome of this was that most respondents want to see a mixture of different types of information when learning about a new product. A nearly unanimous 95% of respondents rate clinical evidence supporting the product highly important to be included in the content. Another 95% indicated wanting to be provided with specific information concerning the product (e.g. treatment options, price, technology). The third most requested type of information was pictures of the product (43%, 10 Dutch, 7 Belgian).

Another aspect of the marketing and communication approach that was covered with the survey is how different types of product attributes influence the decision making process of professionals to invest in a new device. The most important factor in this process is the *clinical evidence* supporting the effectiveness of the product (98%). The factor that is also considered highly important is *value for money* (93%). Also scoring high with 65% is *user friendliness* of the device. Other factors given by participants were (in order of most mentioned to least mentioned): Requests by patients for specific methods, friendliness of the company offering the device and familiarity with product.



As the Viridex RF is an innovative product on the market that is highly effective and cheaper than most more commonly used treatment methods, and since familiarity with the product was rated as less important, it could potentially be an option for the client to focus on this innovativeness, as these factors mean a high value for money.

Furthermore, the survey aimed to discover whether patients' request for certain types of treatment has an impact on the professional's treatment plan. Nearly 68% (16 Dutch, 11 Belgian) of respondents declared that patients' requests do have an impact on which treatment types and techniques are used and invested in. Creating and aiming marketing activities, mainly in the Netherlands, at the end users (patients) could therefore be an effective option in creating a pull effect amongst professionals when patients frequently start requesting treatment with the Viridex RF. However, this depends on patients' attitude towards requesting treatment types from their specialist, which is explored in the second survey distributed amongst potential patients.

As the Viridex RF is an innovative product, it was important to also explore to what extent brand awareness plays a role in the decision making process, because the outcome of this could result in different recommendations concerning the focus of marketing material. 28% of the respondents agreed that previous knowledge of a product or treatment technique would be somewhat important when making the decision to invest in a new device. Only 2.5% considered previous knowledge or being aware of the product's brand a highly important factor in the decision making process. 62.5% stated they did not have a clear preference between brands or devices they had previous knowledge of, and 7.5% did not find previously gained positive information important in the decision making process at all. The outcome of this section of the survey could be of particular importance for the client due to the innovative nature of the Viridex RF, so a focus could be put on this aspect of the product without it being a drawback, as long as it is accompanied and supported by clinical evidence.

### Survey for Potential End Users (Patients)

The survey aimed at potential patients with conditions treatable with the Viridex RF was mainly distributed through Social Media and the researcher's personal network, and was taken by respondents in an online environment, accompanied by a brief explanatory text.

In order to ensure most segments of society were included in the survey, the first section of the survey focused on demographic variables such as cultural background, nationality, age, gender and education. This was important in the process because the group of end users (patients) consists of people of all ages, nationalities (Dutch and Belgian being relevant for this survey), genders and educational levels, so all should be represented in the outcome of this survey.

*A total of eighty* people participated in this anonymous survey, thirty-five of which were Belgian and forty-five were Dutch. The division between male and female respondents was nearly 50/50. The age that is represented most in this survey are people between 18-25 with 56%, followed by 24% of people between 26-45 and 22% of people ranging between 46-55+.

For the purpose of this report, the educational levels of the respondents have been placed into three categories: Less or lower education than a Dutch University of Applied Sciences (<HBO), attendance at a Dutch University of Applied Sciences (HBO) and education from A Dutch Research University (>HBO). 37% of the respondents fit into the category of <HBO, 38% indicated being or having been educated at HBO level, and 25% obtained or are in the process of obtaining a degree that fits into the >HBO category.

40% of the participants indicated having been treated for a skin condition before taking part in the survey.

Part two of the survey then moved on to behavioural aspects of people when diagnosed with skin disorders. 91% (30 Belgian, 43 Dutch) of respondents agreed that they would do research after being diagnosed with a skin condition by a professional. The types of research people would do varied, but 85% (27 Belgian, 41 Dutch) would first turn to online search engines such as Google. This implies that the client's website should score high on Search Engine Optimization for the purpose of reaching potential clients as well as professionals, and information offered should be attractive for both health professionals and people without a medical background. The second most chosen source of information (54%, 22 Belgian, 19 Dutch) is discussing the condition and treatment plan with friends and relatives.

Another similar option frequently chosen (49%, 16 Belgian, 23 Dutch) is looking for information on Social Media or online forums dedicated to people diagnosed with the same condition, so it is suggested that other people's opinions and experiences have a significant role in the research process, despite the source not being a health professional. However, 25% (10 Belgian, 9 Dutch) of respondents would try to get a second opinion from another health expert that was not responsible for the initial diagnosis.

Flyers and brochures often available at health clinics with information on certain diseases and other health issues would be the main source of information for 28% (7 Belgian, 15 Dutch) of the people that took part in this survey.

After establishing whether people would gather additional information and where they would do so, it was also important to find out what types of information would be regarded as most important and relevant. It was possible for respondents to select different options, and 88% (43 Belgian, 27 Dutch) chose previous patient experiences with different treatment methods as most relevant. 50% (21 Belgian, 19 Dutch) would look for clinical evidence of a product, which reinforces the statement made in the previous paragraph about the importance of making information available to audiences with various educational levels. Another factor that scored high (50%, 16 Belgian, 24 Dutch) is specific information about different products such as the technology behind it, benefits over other products and success rates. The outcome of this part of the survey indicates that possible side effects, pain levels during treatment and of course effectiveness of the product are key factors in the development of a preference amongst patients.

The last part of the survey focused on the likelihood of people mentioning their research to their professional before agreeing to treatment. 95% (33 Belgian, 42 Dutch) of the respondents clearly indicated that they would feel confident enough to inform their professional about their research, and to bring up treatment methods that were initially not suggested. This outcome corresponds well with the outcome of the survey distributed amongst professionals, as 68% of professionals stated that patients' requests for certain treatment methods would influence the decision to invest in a new product or device.

### 5.3 Desk Research Results

There are three distinct different regions this research project is focused on: Flemish Belgium, Wallonia Belgium and the Netherlands. Each of these regions has their own identity and culture, so the following paragraphs will focus on comparing the different regions whilst outlining the main differences that need to be taken into consideration when creating a marketing strategy.

Based on his comparative research on different cultures, Hofstede (2001) concludes “no two countries (...) with a common border and a common language are so far culturally apart (...) as (Dutch) Belgium and the Netherlands”. This is reflected in all aspects of life (e.g. language, personal relationships, business etiquette).

One of the foremost and most noticeable differences between the two countries in terms of culture is the language. Flemish and Dutch are widely considered the same language, but it is important not to underestimate the difference between the two. Schuwer (2011) says: “We verstaan Belgen, maar we begrijpen ze niet”. This loosely translates to “We understand Belgians, but we do not comprehend what they are saying”. This is reflected in the use of everyday language as well as business language (Appendix V). Despite the consensus that Flemish and Dutch are nearly identical languages, it is important to note that there is in fact a large language barrier between the two, due to the different words used in certain situations as well as different the different meaning of certain words. (Nederlands is geen Vlaams, unknown)

This is relevant for the creation of a marketing strategy for the Viridex RF in the Netherlands and Belgium because the target group consists of members from both countries and could therefore give different meanings to various words or phrases, which could cause confusion.

In addition to the language barrier between Flemish Belgium and the Netherlands, there is another possible language barrier between the two and Wallonia Belgium, as the official language in this area is French. The separation between the Walloons and the Flemings is structurally organised on all levels.

The two regions have their own churches, schools, universities and communication media such as newspapers and television channels. This has resulted in fundamental differences between the regions that are so strong that the Walloons and Flemings form two separate societies. The Flemish part of Belgium can be identified as rather Anglo-Saxon, whereas the Walloon region of Belgium is more focused on France and its values. (DeWachter, 2006)

It is of high importance to keep the language barrier in mind when creating promotional messages aimed at the Netherlands and Belgium. Situations in which part of the target group does not comprehend the meaning behind the messages could quickly arise when creating communication material without doing proper research on the language aspect, which could mean losing potential clients because of simple communication errors.

Language barriers are not the only factors to be taken in consideration. As mentioned in a previous chapter, a comparative analysis of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1983) leads to an understanding of other factors in which Belgium and the Netherlands differ culturally.

Firstly, Belgium scores 65 on Power Distance and the Netherlands 38. Meaning that there is less of a hierarchy in Dutch organisation than in Belgian organisations.

This difference will show significantly in the decision making process within an organisation. The Dutch will make decisions based on discussions that include all staff, of which the result is usually a mutual consensus or a midway compromise. The boss or CEO of an organisation will often blend in and be equally approachable as other employees. The boss or CEO of a Belgian organisation is expected to be an authoritative figure that makes the decisions. (Gerritsen, 2014)

A second cultural dimension that offers a relevant insight is Uncertainty Avoidance. Belgium scores 94 where the Netherlands scores only 53. Research shows that this affects the medical sector as well. Antibiotics are more frequently prescribed, more medical procedures are performed and more dentists, nurses and doctors are available per person in Belgium than in the Netherlands; more effort is put into eradicating and preventing diseases. (Gerritsen, 2014)

The factors mentioned above might become very clear when the client does business with new Dutch clients. Confusion could occur from F Care Systems' perspective as well as from the Dutch client's perspective, as both cultures are used to doing business in a slightly different manner, so it is important for the client to create a sense of familiarity with the Dutch and Belgian cultures as to anticipate possibly difficult situations in the business process.

According to Trompenaars' Seven Dimension of Culture (1997) the Netherlands is more *Specific* than *Diffuse*, meaning that there exists a strict boundary between personal and professional life. It is unnecessary and inappropriate in Dutch business culture to try to establish a personal relationship before doing business, whereas it is not uncommon for Belgian business deals to start with extensive lunches to establish a more personal relationship.

Moreover, the Dutch are more monochronic than the Belgians (Hall, 1990). Being punctual is important to the Dutch, as they highly value planning and time management. When running late it is important to call in advance to inform the relevant people of this, and continuously running late and postponing meetings can result in an unsuccessful business transaction. (Gerritsen, 2014)

Becoming aware of the many cultural differences between the Netherlands and Belgium will help in future communication and marketing activities undertaken by F Care Systems aimed at the Dutch and Belgian market.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

The previous chapter gave a detailed account of all research results, and this chapter will attempt to offer a concise summary of the most important and relevant research findings based on the main research questions.

### **1. What kind of marketing strategy is F Care Systems currently using for the Viridex RF in the medical device market in Belgium and the Netherlands?**

A detailed analysis of the client's current marketing strategy revealed that many activities are organised but that a clear vision and objectives are lacking for the Viridex RF, and that cultural differences are not acknowledged apart from language translations on the website. The main channel used to inform potential clients of the Viridex RF is the company website and the specially designated website, but these websites could easily be improved by ensuring they are both error free and contain enough relevant information.

The theory by Smith (2003) concerning the importance of creating a customer-need-oriented marketing strategy helped the researcher in the critical analysis of the current marketing activities organised by the client and to identify several factors in which the client could improve in this regard. One of these factors is knowing what the *Unique Selling Proposition (USP)* of the Viridex RF is and how to use this to the client's advantage. The Viridex RF is a device that offers treatment of various skin conditions by using an innovative technique that ensures fewer discomforts for patients while also being easy to use and cheaper than many of its competition. This is the product's USP, but it is currently not used to its full advantage.

Survey results provided an insight into what the target group finds most important when deciding on purchasing a new product: Clinical evidence in the form of studies done by licensed medical professionals. Clinical evidence for the Viridex RF present on the websites is limited to one PowerPoint presentation. Given the fact that clinical studies are highly valued and important in the decision making process, providing potential clients with only one study about one specific treatment option is not enough according to customer-needs.

Furthermore, if the client decides to start creating marketing messages aimed at patients, it is important to feature clinical evidence in a manner that members of this target group, people without a medical background, comprehend the meaning of the study results.

Apart from the websites used, printed marketing materials exist and are often distributed at congresses. For the Viridex RF, the client has chosen to develop different flyers and brochures aimed at either professionals or patients, which is a good strategy that ensures each group receives relevant information. However, most printed material is distributed in environments that only attract professionals, so locations that attract patients should be added.

Social media is also actively used, and especially Facebook uses Key Opinion Leaders in the form of doctors who work with and represent the client's products, but this strategy is only actively pursued for products other than the Viridex RF.

All in all, the client has based its marketing approach on a variation of different channels that are good choices, but improvements could be made by focusing more on its customer's needs and by highlighting the Unique Selling Proposition of the Viridex RF more to gain a competitive advantage. (Cespedes & Piercy, 1996)

## **2. What kind of marketing strategies is the client's competition currently using to market its products in Belgium and the Netherlands?**

Competition for the Viridex RF exists in many different treatment methods, so most is indirect competition. Two companies that could be significant competition to the Viridex RF in the Dutch and Belgian market have been analysed as part of this report.

The first company that was identified as potential competition for the Viridex RF on the Dutch market was Megapoint. Megapoint does not focus on developing its own products but on distributing other company's products, meaning that there is probably less expertise, which could be an advantage for F Care Systems because the client has a high level of expertise. Megapoint does however have a large showroom where customers can see and try out different products, which is something the client lacks.



The second company that was identified as potential competition is Syneron Candela, which is a large medical company with a global presence that develops and produces its own products and devices. One of the main techniques developed by Syneron Candela that could become a significant competitor in the near future is the *elos* plus technique, which uses a combination of optical and radiofrequency energy to treat a multitude of skin conditions.

This company effectively uses its website to target different cultures. It has several different websites adapted to various geographical regions. Information on these websites is specially adapted to each location, with clinical evidence gathered in a region getting featured more prominently than evidence gathered elsewhere.

Also, even though the *elos* Plus technique is currently mainly used for hair removal, its full potential is comprehensively mentioned on its own website ([www.elos.info](http://www.elos.info)) aimed at their Dutch speaking target group.

There are many differences in the marketing strategies of the F Care Systems, Megapoint and Syneron Candela that can be identified, but it is important to note that the three companies differ greatly in terms of scope of activities, target groups and product lines. An example of a difference between F Care Systems and Syneron Candela's marketing and communication approach is the information aimed at potential patients featured on the website. As mentioned before, Syneron Candela's website has got several pages dedicated to information specifically aimed towards patients, whereas F Care Systems does not currently have this. Another difference between Syneron Candela and F Care Systems' approach is Syneron Candela's main website linking to websites tailored to certain regions, and Facebook posts aimed at both professionals and patients, whereas F Care does not utilise either strategies. A clear difference between F Care Systems and Megapoint is that F Care Systems has a limited number of products to focus on and is able to offer expert knowledge, where Megapoint focuses on a large variation of products and this is highlighted as a strong point in their strategy.

### **3. What behavioural aspects play an important role, amongst Belgian and Dutch dermatologists and skin therapists, concerning willingness to purchase an innovative and unconventional medical device in their practice?**

Sherif's social judgment theory (1961) was useful in the research process because it gave the researcher an understanding of how messages are ranked and judged in the recipient's mind, with messages seen as worth considering getting placed on the latitude of acceptance. One desired outcome of the research was finding out what factors contribute to messages being placed on this latitude of acceptance, or on the latitude of rejection when it is judged as not worth considering.

The survey distributed amongst professionals gave good indications as to what could contribute to creating a marketing strategy with messages that will be placed on the latitude of acceptance. The survey results strongly hint that including content supporting the effectiveness with clinical evidence, user friendliness and value for money of the device will result in a favourable opinion of the product, because these are considered specifications that products must adhere to before they are considered a good investment.

Incorporating the content mentioned above in the Viridex RFs marketing communication materials could help persuade the target group to start using the product. Because the Viridex RF successfully uses a relatively unknown technique to treat specific types of conditions, the target group could at first be somewhat apprehensive. This is because, before being exposed to the Viridex RFs promotional material, the target group could potentially be unaware of the effectiveness of the technique used by the Viridex RF.

A strategy that could strengthen the message's chance of being placed on the latitude of acceptance is the use of Key Opinion Leaders to represent the Viridex RF (Sah et al., 2013), because a highly educated professional representing the company or specific products reinforces the idea that the product is effective and could therefore convince the audience. The client has successfully applied this approach to other products. Since the Viridex RF is designed to treat conditions that the target group is specialised in, there will most likely be enough ego-involvement, when including the right content in communication materials, since the use of a new medical device could lead to a more efficient or more lucrative manner of working for the professional.

Lastly, cultural differences should not be forgotten when communicating with clients and when designing a marketing strategy for the two countries. These differences are not limited to language barriers between French, Flemish and Dutch used by the target group in Belgium and the Netherlands. First, the Dutch are more monochronic than Belgians (Hall, 1990), so they value time management more, which means the client should be punctual at business meetings or other interactions with Dutch clients.

Also, because the Dutch draw concrete boundaries between personal and business life (Trompenaars, 1997), it is important for the client to respect this. Such boundaries between personal and professional life can express itself by the Dutch preferring not to invest time in developing a personal relationship through business lunches or dinners.

Additionally, Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1983) should have an impact on the communication between F Care Systems and Dutch clients, because various factors of the business process will be affected. The three cultural dimensions that will have the most significant impact are the ones that show the difference between Belgium and the Netherlands. These are the dimensions of power distance, masculine versus feminine and the dimension of uncertainty avoidance. There exists a strict hierarchy in Belgian organisations, which falls under the dimension of power distance, whereas this is not the case in Dutch organisations. The Dutch prefer to discuss matters extensively before coming to a mutual consensus or compromise; an uncommon practice in Belgium, as the person at the top of the hierarchic pyramid usually has the power to make decisions individually.

Ignoring cultural differences such as the ones mentioned above can lead to frustrations and unsuccessful business transactions regardless of previous messages having been interpreted as acceptable and interesting.

#### **4. What communication methods would be preferred by the target group in terms of message, content and channel?**

The Viridex RF is based on an innovative technique and approach for the treatment of skin conditions. The outcome of the survey aimed at the target group of professionals suggests that previous awareness of a product or brand does not have a profound impact on the decision to purchase a new device.

The innovative aspects of the Viridex RF can therefore be focused on when creating marketing material, as a product's branding is regarded as a highly valuable asset of a company (Balmer, 2012)

Focusing on the innovative nature of the product can be beneficial for the client when it is accompanied by clinical evidence supporting the effectiveness of the product as well as detailed product information, as these were widely seen as the types of information that have the greatest impact on the decision making process. Approaching new clients with this information should preferably be done in the context of a medical congress, or via an email sent between 9:00am and 12:00noon on workdays.

Cultural aspects that need to be taken into consideration when creating promotional messages are present in the form of language barriers as well as other cultural factors. Besides the immediately distinguishable difference between Dutch and French, there is a considerable difference between the Flemish spoken in Belgium and the Dutch spoken in the Netherlands because many words and phrases have different meanings between the two (Gerritsen, 2014), so it is important to carefully construct messages aimed at either the Dutch or the Belgians to avoid confusion. Apart from the language barriers, there were no indications for different preferences concerning communication channels, context and message content between the Dutch and Belgian members of the target group.

## **5. Would it be beneficial to expand the aim of the marketing activities towards potential patients?**

As Waaga's (2013) theory suggests, there exists a complicated relationship between several groups of people in the medical sector, it was important to explore the opinions and preferences of *prescribers of a product* (e.g. dermatologists) as well as the *end consumers* (e.g. patients). Waaga (2013) also suggested that patients in Europe generally have little say in the choice of treatment method, but the survey distributed amongst the prescribers of the product indicated that patients in this particular context do have a significant role, as 68% of the respondents stated that patient requests are important in the decision to start using new treatment types.

Given the outcome of perceived patient influence in the decision making process of professionals, as well as the client's expressed interest in creating messages targeted at end users, the researcher decided to broaden the scope of the research through another survey aimed at potential patients. The purpose of this was to explore whether the end users feel comfortable enough to mention treatment methods that their professional does not mention, and what messages (e.g. channel, content, context) should be produced by the client to create a pull effect from patients.

The outcome of this additional survey was that nearly all patients diagnosed with skin conditions would do independent research and communicate the outcome of this to their professional. Information is sought in a variation of different locations such as Google, Social Media & online forums, advice from friends and second opinions from other professionals. Clinical evidence, case studies with previous patients and specific product information were most valued in this search.

Based on the research done, it can be concluded that expanding the aim of marketing activities to the target group of end users could be a helpful and potentially profitable strategy for F Care Systems.

## **Chapter 7: Advice**

The following chapter will attempt to provide the client with feasible recommendations to implement and improve the current marketing activities for the Viridex RF in Belgium and the Netherlands.

### **7.1 Recommendations**

#### **1. Adjust Company Websites**

The first and one of the most important and comprehensive recommendations the researcher has come to, based on research findings, is for the client to invest time and money in the main F Care Systems and the Viridex RF website, because certain improvements could solve many of the client's marketing related problems and therefore lead to convincing more people to start using the Viridex RF in their clinic.

First of all, proofreading all text on the websites could be an important step to creating an error free and appealing text. The researcher easily found grammatical and spelling mistakes in the English and Dutch versions of the text, despite the noteworthy improvements that have been made the past several months. The websites should reflect company values and are an important tool in generating a positive and professional corporate image.

Because this research has identified main sources and types of information the target group finds interesting and what content is highly valued, the client could choose the cost efficient option of creating such content without the help of a company specialised in creating online marketing content, but it is important to note that this could be a time consuming task since the client's field of expertise does not lie in the field of marketing.

Important in the process of improving website content is scheduling enough time for it, and realising that a member of each department should be involved in deciding on what content to make available online.

Therefore, clear objectives need to be set before starting work on the websites. Information that is highly valued by the target group of professionals is clinical evidence, technical features and user friendliness of the product, so this should be easily accessible. The following paragraphs in this chapter will highlight several other types of content that, based on research results, are important to include.

As this research indicated it could be beneficial to expand the target group to patients to create a pull effect, it is important to make adjustments to the websites' content with regards to the different needs and wants of patients' regarding content found online. Survey respondents commonly stated turning to the Internet for information on various treatment types. It would be useful for the client to create case studies and customer review content aimed at this target group and add this to the websites, since this target group will look for previous patients' experiences. One of the possibilities would be adding a section to the websites that is labelled '*patient information*' and add all relevant information for end users under this section to keep the rest of the websites aimed towards professionals.

Also, it could be highly beneficial for the Viridex RF's branding to highlight the innovative aspect of the products more on the websites when reconsidering the websites' content since the innovative nature of the product and all the benefits it brings to both the professional and the patient is the Unique Selling Point of the product. This research showed that medical professionals in the Netherlands and Belgium do not automatically choose a conventional method over an unconventional and relatively unknown one, as long as the latter is sufficiently supported by clinical evidence.

A further recommendation would be to look into the possibility of creating region specific websites. This study concluded that there were cultural differences between the Netherlands and Belgium. In practice this would mean that content is adjusted according to cultural values, language and other specific needs such as, region specific clinical evidence, as is successfully done by the client's competition: Syneron Candela. However, further research would be needed to evaluate the exact added value of creating region specific websites. Important to consider when choosing this option is retaining a form of consistency between the different websites and the company's intended corporate image and values to make sure potential customers immediately know what company the website represents.

Another improvement could be to make the websites visually more appealing. The company's products all use a modern and innovative technique to treat various medical conditions, but there is a clear gap between this ingenuity and the out-dated design of the websites. Moreover, featuring interesting content may be extremely important, but showcasing the content in a visually appealing manner will most likely retain the reader's attention longer.

People that visit a company's website will almost instantly form an impression about what they are exposed to and this will decide whether they remain on the website or leave it. (Laja, 2016).

Lastly, the client should improve Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for all company websites to make sure they all get a high ranking in search engines, which are often used by end users to find information on treatment types for skin conditions. The previously mentioned point of generating or improving website content plays a big role in SEO, so it is important to keep this in mind. SEO, when utilised effectively, is a useful and cost-effective tool to generate a high visibility for the entire company and the Viridex RF.

## **2. Adjust Social Media Strategy**

The second main point of advice the researcher would like to make the client aware of concerns the company's social media use. F Care Systems uses various different social media channels to communicate with the online environment. The messages and content shared on these platforms is currently only aimed at the target group of physicians, dermatologists, surgeons, medical distributors and other groups of people working in the medical field, but this research indicated through both the survey aimed at professionals as well as the survey aimed at potential patients, it would be beneficial to broaden the aim of marketing activities to also include patients with relatively little medical knowledge. This means having to make adjustments to the content posted in order to make it more appealing to a group of people that differs greatly (in terms of educational background and interests) from the current target group of medical professionals.

Adopting a slightly different strategy with regards to the management of the company's Facebook page is important because the survey aimed at end users explored what channels people diagnosed with treatable skin conditions would turn to and social media such as Facebook was one of the highest scoring channels.

One of the client's competitors, Syneron Candela, has a successful Facebook account with over 8000 followers (significantly higher than F Care Systems' follower count), and one of the reasons could be that amongst their followers are many regular people without medical backgrounds.



This is because the company has found a good balance between posting updates that are interesting for people with high levels of medical expertise as well as updates that are interesting for the lesser-educated individuals. Generating more traffic on the company's social media accounts, Facebook in this case, leads to more awareness of the company and its products. Also, since patients turn to social media for information on possible treatment methods, posting content that is considered relevant and interesting could eventually lead to creating a pull effect from people discussing and requesting treatment with the client's products with their medical professional.

The client could greatly benefit from adopting a similar approach as Syneron Candela and create more variation in the updates that are shared. This would ensure the group of people who are interested in reading about updates becomes larger and through this the company would gain followers, which could lead to more word-of-mouth marketing especially amongst potential patients. Decisions made on what type of content to post aimed specifically at the new expanded target group should be based on research about what these new people find important. As mentioned above, according to the survey done by the researcher this includes case studies with previous patients and their experience with the treatment method and/or product, clinical evidence as well as technical information on how the product functions.

In addition to adding a variation of different posts to the usual posts with updates on the clients' international activities with regards to congresses, upcoming events and newsletters, the researcher advises the client to start adhering to a planning for social media activity in terms of frequency objectives. The client does not have a planning for when to share updates and posts with the audience, and as such there are often relatively long periods that no new posts are created and shared.

It is important to find a balance between posting too many posts in a row, which could annoy followers and not posting enough so followers forget about the company entirely. When posting an update on Facebook, it is important to remember that it most likely will not reach all followers, so it is possible for a business to post several updates over the course of a day without upsetting and losing followers or likes. (Lee, 2014)

Lastly, the client's current strategy is to post most social media updates only in English or sometimes in Dutch, meaning that many members of the target group, mainly in the Wallonia region of Belgium, cannot not receive social media content in their native language while the company is fully capable of communicating in French on a professional business level.

The client could consider including posts written in French in the future, or it could be a possibility to consider creating second social media accounts/pages for the company with the purpose of only communicating and sharing updates with followers in French. However, if the client does not find the approach of creating second social media accounts for French updates attractive, the researcher recommends the client to at least try to provide the French-speaking members of the target group with the opportunity to receive updates in their native language, via the regular F Care Systems social media accounts, as a sign of respect because the company is able to do this without spending much additional time creating posts and updates. Doing this will create goodwill amongst French speaking followers and could create more support on a subconscious level, because it signals that the company shares particular cultural values.

This could be done by alternating between sharing updates in English and French, or by posting updates that are relevant for a wide audience across different countries in both English and French.

As mentioned in the research results chapter, the client provides visitors to the websites the opportunity to sign up for an online newsletter. This newsletter contains relevant information on the company as a whole concerning technical developments, featured articles in magazines and other publications. This is an excellent initiative, as many people express an interest in receiving such information by signing up to receive these documents. However, it is not made clear before signing up what the frequency of appearance of the newsletter is. This is most likely because the frequency changes often. It would be better to make a definite decision on how often to send out updates to newsletter recipients to ensure a regular stream of outgoing communication.

Also, the newsletter is only distributed in English; so many of the French-speaking members of the target are not able to understand company updates despite expressing their interest in this. The client should therefore make the newsletter available in both English and French to cater to the needs of the complete target audience. The client currently aims to send out a newsletter every other week, and the researcher advises this to remain the same.

### **3. Adjust Printed Promotional Material**

The third main recommendation the researcher would like to make for the client's marketing challenge for the Viridex RF is to invest time and money in revising all printed promotional materials currently used such as brochures, flyers and posters. Despite both target groups of professionals and end users stating that printed materials do not influence their decision making process to a high degree, it is essential to only distribute high quality products because the company name is associated to it, and as such it is an important part of the company's overall branding.

The current Dutch and English printed promotional materials feature language errors that are easy to spot, the material often includes relatively low quality pictures and the name of the product: Viridex RF, is not mentioned on a brochure intended for patients. As mentioned in the first main point of advice, it is important to reflect company values in all its communication, especially in external communication documents, because it is vital in creating a positive corporate image.

Updating the printed promotional materials by ensuring all documents include the product's name and logo, are written in grammatically correct text without spelling mistakes, and using photos taken by professional photographers will bring across the value of professionalism and expertise, and as such will provide the reader with the opportunity to easily recognise the brand, product, technique, and use these factors to form a positive opinion, as well as creating a consistent connection between the brand and its innovative products.

The researcher advises the client to start the process of updating the printed materials by first establishing what content needs to be shared with the intended audiences.

The survey results show what types of information is most valued and most of the valued information is currently featured in the brochures, but some alterations could be made to highlight the customer reviews for the group of end users and to highlight the clinical evidence for professionals, because these two types of information have shown to be essential.

It is also important to make careful considerations with regards to different cultural needs in terms of slight language barriers between Belgium and the Netherlands. Doing research on whether certain terms chosen to use in promotional material may cause confusion in one of the countries is crucial, because not doing so could cause much confusion with fewer customers as a possible outcome. Examples of relevant terms that differ between Flemish and Dutch can be seen in appendix V of this report.

Furthermore, the client could consider using the strategy of including Key Opinion Leaders in the printed materials, as has been done with other F Care Systems' products. Including short statements from medical professionals about the product and facts gathered from clinical studies could be a very useful manner of conveying the clinical evidence in an interesting and concise way.

After having decided what content to share and having put together error-free texts, the client could choose to outsource the creation of the updated brochures, because professionals specialised in designing brochures, flyers and posters will have easier access to software needed for this process and have more time available than the marketing department at F Care Systems, unless the chooses to invest in such software.

#### Additional recommendations

In addition to recommendations for the marketing strategy of the Viridex RF that can immediately be implemented by members of the F Care Systems team, the researcher would like to take this opportunity to inform the client of further recommendations that the client should consider in future marketing communications efforts. These recommendations are based on research outcomes and research limitations encountered by the researcher.

### **1. Generate more Clinical Evidence for the Viridex RF**

An important point of advice the researcher has come to based on different types of research is investing in and generating more clinical evidence for the Viridex RF. Survey findings clearly indicate that the availability of clinical evidence for medical devices is one of the most decisive factors in the decision making process of professionals to consider a device as a possible investment opportunity.

This statement is supported by the fact that other F Care Systems products, which use the same technology, have been far more successful than the Viridex RF has been so far, and these products, such as the EVRF, have been the topic of many clinical trials and studies performed by independent certified medical professionals.

It is therefore strongly suggested that there is a correlation between the availability of clinical evidence and success of the product. Clinical evidence in turn can then be used to support the recommendations made above (e.g. added to company websites and Social Media).

Not only do professionals highly value clinical evidence, end users in the form of patients also stated that clinical evidence is one of the types of information most looked for when doing independent research. Therefore, clinical evidence that is interesting for both groups is essential to include.

In order to ensure that both groups of people find the format and language used in the clinical evidence understandable and interesting, it is best to create two different versions of study results: one aimed at professionals that includes all necessary medical jargon and a simplified version for patients.

The Viridex RF is a device that can be used to treat a multitude of skin conditions, so it is necessary to provide customers with clinical evidence on the device as a whole, meaning that studies need to be done for every skin condition that can be treated with the product. The main website currently features many clinical studies done on F Care Systems' other products, but only one is included about the Viridex RF and this focuses only on one condition that can be treated with the product. This same study is the only one mentioned on the Viridex RF website.

In conclusion, it may be expensive and time consuming to gather more scientific proof through clinical studies, but the research clearly indicates that this is one of the most important factors when deciding on a treatment plan or investment opportunity.

This research indicates a return on investment when investing time, money and energy into pursuing this, because it would most likely be a highly valuable asset in the product's marketing strategy and be rewarded with a higher willingness from the target group to start using the Viridex RF and therefore eventually lead to more revenue for the client.

## **2. Conduct On-Going Competitor Analysis for Belgium and the Netherlands**

Even though a competitor analysis is not an element of marketing communications advice, it does provide useful insight into the market. This information could be highly useful for all marketing endeavours.

One of the main research results focused on a competitor analysis of companies offering similar products as the Viridex RF in either Belgium or the Netherlands. The outcome of this was the identification of two companies that differ greatly in terms of their scope of activities in the broadest sense possible, and as far as the researcher is aware, the client had not identified these two companies before. In order to successfully compete on the market of medical devices in the two countries this report is focused on, it is important to be aware of market circumstances at all times. The report and its advice are based on current market conditions, but since these can rapidly change, the researcher advises the client to regularly do a competitor analysis to ensure its knowledge on market conditions is up to date.

Having a thorough knowledge of the competitors' activities can be of great benefit to F Care Systems for a number of reasons. First of all, it enables the client to anticipate changes in the market that require a change in the marketing/communication strategy. Secondly, continuously conducting competitor analyses will ensure the client is always aware of what companies form the strongest competition, and by analysing their marketing strategy the client can identify their strengths and weaknesses. This would provide an opportunity to learn from competitor's mistakes, as well as adjust F Care Systems' strategy based on strengths and creative ideas when applicable.

Furthermore, the researcher identified a company, Syneron Candela, which could prove to become highly competitive in the near future. This particular company has developed a technique that uses a similar technique as the Viridex RF, in combination with a more commonly known technique, and the Syneron Candela has a strong global presence including a global distributor network, excellently developed websites and a particularly strong Facebook presence. Developments regarding this company's strategy and how the product will be marketed in the Dutch and Belgian markets can become very important for the client to be aware of.

All in all, it is important for the client to continually update its knowledge about the medical device market in Belgium and the Netherlands in order to always be aware of what competition the Viridex RF is facing in those countries, and to be able to adjust its marketing and communication strategy accordingly, because the market can rapidly change with new upcoming and potentially competitive companies entering it.

### **3. Conduct Target Group Analysis for Wallonia**

As mentioned in the research limitations, both surveys were initially conducted in Dutch and the researcher's efforts to have the surveys translated to French by a third party were unsuccessful. Therefore, the conclusions that were drawn in the previous chapter, as based on the surveys, and the recommendations outlined for the client in this chapter are all mainly based on the opinions and values made known with the Dutch and Flemish speaking members of the target group, and could possibly not be applicable to Wallonia and the desired outcome of persuading more members of the target group to purchase the Viridex RF could possibly not be achieved without adjusting the strategy to the region's specifications. Desk research on Wallonia was done and the outcomes indicated that there is a significant cultural gap between the Flemish and French speaking parts of Belgium.

The researcher would therefore like to recommend the client to do additional primary research in the form of interviews, focus groups or a survey on the Walloon members of the medical target group as well as the end users of the product to discover their needs with regards to an effective marketing and communication strategy.

This recommendation is made because of the many cultural differences between the Flemish region and the Walloon region of Belgium. The client should not underestimate these cultural differences and the impact they have on the target group's opinions and behaviour. Desk research findings showed that these differences are extensive and go beyond a language barrier.

## 7.2 Implementation Plan

The following subchapter describes how the advice outlined in the previous pages can be implemented in terms of planning, budget and task distributions.

First of all, it is important to note several factors that affect the creation of an implementation plan. F Care Systems is a company with a global presence and it effectively works with a small team; meaning that staff has limited time available to add additional tasks to their workload, so time is valuable and scarce. Also, as with most companies it is important for the client to work in a cost-effective manner, so the researcher has tried to find the most cost effective and time efficient options to implement the advice.

The client usually works with an intern for most regular marketing activities, so the researcher suggests **filling an additional intern position**. The possible additional intern should have work experience in marketing to address several points of advice, namely: *Adjust company websites* and *update printed promotional material*. In order to ensure a high level of expertise, the client should recruit a Master's degree student. The student should be experienced in working with Social Media, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), marketing content creation, as well as working with WordPress, and work experience in the field of healthcare marketing would be a big pro. In order to ensure the highest efficiency, the student would have to be present in the office on a fulltime basis.

Advantages of outsourcing such tasks to competent students include: getting a second opinion from a 'fresh' pair of eyes and the low costs involved for the client while still getting expert advice. Most students would be willing to work fulltime as an intern when the company offers accommodation, which would accumulate to  $\pm$  €400 a month in Antwerp.

A downside of using a student for this purpose is the time it could take between starting the process of finding the student and seeing results. Students generally start internship placements at the beginning of a semester so, given the timeline, the client might not be able to find a student until the spring semester of 2017.

The researcher advises the client to **recruit two interns at the same time** since the workload of updating the websites and the printed promotional material in addition to regular on-going marketing activities could become too high for one person, which could lead to substandard outcomes.



Additionally **a member of the sales team should take an online course for Online Marketing**, to further develop existing skills, so the sales team can support the marketing department where necessary. A good example of such a course is the following: <https://www.loi.nl/p-4610-online-marketing>. This course is excellent because a wide variety of relevant topics are covered on Dutch HBO level, e.g. web strategies, social media marketing, assessment methods for existing strategies, email marketing, Customer Relationship Management, search engine marketing, and the researcher strongly believes that having a permanent member of staff with considerable and relevant marketing knowledge and skills would be of great benefit to the company. Investing in a fulltime employee's marketing knowledge is particularly helpful during the intervals of not having an intern available. As can be seen on the website, it concerns a 9 month course with a monthly fee of €50,70.

Furthermore, the researcher has advised the client to proofread all company websites to ensure error-free content. Effective reviewing and editing of existing website communications can easily be achieved by **involving all employees and making a task division**. A team meeting should be held to divide up content between all members of the team and **a clear deadline should be set**. The desired outcome of having error free websites could be achieved within several weeks when tasks are divided equally and when a deadline is adhered to.

One of the points of advice includes *conducting a target group analysis for Wallonia*. Conducting a target group analysis could be part of a bigger project, and would therefore be a perfect opportunity for a French-speaking student looking for a thesis assignment. Therefore, the researcher advises the client to **recruit a French-speaking marketing/communications student** to do this research. Students have much up to date knowledge and are often willing to do such an assignment free of charge since it enables them to write their thesis.

The cost involved for the client would be limited to covering travel fees when the student comes to headquarters for meetings. A French-speaking student looking for a thesis assignment can be found by emailing universities with the vacancy and asking them to spread this amongst their students.

Furthermore, the researcher has advised the client to update its Social Media approach. The client should **change their social media efforts to a more regular and scheduled approach** to increase net presence on a more frequent basis with **shorter timeframes between updates**. An important aspect of this is planning when to create new posts and updates to share with the audience. Lee (2014) suggests **updating company Facebook pages twice a day, seven days a week; one update in the morning and one in the afternoon**.

The frequency with which **LinkedIn** needs to be updated differs in Lee's (2014) approach: it **should be updated once a day in the morning and only on weekdays. Twitter should be updated around every working hour on workdays and several times a day on the weekends**. Important to note is the different time zones F Care Systems is active in, so a consideration needs to be made accordingly. Furthermore, the communication must be individually tailored to the various social media channels in terms of content shared. The sales team and CEO should meet to discuss the possibility of creating separate Social Media accounts for the various languages the company is active in or adding the various languages to the current pages before implementing the new schedule for creating posts.

The following Gantt chart provides an overview of all relatively long-term suggested activities and the timeframe in which they could take place for the next five months. Please note that some activities have to be repeated regularly and according to schedule in order to ensure the best possible outcome. Assessment moments have been added to evaluate and monitor changes (i.e. success of changes will be reflected in more online followers, more interest from potential customers and eventually more sales of Viridex RF).

Activity	September											
	1	2	3	4	October		7	8	November			
Week					5	6			9	10	11	12
Start recruitment process of marketing interns												
Team meeting: set clear objectives for messages and values- the websites and promotional material need to contain												
Send out notes on results of team meeting to entire team												
Introduce interns to company's objectives and technology												
Work on adjusting websites and printed material (according to research results and advice)												
Discuss website and promotional material progress												
Meeting about Social Media strategy												
Start implementing social media strategy												
Team meeting to divide webpages to proofread												
Work on proofreading websites												
Start looking for French speaking student												
On-going competitor analysis for Dutch and Belgian market												
Supervisory moment French speaking thesis student												
Work on target group analysis for Wallonia												
Check results of improved social media strategy- (i.e. Number of likes, comments, followers etc)												
Start online marketing course												
Focus on generating clinical evidence for the Viridex RF												
Create new content for website such as case studies, reviews - and technical specifications												
Check and review outcome of implemented changes												
CEO												
Sales team												
Entire team												
Marketing interns												
External French speaking thesis student												
Technical department												



The advice and implementation plan have been designed to be as cost effective as possible while maintaining high quality results. Recruiting two interns for marketing activities will create enough time to make suggested improvements to the marketing materials while simultaneously updating the social media strategy and executing regular marketing tasks.

The total cost of following through on most points of advice is approximately €850,- a month (accommodation for both interns and the online marketing course); this is limited to the transitioning period between marketing approaches. After the changes have been made successfully, having one intern should suffice and the online course will have ended so costs would go down to ± €400,-. This budget has not taken into consideration the expense of generating additional clinical evidence because the cost of this varies greatly.

In conclusion, the researcher believes that the advice could be of great benefit for F Care Systems because implementing the suggested changes of adjusting the company website; printed materials and social media strategy, generating more clinical evidence for the Viridex RF, and through these adjustments communicate more effectively with the target groups, and the effective use of staff and resources could lead to significant and improvements in the marketing efforts for the Viridex RF in a cost efficient manner, and therefore improve the client's business activities in Belgium and the Netherlands.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I

#### SWOT Analysis

	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Internal Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Experience in selling and marketing medical devices</li><li>-In house production of devices</li><li>-Extensive international distributor network</li><li>-Small team of highly educated members</li><li>-The Viridex RF offers cheaper, more effective results than conventional procedures</li><li>-Staff members capable of communicating on a professional level in four languages, English, Dutch, German and French, and website in three languages (Dutch, English, French)</li><li>-The Viridex RF can be used to treat various conditions – multifunctional</li><li>-Conditions that can be treated using Viridex RF are a common phenomenon</li><li>--Viridex RF offers non-invasive treatment with immediate results</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Limited staff available for marketing activities</li><li>-Limited budget available for marketing activities</li><li>-The Viridex RF offers an unconventional and relatively unknown treatment method</li><li>-The Viridex RF website is still being developed</li></ul>
	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<b>External Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Interest from doctors in new techniques</li><li>-Possibility of targeting different markets for the Viridex RF than with other FCS products (dermatologists, skin therapists, end user etc)</li><li>-Improving SEO of Viridex website once it has been completed</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Comparable devices by competitors</li><li>-Rapid development in the medical device market</li><li>-More conventional treatment methods that people are more aware of</li></ul>

## Appendix II

### **Preliminary Research**

#### **DESTEP Analysis**

This includes the:

- **Demographic** (e.g. development of population; target group's size and age),
- **Economic** (e.g. economic crises),
- **Social-cultural** (e.g. behavioural values or cultural changes),
- **Technological** (e.g. developments in medical equipment or communication technologies),
- **Ecological** (e.g. waste disposal, energy consumption) and
- **Political** (e.g. laws and regulations in different countries) factors influencing the target group's investment behaviour in medical sector

**Demographic:** F Care Systems works in an international environment, and can therefore target people affected by skin conditions in all these different markets. Stretch marks are a very common phenomenon amongst women of all ages but more frequently form during pregnancy or when overweight. Age spots, telangiectasia, rosacea, wrinkles fibromas and angiomas are also frequently encountered relatively harmless skin conditions. As the Viridex RF offers solutions for all of the above mentioned conditions, it has a wide potential patient-base worldwide, which in turn could mean a wide customer base in the form of dermatologists and skin therapists offering treatment.

**Economic:** The worldwide economic crisis that started in 2007/2008 has also had an effect on the field of healthcare and thus on the sales of medical devices, because many hospitals, practices and doctors re-evaluated their investment and spending policy, as revenue decreased. However, the Belgian economy has started growing again and indications are good for the coming years (Wijffelaars, 2014). The Dutch economy has grown and is predicted to grow further the coming year. (Dailey, 2015). Growing economies are promising signs for companies such as F Care Systems because it signals the possibility of more investments.

**Social-cultural:** F Care Systems operates on a global level, on many international markets, so it is important to realise that this means interacting with people from many different cultures, speaking many different languages. This of course has an influence on how the company operates and positions its products.

Beauty is an important factor in many societies, and skin is often considered an important aspect of beauty. Combined with the economic growth mentioned above, this means people are more capable and willing to invest in skin treatments to reach beauty standards. (F Care Systems, 2011)

**Technological:** The medical sector is constantly developing and adjusting in order to come up with more effective and efficient treatment methods. Therefore, it is important for medical equipment manufacturers to be careful because the technology evolves rapidly. (F Care Systems, 2011)

It is also important for F Care Systems to take other technological developments, such as the Internet, into consideration. Websites and social media should be updated frequently and have a professional appearance.

**Ecological:** F Care Systems works in a field where chemical compounds are often left behind in the body, and this might cause some patients to choose other treatment methods. However, treatment with the Viridex RF does require the use of chemicals and does not leave any chemical substances in the body.

F Care Systems mentions the correct disposal method of the equipment in various languages in all of its manuals, and encourages the customer to contact the company when in doubt, so F Care Systems does show concern for ecological factors towards its clients. (F Care Systems, 2011)

**Political:** Companies that produce medical equipment have to adhere to many laws and regulations in order to ensure patient safety. Legislation differs per country so F Care Systems has ISO 9001 and ISO 13485 certifications, as well as CE marking and FDA-USA (510k) certification. (F Care Systems, 2015)

### Appendix III

Overview questions that can be answered by a competitor's analysis, as based on MaGee (2015).

- What competitor companies make up the top three?
- How is my company able to compete?
- What products and services are offered by the competition?
- Are the products and services offered aimed at the same target group?
- Can the competition be considered highly profitable?
- When were the competitor companies established?
- Is the competition expanding its business or scaling down?
- What are the positive and negative attributes of the competitors?
- How can a distinction be made between my company and the competition?
- What is the competition's marketing and promotional strategy?
- Does the competition have competitive advantage over my company?
- How does the competition rate on employees, resources, customer service and quality of products?
- What is the competition's size?
- Does the competition operate in the same geographic area?
- How big of a threat is the competition?
- Are the competition's strengths and weaknesses the same as the client's?

#### Appendix IV

#### **SWOT Analyses for Competitor Companies**

##### **Megapoint:**

	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Internal Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Experience in selling and marketing medical devices</li><li>-Small team of highly educated members</li><li>-Offering a wide variety of medical products catering to various target groups</li><li>-Giving customers a chance to visit a large showroom to see all products</li><li>-Giving customers the possibility of ordering products through a webshop</li><li>-Many Facebook likes, indicating much awareness amongst target groups</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Limited staff available for marketing activities</li><li>-Only focusing on Dutch market</li><li>-Old fashioned website</li><li>-No main focus on range of products</li><li>-Importing products so possible lack of expertise with certain products</li></ul>
	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<b>External Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Possibility of importing any type of medical equipment approved for Dutch market</li><li>-Expanding business to Belgian market because of location near Dutch/Belgian border</li><li>-Updating website and gaining more customers</li><li>-Expanding social media presence to other platforms</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Companies entering the market with more concrete knowledge on certain products</li></ul>

**Syneron Candela:**

	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Internal Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Experience in selling and marketing medical devices</li> <li>-Large team</li> <li>-Offering different products in different price ranges</li> <li>-Providing different websites for different countries</li> <li>-Giving customers the possibility of ordering products through a webshop</li> <li>-Prominent social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube</li> <li>-Many offices in different countries → physical presence in different countries</li> <li>-Large distributor network</li> <li>-Presence in 86 countries through offices and distributors</li> <li>-FDA approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Large staff, so possibly miscommunication</li> <li>-Possible loss of control and profit margins in markets that rely on distributors</li> </ul>
	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<b>External Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-More collaborations with health institutes to locally promote products and create more awareness about various treatment possibilities</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Companies with offices in countries that Syneron Candela doesn't have offices with more detailed market knowledge</li> </ul>

## Appendix V

### List of possibly important differences between Flemish and Dutch

(please note that list is incomplete and only shows a selection of differences)

<b>Flemish</b>	<b>Dutch</b>
Bekomen	Krijgen
Autostrade	Snelweg
Brugpensioen	VUT
Kliniek	Ziekenhuis
Domiciliëring	Machtiging
Geld opdoen	Geld uitgeven
Lopen	Hardlopen/rennen
Privaat	Privé
Schepen	Wethouder
Zeker en vast	Vast en zeker
Afstappen	Uitstappen
Discuteren	Discussiëren
Bijhouden	Bewaren
Baxter/Bakster	Infuus
Bekomen	Verkrijgen
Belangenvermenging	Belangenverstrengeling
Bestemming	Geadresseerde
Camion	Vrachtwagen
Denkpiste	Gedachtegang
Hospitalisatie	Ziekenhuisopname
Inkom	Ingang

(As based on: De Verschillen tussen Nederlands en Vlaams, unknown)

## Appendix VI

### Survey Results

#### Survey for Professionals

##### 1. What is your profession?

<u>Answers given</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Dermatologist	21	52.5%
-Skin Therapist	13	32.5%
-Beautician	5	12.5%
-Doctor	1	2.5%

##### 2. What is your nationality?

<u>Answers given</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Dutch	21	48%
-Belgian	19	52%

##### 3. Which skin conditions do you treat?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Stretch Marks	23	57.5%
-Telangiectasia	35	87.5%
-Angiomas	32	80%
-Fibromas	33	82.5%
-Wrinkles	28	70%
-Age Spots	36	90%
-Skin conditions not mentioned on list (e.g. acne, hair removal, tattoo removal scarring, oedema)	13	32.5%

##### 4. Via what communication channel would you prefer to be approached with information concerning a new medical-aesthetic product that currently isn't used in your practice?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Social media	4	10%
-Email	31	77.5%
-Telephone	2	5%
-Telephone conversation followed by personal meeting	2	5%
-Letter via mail	10	25%
-At a medical congress	32	80%



**5. What type of content would you be most interested in when receiving a business proposition about a new medical device?**

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Clinical evidence supporting product	38	95%
-Background information about company	12	30%
-Specific information about product such as technical characteristics and functions	38	95%
-Pictures of the product	17	42.5%
-Contact details from company	21	52.5%
-Customer reviews	1	2.5%

**6. Do patient requesting treatment with certain treatment methods or product have an influence on the decision to start using a new treatment method?**

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Yes	27	67.5%
-No	13	32.5%

**7. When would you like to be approached with business offers for new medical devices on workdays?**

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Between 9:00am and 12:00noon	6	15%
-Between 12:00noon and 3:00pm	5	12.5%
-Between 3:00pm and 05:30pm	4	10%
-I prefer not to be approached on workdays	25	62.5%

**8. The overall market awareness of a medical brand or device play a highly important role in the decision making process to purchase the product.**

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Strongly disagree	0	0%
-Slightly disagree	3	7.5%
-Neutral	25	62.5%
-Slightly Agree	11	27.5%
-Completely Agree	1	2.5%

**9. What are the most important factors in purchasing a medical product?**

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-User friendliness	26	65%
-Value for money	37	92.5%
-Friendliness of company selling product	11	27.5%
-Clinical evidence supporting product	39	97.5%
-Requests made by patients for product	14	35%
-Previous familiarity with product	6	15%
-Other (e.g. risk factors, lucrative)	3	7.5%

Link to the original survey: <https://nl.surveymonkey.com/r/7NV6B2Y>

## Survey for End Users

### 1. What is your nationality?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Dutch	35	43.7%
-Belgian	45	56.3%

### 2. What is your gender?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Male	36	45%
-Female	44	55%

### 3. What is your highest completed educational level?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-HBO	26	32.5%
-Professional Bachelor	1	1%
-HAVO	9	11%
-WO	12	16%
-MBO	5	6%
-Licentiaat	1	1%
-Master's	6	8%
-Humanoria	1	1%
-Huishoudschool	2	2.5%
-Mulo	2	2.5%
-ASO	1	1%
-VWO	11	14%
-HBS	1	1%
-ULO	1	1%

### 4. What is your age?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-18-25	45	56%
-26-35	5	6%
-36-45	13	16%
-46-55	6	8%
-5%+	11	14%

### 5. Have you ever been treated for a skin condition?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Yes	32	40%
-No	48	60%

**6. Would you do additional research on treatment methods after your doctor diagnoses you with a skin condition that needs treatment?**

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Yes	73	91%
-No	7	9%

**7. Where would you look for information concerning different treatment possibilities for the skin condition you have been diagnosed with?**

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Ask friends and family	43	53.75%
-Get a second opinion from another doctor	20	25%
-Flyers and brochures available at medical practices	22	27.5%
-Social media/online forums	39	48.75%
-I wouldn't look for additional information	2	2.5%
-Search engines such as Google	68	85%
-Other (e.g. scientific articles/books, thuisarts.nl)	3	3.75%

**8. What types of information would you find most important and interesting when looking for new information on treatment methods of skin conditions?**

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Previous patients' experiences	70	87.5%
-Clinical evidence (studies done by doctors)	40	50%
-Before and after pictures of treatment	0	0%
-I wouldn't look for additional information	10	12.5%
-Specific information on the product used for treatment	40	50%

**9. If your research has led you to find a treatment method that you seems appealing to you, but your doctor has not mentioned it as an option, would you still discuss it with your doctor?**

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Response Count</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
-Yes	76	95%
-No	4	5%

Link to the original survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9NLGD2X>

## Appendix VII

Initial Gantt chart that provided guidance for the researcher in the first semester of compiling this report.

Activity Week	September				October				November			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Analyse project & organisational context												
Client supervisory moment												
Hanze supervisory moment												
Preliminary research												
Plan research project												
Work on theoretical framework												
Work on research framework												
Research objective												
SWOT analysis												
Competitor analysis												
Write methodology												
Work on conceptual model												
Prepare survey												
Prepare for interviews												
Conduct interviews												
Send out survey												
Analyse interview and survey results												
Formulate advice												
Hand in draft of proposal												
Hand in proposal												
Hand in complete assignment												

Activity Week	December					January				
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
Analyse project & organisational context										
Client supervisory moment										
Hanze supervisory moment										
Preliminary research										
Plan research project										
Work on theoretical framework										
Work on research framework										
Research objective										
SWOT analysis										
Competitor analysis										
Write methodology										
Work on conceptual model										
Prepare survey										
Prepare for interviews										
Conduct interviews										
Send out survey										
Analyse interview and survey results										
Formulate advice										
Hand in draft of proposal										
Hand in proposal										
Hand in complete assignment										

Gantt chart used by the researcher during the second semester.

