



THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE: FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGY

2013

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Business owners and entrepreneurs are starting to recognize the importance and value of an online presence. And while a universal acceptance of digital marketing is a huge step forward for the marketing industry, many business owners are in such a rush to get online that they fail to develop a proper strategy for the move into the digital space. Going digital for the sake of having a website and using social media is not the answer; by themselves and in the wrong hands, these things are often misused or incorrectly implemented. The real key to generating a great return on investment (ROI) with Internet marketing is using your business goals to develop a dedicated strategy.

Meet the Digital Royal Family

There are four main pillars of digital marketing emerging as the 'Digital Royal Family' - cornerstones upon which to build successful digital marketing campaigns. These are the areas every entrepreneur and business manager needs to know and understand in order to be successful in the digital age of the Internet.

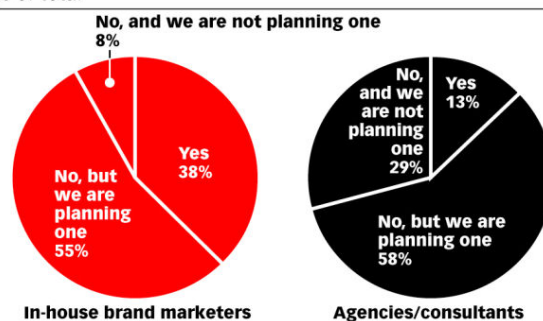
Content is Still King

While the phrase 'Content is King' has become an overused cliché, the statement is as true as ever. King Content is the lifeblood of digital marketing. Without content, the strategies and techniques discussed in this book wouldn't be effective.

So what exactly is content? In the context of the Internet, content is anything digital: website copy, blog posts, infographics, newsletters, whitepapers, campaigns, videos, and web and mobile applications. Anything designed to bring value to the audience consuming it - whether in the form of entertainment or information - is considered content.

The Internet is saturated with mediocre content, which places an even greater importance on creating content with a clearly defined strategy based on specific goals and expectations. Figure 1 outlines the drastic degree to which defined content strategies are being implemented or planned by both brand marketers and agency clients, which further indicates that content is King of the Digital Royal Family and Ruler of the Internet Realm.

Brand Marketers and Agency Clients Worldwide that Have a Defined Content Marketing Strategy, Aug 2012
% of total



Note: n=654 in-house marketers working for a brand; n=513 agencies/consultants; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding; read as 38% of in-house marketers working for a brand say their company has a defined content marketing strategy while 13% of agencies/consultants said their clients had a defined content marketing strategy
Source: Outbrain and Econsultancy, "Content Marketing Survey Report 2012," Oct 3, 2012

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Digital Advertising is Queen

Next in the hierarchy of digital marketing is Queen Digital Advertising. Stats show that digital ad spending has steadily increased 15% year over year and is projected to continue at this pace into 2016 (see image below). Regardless of geographical region, the stats say the same thing: digital advertising spend is on the rise. Businesses can't afford to ignore the shift to digital advertising any longer or they risk getting left behind the competition.

Digital Ad Spending Growth Worldwide, by Region, 2010-2016

% change

| | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Middle East & Africa | 70.0% | 55.8% | 47.9% | 47.4% | 38.5% | 30.0% | 26.5% |
| Latin America | 27.0% | 34.0% | 37.0% | 23.0% | 28.0% | 18.0% | 16.0% |
| Asia-Pacific | 20.0% | 23.1% | 25.0% | 19.0% | 16.0% | 14.0% | 13.0% |
| Eastern Europe | 32.7% | 38.4% | 18.9% | 17.3% | 15.5% | 13.0% | 9.0% |
| North America | 15.6% | 21.5% | 16.6% | 13.8% | 12.4% | 9.0% | 6.8% |
| Western Europe | 15.5% | 13.9% | 10.6% | 11.0% | 10.0% | 7.4% | 6.6% |
| Worldwide | 17.5% | 20.6% | 17.8% | 15.1% | 13.7% | 10.8% | 9.3% |

Note: includes advertising that appears on desktop and laptop computers as well as mobile phones and tablets, and includes all the various formats of advertising on those platforms; excludes SMS, MMS and P2P messaging-based advertising

Source: eMarketer, Dec 2012

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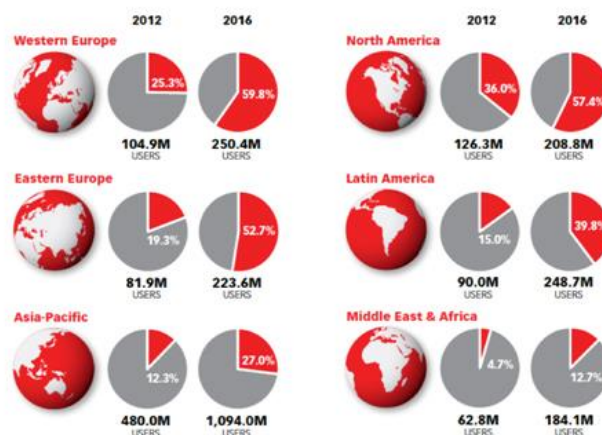
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Mobile is Prince

Things get a little crazy starting with the children of the Digital Royal Family. They're young, wild at heart and slightly unpredictable, but their potential is limitless and relatively untapped (at least for the time being). The bad boy of the family is Prince Mobile.

The below image outlines not only the prevalence of smartphone use, but also how rapidly it's going to increase by 2016. As more people search for and consume information on the go with their highly functional smartphones, mobile will play an integral role in any successful digital marketing strategy.

Prince Mobile continues to grow and become more prominently featured at the core of digital marketing, which makes him the next King of the Digital Royal Family.



Source: eMarketer, "The Global Media Intelligence Report," September, 2012.

Social is Princess

The darling of the Digital Royal Family - the belle of the ball - is Princess Social. She's cutting edge, not afraid to take risks, and although she's still changing at breakneck speed, businesses can't afford to ignore Princess Social's rapid growth.

The chart below shows constant amounts of growth in social networking spend from 2010-2012. In the coming years, social spend is expected to increase by 33%, followed by another 22% the next year. Social media is here to stay. The many businesses that are choosing not to use social - mainly because they don't understand it - are going to regret their refusal to adapt. The key to unlocking the value of social media is embracing it and finding a way to make it work for your business.

Princess Social is poised to transition into her role as the next Queen of the Digital Royal Family. Our Social Media whitepapers will delve a little deeper into how you can successfully integrate Princess Social into your digital marketing efforts.

Social Network Ad Spending Share Worldwide, by Region, 2010-2014

% of total

| | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| North America | 55.2% | 50.7% | 49.7% | 48.8% | 48.9% |
| Western Europe | 27.4% | 25.4% | 24.6% | 22.3% | 20.9% |
| Asia-Pacific | 14.4% | 19.4% | 20.6% | 22.9% | 23.7% |
| Eastern Europe | 1.7% | 2.3% | 2.5% | 2.8% | 2.8% |
| Latin America | 1.2% | 1.9% | 2.3% | 2.7% | 3.1% |
| Middle East & Africa | 0.1% | 0.2% | 0.3% | 0.4% | 0.6% |

Note: includes display, search, video and other forms of paid advertising appearing within social networks, social games and social applications; excludes spending by marketers that goes toward developing or maintaining social network profile pages or branded applications; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: eMarketer, Nov 2012

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Digital Marketing Framework

Now that the Digital Royal Family has been introduced, it's time to take a step back and look at the type of environment your business needs to create in order for them to thrive. Content, advertising, mobile and social media will make up the foundation of your digital marketing efforts, but what kind of base do they have? This base is called a digital marketing framework. The framework is a six-step process, made up of the following phases: Discovery, Internet Business Analysis, Build, Implement, Measure and Manage Results.

Discovery

The first and most important element of the digital marketing framework is Discovery. It's the longest phase and requires the most time and energy to piece together, but if done correctly, it'll ensure the success of the other five phases and drive your entire digital marketing strategy. The core components of Discovery include identifying goals and objectives, selecting strategies and tactics, exploring new opportunities, and setting metrics and targets.

Internet Business Analysis

The second phase of the digital marketing framework is the Internet Business Analysis. Now that your goals and objectives have been identified, the next step is researching how best to implement a digital marketing strategy. There are three specific tasks that will yield valuable information: market segmentation, persona development and competitor analysis.

In the process of market segmentation, a business will consider which pieces of the market to target and then analyze those areas. You'll have much greater success when targeting niches rather than jumping headlong into a vast and uncharted ocean of consumers.

Persona development involves the creation of fictitious characters that represent various types of your customers by incorporating different demographics, interests, locations, age groups, gender and behavior. Once personas are created, specific and more personal campaigns and strategies can be used to target the differing customer types which will lead to a higher conversion rate, more sales and a better ROI.

Before implementing digital marketing tactics, it's a good idea for you to analyze your competitors to see what they're doing in the digital space. An in-depth competitor analysis often returns valuable information including strategies that are working for your competitors (which you can then implement) and areas where you can gain a definite competitive advantage.

Build

The next component of the digital marketing framework is Build. The Build phase is where the strategic development of a digital marketing plan shifts into resource planning and allocation. Before the requirements of a digital marketing strategy can be built or implemented, your business needs to have a discussion about who will build it and at what cost? Are there enough staff members to handle it internally or do you need an agency or consultant? How much budget do you have available?

Businesses that choose to work with consultants will discover that experts can alleviate the pressures of Build (and much of the following three phases) from the equation as they'll already be off and running with the project at this point.

Regardless of the path, the Build phase is where you'll set up or modify your digital assets, which are things like your website, social media profiles and the development of any other digital campaigns.

Implement

Following Build is the Implement phase. During this period all of the digital assets and campaigns tasked throughout Build need to be scheduled for launch and subsequently activated. A cohesive and well-organized launch strategy can pay dividends as it's often an underrated part of most digital marketing efforts.

Measure

Once businesses are fully operating within the digital space, many consider their job done. They sit back and wait for good things to start happening and are either satisfied by mediocre results or simply disappointed. Don't build, implement and wait, because it won't do you any good. The Measure phase of the digital marketing framework is what

enables you to determine which strategies work best and enhance those that are generating a positive ROI with your marketing budget.

Since most businesses aren't aware of the Measure phase, this is another area where an agency or consultant can assist. A consultant helps you determine target goals for each digital tactic and then sets up the measurement of those metrics.

Manage Results

The Manage Results phase is the final cog in the digital marketing framework. One of the most helpful aspects of digital marketing is that anything and everything can be measured. After implementing a campaign and letting it run for a reasonable amount of time (and also tracking it correctly), it'll be easy to discern whether the campaign works. If it doesn't, pull the plug. If it works, start the digital marketing framework again and figure out how to enhance it.

Most businesses aren't managing their results - at least not yet. The monitoring of digital marketing efforts allows you to make ongoing adjustments and rapid improvements to campaigns. The Manage Results phase is the key to more efficient digital marketing and could be the competitive edge your business is lacking.

The Benefits of a Process

The digital marketing framework is really a cycle, much like WSI's Digital Marketing Lifecycle™. Adhering to a cyclical process is especially efficient for digital marketing due to the constantly shifting nature of the industry. What works now won't work next year if it isn't updated and adapted to reflect the changes of the Internet, technology, consumer behavior and industry best practices.

WSI's Digital Marketing Lifecycle™ was created as a framework to developing and maintaining successful digital marketing strategies. Each phase works in tandem with the next and is vital to the cycle as a whole. If a segment is left incomplete, the cycle becomes disconnected and the digital components involved will never meet their full potential.



First Things First: The Importance of Discovery

While all phases of the digital marketing framework do play an equal role in the overall success of any digital marketing strategy, there would be no framework without the Discovery phase. Businesses often have a hard time determining how and where to start their digital marketing efforts, and since most are in a hurry to catch up, things can get messy. And a messy start just breeds dysfunction, inefficiency and ultimately failure, which leaves that business - the one that was rushing to get online - even further behind the competition.

Identifying Goals and Objectives

As part of the Discovery phase, you'll need to identify your goals and objectives. For most businesses, these goals and objectives break down into three categories: lead generation, brand awareness and customer retention.

The first step to identifying your goals and objectives is to determine how your current efforts align with these categories and analyze how effective those efforts have been. This analysis should help you expose gaps and areas of opportunity within your strategy, which allows you to begin identifying a new set of goals and objectives for digital marketing campaigns.

Lead Generation. The objective of any business is to fill a consumer need with a product, service or solution. However this requires one important thing: actual customers. You might offer an amazing service, but if nobody knows about or realizes its value, it won't succeed. Lead generation is any process or tactic that puts you in front of customers to make them aware of your offerings.

Due to the nature of lead generation - which simply means finding customers - startup businesses and companies without an audience or client base should focus on this process. Digital strategies that excel at lead generation include display advertising, paid search advertising (PPC) and search engine optimization (SEO).

Brand Awareness. Of course businesses want more people to be aware of their brand, but many don't know how to proactively enhance consumer knowledge. Brand awareness means ensuring that potential clients are aware of your business and the products you offer. Consider the Kleenex brand, for example. Kleenex is a brand of facial tissue, but many people simply refer to the noun, facial tissue, as Kleenex. That's brand awareness.

Kleenex is a big brand, but there are many techniques that can help you increase the rate at which consumers attach your brand's name to a product or service. Content marketing and display advertising are great strategies that, when combined and properly executed, can accomplish an incredible spike in brand awareness.

Customer Retention. Keeping customers happy is a hallmark of successful businesses. But the game has changed. Perhaps the most drastic shift brought on by digital marketing and the Internet is the way customers seek out and engage with the brands they purchase. If your brand isn't accessible or willing to interact with customers - on both sides of the buying cycle - you're at risk of losing potential customers and retaining less of your current clientele.

Having an open line of communication with your customers and giving them more access to your business is a great way to foster trust and good will with both prospective and current clients. Content, social and email marketing are very effective strategies you can use to improve your overall ability to retain customers.

Selecting Tactics

Once a business has effectively set its goals and objectives for a digital marketing campaign, the next step is to decide which tactics are best suited to hit specific targets. Many businesses jump into digital without understanding the strengths or purpose of the tactics they attempt to implement, often trying to do a little bit of everything. Doing a little bit of everything is a huge mistake. If you only have the budget and employee time to do a few of these things, it's better to do those few really well than all of them poorly.

Additionally, you need to implement the strategies that best align with your goals. Some tactics do a better job of generating leads, so if leads are a priority, you should devote most of your focus to tactics that excel at lead generation.

Content Marketing. Since content is the core of many other digital tactics, content marketing is actually a very balanced and effective strategy in all three categories. Overall, content marketing slightly favors customer retention, but it's still a great way to generate leads and increase brand awareness, and is a vital component of any successful digital strategy.

Paid Search Advertising (PPC). Paid search advertising (the pay per click ads found on search engine results pages) is an exceptional lead generation tool. To a lesser extent, PPC campaigns can be effective for brand awareness, but they excel at honing in on people who are interested in your product or service and driving them to your website. Again, if customer retention is your main objective, paid search advertising isn't the answer.

Display Advertising. Similar to PPC, display advertising is a great lead generation tool for all businesses. But where display advertising excels is in the brand awareness category. Once a customer engages with your brand, the goal is to convert them to a brand advocate so that they recommend and say good things about your product or service. If you're struggling to retain customers however, display advertising isn't the best strategy.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO). SEO helps direct search engine traffic to websites and is similar to PPC, except there's no charge for these clicks. SEO is a very effective lead generation tool and also helps out in the brand awareness department. By targeting specific keywords, SEO can connect you with searchers who are looking for the products and services you offer.

Social Media Marketing. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+ are social platforms that many businesses are struggling to incorporate into their marketing plans. And that's understandable. Social media is young and changes very rapidly. But the businesses that have figured out that social media marketing is a valuable component to brand awareness and customer retention are ahead of the curve and reaping the benefits of early adoption. Social can be an invaluable tool for connecting with customers, answering questions about products and services and improving the customer experience.

Video Marketing. Much like social and mobile, video marketing has exploded over the last few years. As the cost of creating videos has decreased, it's become an excellent strategy for increasing brand awareness. Video also complements both social and SEO efforts by encouraging consumer engagement and boosting organic rankings. If used

correctly, videos can be leveraged for lead generation but overall, they're most effective for expanding your brand and allowing you to creatively market your products and services.

Email Marketing. Second to only content marketing in terms of overall balance, email marketing is an incredibly effective and underrated tactic. By remaining top-of-mind and reaching out to your customers, email marketing is great at customer retention and brand awareness. Because of the many ways to collect email addresses - by giving away free content, running contests, and engaging on social media - email marketing can also help you generate leads and make initial contact with potential customers.

Conversion Architecture. Landing page optimization and responsive design - which fall under conversion architecture - are vital components of lead generation tactics. If you run PPC and display ad campaigns, you'll need to ensure your website is optimized for conversion to enhance those strategies. Conversion architecture should be implemented to augment lead generation and brand awareness tactics.

Mobile Marketing. As smartphone adoption continues to rise and tablets become increasingly popular, more people are searching, engaging and making purchase decisions from their mobile devices. Like social media, mobile is relatively young and most businesses are trying to get a handle on how they can incorporate it. But the truth is, some businesses have mastered mobile and are launching themselves ahead of the competition with it. Mobile is an excellent tactic for brand awareness and customer retention.

Everything Works Together

The purpose of the Discovery phase is to help you invest a relatively small amount of time in return for major results. The time and honesty required to analyze and identify your goals and objectives for digital marketing will pay off. Not only will the Discovery phase give you a clear internal picture with regards to your marketing, but it'll set you up to achieve marketing success where it matters most: on the Internet.

Businesses that want to accomplish total digital marketing success can also become educated on the strategies and techniques they may not know or understand. For example, if you decide to throw a bunch of money at social and mobile marketing, educate your team. If you don't take the time to teach your employees about the strategy and the goals and objectives behind it, the techniques may have a hard time gaining traction. When it comes to digital marketing, the whole team needs to be on-board.

The world of digital marketing can be daunting. Things move and change quickly, and what works today might be dated a few months down the road. As a result, you should consider consulting experts to keep you up to speed on the evolving landscape of the Internet, because when the Internet changes, so does the digital marketing framework. The perfect digital strategies are often a mix of in-house talent and the creativity and knowledge of industry experts, so don't be afraid to think outside the box or ask for help.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Husam is a well-recognized International speaker, Digital Marketing Consultant with WSI (8 years), Professor of eCommerce, and Certified Marketing Professional by Google, Yahoo, and he is also a member of the Search Engine Marketing Professionals Organization, member of the Web Analytics Association, and member of the Usability Professionals Association.

Husam is actively helping organizations worldwide to be successful online by implementing the most effective digital marketing and social media strategies, building their online digital assets, increasing their online visibility and brand efficacy, managing their reputation online, and maximizing ROI from the Internet.