



6 WAYS TO COMPETE IN THE NEW DIGITAL LANDSCAPE OF 2015

November 2014

WSI WORLD

Introduction

Predictions are all the rage near the end of the year - and yes, [we've gone and done it, too](#). We believe that considering trends and making predictions is an excellent thought-exercise and encourage everybody to do it for their own businesses. Taking an introspective look at your past marketing efforts and determining how to adapt them for the future will always be a worthwhile endeavor.

The problem for most businesses is the time crunch, especially during October to December when Thanksgiving, Christmas, shopping and family eat up all the extra hours in our days. So people look for ways to cut corners. We all do it, in one way or another. When it comes to planning ahead, reading somebody's generic forecasts for the digital space seems like a good time-saver. But bookmarking a set of predictions and trends is a far cry from taking action in any way, shape or form.

Unfortunately, while a prediction that [one billion people using smartphones as their only Internet access](#) is a fantastic insight, how are you going to make use of it? Truth be told, you're probably going to share the fact on Twitter, scribble it down on a Post-it note and ultimately forget about it. In the end, prognosticating the future of the digital landscape is interesting, and certainly helpful in theory, but not everybody will be able to put it into practice.

Map Your Business's Future With a Framework

We [talk a lot about frameworks at WSI](#) and that's because we believe having a defined path to follow is vital to digital marketing success. It's a complex world out there in the digital space, and trying to do "a little of this and a little of that" just won't cut it. The best marketing campaigns follow a framework that acts as a map from the starting point to the end goal of the entire strategy. Every step of the journey is determined before setting a strategy into action, and while having the ability to pivot and adapt as you go along is great, the framework exists to ensure that you always accomplish your end goal.

It's like setting out on a road trip where you have a destination in mind and a route that will take you there. You might make a few pit stops or deviate from the plan a little bit, but you always get back on track with the main route, because that is what will lead you to your destination, no matter what.

Our goal with this whitepaper is to help you build a roadmap for your business in 2015. We will use trends and predictions to highlight why we think it's necessary for you to take one route over another, but at the end of the day, we want you to have a rough idea of how you can get your business from digital point A to digital point B in the coming year and beyond.

#1 - Just Showing Up Is No Longer Good Enough

Believe it or not, there was a period when the Internet wasn't such a crowded, oversaturated place. A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, being present in the digital space put you well ahead of the competition, because it was as uninhabited as the planet Hoth. Okay, maybe that's an exaggeration, but it's true that even 10 years ago, the Internet wasn't as jam-packed with businesses competing for attention. If you had a website, you were doing something that most of your competitors didn't think they needed to, and that was a huge advantage.

It seems crazy, but Twitter wasn't around in 2005 and Facebook was just starting out, so the Internet was a drastically different place. Even a few years later as social media began to explode, businesses weren't exactly flocking to the platforms; so if you were there, you were way ahead of the competition. It didn't even matter if you knew what you were doing; just doing it was enough.

Needless to say, those days are gone. Just showing up is no longer good enough. In fact, just showing up essentially renders you invisible, because everybody and their grandmothers understand that the world - including the business realm - thrives in the digital space.

Actionable Tip: When it comes to digital, don't do the bare minimum.

Doing nothing is better than *just showing up*, because at least people won't think you're trying to dupe them with a false digital presence.

Yes, customers are that smart! The first step in creating your roadmap to digital success is determining if you can commit the time and resources to doing digital the right way.

#2 - Technology Is Changing Marketing

There is no question that technology is driving change in the marketing world, and yet marketers and businesses still lag on the adoption of new gadgets, devices and digital channels. For some, it's the old "head in the sand" approach, but here's a newsflash: things

are going to change, whether you like it or not. For others, keeping up with technology seems daunting, so they just don't do it. One thing is for sure: marketing is not driving change in technology, so even if you label yourself a marketer, it would serve you well to become a bit of a technologist, too.

In tip #1, we talked about how much different the Internet looked 10 years ago. Well, what do you think the digital world will look like 10 years from today? If you're smart, you'll say you have no idea. How could you? The breakneck pace of the technological advancements we're making is incredible, to the point that every business and marketer should be using a tool, channel or device that is outside his or her comfort zone. It's the only way to get used to working in an environment in constant flux, but it's absolutely necessary because that's the world we live in.

Actionable Tip: Doing digital the right way involves working outside your cozy comfort zone. The next step in outlining your digital roadmap for 2015 is asking yourself whether you're prepared to learn new things in order to move forward. Put more focus on learning new technology and all of the sudden, the marketing part won't seem so difficult.

#3 - Paid Advertising Channels Deserve Your Attention

Paid ads are another thing we've been harping on over the last few months, [especially the social kind](#). We know the Internet is saturated with content; it's just the way things are now. It's frustrating to write a good blog post or article that only 20 people will read. Social ads and other forms of paid advertising can ensure that your content marketing efforts are seen and read. We repeat: *social ads can guarantee an extended reach for your content*. And the kicker? The total cost for a social ads campaign, at least at the time of this writing, is extremely cheap.

If you can spare the budget, paid search campaigns are also becoming a necessity because no matter what industry you're in, you can be sure that at least one of your competitors are paying for space on search engine results pages (SERPs). The only real way to compete with that is to get your own space on the SERPs. The constantly changing search algorithms are another reason paid search campaigns deserve your attention. It's getting more difficult to keep up with the changes [Google makes to its algorithm](#); with paid search, as long as you pay for your ads, they will appear on the SERPs.

Actionable Tip: When you're putting together the framework of your 2015 digital marketing strategy, find a way to include paid advertising channels. Whether your marketing goals are content promotion and amplification, direct sales offers, or sign-ups and registrations, social and paid search ads will help you reach your destination.

#4 - Humanize Digital Experiences

Customers are human. Even if you're a business-to-business company, humans carry out the buying and selling. These distinctions might seem obvious, yet you can still find robotic, company-centric marketing messages that are filled with corporate jargon. Does that sound appealing? We didn't think so.

Look, customers are intelligent and they know what's going on in the digital space. Customers understand there is a constant battle for their attention that's never going away, so they've learned to ignore poorly executed marketing. These days, that means marketing messages that haven't been humanized.

First and foremost, your digital content should speak directly *to* your customer and it should be about *your* customer. Obviously, your content needs to be about your business and its offers too, but it should all be written for the customers' benefit. And no, it's not to the customers' benefit if you tell them how great your products and services are - *that's a decision you need to let them make on their own*. When you can tell there's a real person behind a marketing message - a real human who is trying to reach out to you personally - that's how you know you're having a humanized digital experience.

Actionable Tip: Put a little bit (or a lot) of yourself into your marketing framework for 2015. If you're a solo operation, don't be afraid to become the face of your company. If you're on a team or part of a big business, let the people define your brand and its message. Be honest, transparent and real - customers will recognize when you aren't being human and you'll lose them forever.

#5 - Tell Stories

Everybody loves a good story. Stories are why we read books, go to the movies and watch TV shows. The stories surrounding athletes and the games they play are what make the Olympics and professional sports so intriguing. We love stories so much that, by contrast, we think anything that isn't a good story is boring and irrelevant. So the question is, are you telling a story with your marketing?

The majority of businesses are embracing the chance to tell their story, which is a trend that will continue in 2015. The good news about the digital space is that it offers a variety of great storytelling mediums for businesses: long and short form articles, videos hosted on Vimeo or YouTube, social stories on Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, infographics, presentations on SlideShare and even relatively untapped mediums like Vine. So you have an audience that wants to hear a story and various mediums by which to tell your tale; the rest is up to you!

Actionable Tip: Write your brand's story because in 2015, you'll need to tell it. This story should weave its way through your entire framework and be present at every stop on your digital roadmap. Your story should be real, it should be human, and it should aim to connect and engage with your audience (as opposed to forcing your products and services on them).

#6 - Optimize the Digital Journey

If there's one big takeaway for this whitepaper, it's that when it comes to the digital world, everything is connected. Your marketing strategy should connect the dots of your digital roadmap and lead your customers along your brand's optimized digital journey. In order to optimize a customer's digital journey, you must deliver a consistent presence across your digital properties. This includes your website, content, social media and mobile marketing efforts working in concert to present a seamless customer experience regardless of device, country, or time of day.

It might seem like a difficult task to integrate and streamline different tactics, but that's exactly why you need to start mapping out your 2015 digital framework right now! Armed with a roadmap and a destination for your digital marketing efforts, you can determine your brand's story, choose how you're going to tell it, and then prepare to deliver it. The only thing left to do? Bring on 2015 and embrace the opportunity to execute the framework you've just built!

Actionable Tip: When considering marketing tactics for 2015, ensure that the channels you choose are easily integrated with the other tactics your brand is using. At the end of the day, your channels shouldn't cause friction - that might confuse people trying to engage with your brand. Your tactics should work in unison to create an optimized digital journey for your customers.

Conclusion

The key to predictions and prognostications is actually doing them on your own. Yes, reading somebody else's off-the-wall trends of the future is fun - [especially if you go back to see how right or wrong they were](#) - but it's tough to take action. In this whitepaper, we discussed the potential shifts and trends of the digital landscape and provided some ideas for how your business can adapt to these changes in 2015. Here's a summary of where the digital marketing industry is heading and the actionable tips we came up with:

Just showing up is no longer good enough:

- When it comes to digital, don't do the bare minimum
- Determine whether you can commit the time and resources to doing digital the right way (if not, doing nothing is better)

Technology is changing marketing:

- Are you prepared to learn new things in order to move forward?
- Focus on new technology and marketing will get easier

Paid advertising channels deserve your attention:

- In 2015, find a way to include paid advertising channels
- Cheap way to promote your content, increase reach

Humanize digital experiences:

- Put a little bit (or a lot) of yourself into your marketing framework
- Be honest, transparent and real

Tell stories:

- Market your brand by telling your story
- Your story should be real, human, and aim to connect and engage with your audience

Optimize the digital journey:

- Choose marketing tactics that integrate well with each other
- Create an optimized digital journey for your customers

In terms of adapting to an always-evolving market, your business' desire and willingness to embrace change is the key. Will you look to the future and try to figure out what your business needs to do to succeed, or will you stick your head in the sand and hope for the best? If you are the kind of marketer who wants to get the jump on your competitors, creating a digital framework based on your own predictions and observations about the digital space is an excellent way to do that. Happy roadmapping, marketers!

About WSI (We Simplify the Internet)

WSI is a digital marketing company with a strong international presence. Our Digital Marketing Consultants use their knowledge and expertise to make a difference for businesses all around the world. Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, we also have offices in over 80 countries. We're a powerful network of marketers who strive to discover, analyze, build and implement digital solutions that win digital marketing awards and help businesses succeed online.

Over the last 20 years, WSI has won multiple digital marketing awards for our solutions by adapting to the constantly shifting landscape of the Internet. We take pride in helping businesses make the most of the dollars they spend on digital marketing.

Ready to move ahead and discuss a project with a local Digital Marketing Consultant? Get in touch with one of our experts now by visiting www.wsiworld.com/get-in-touch-with-an-expert.