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DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY GUIDE Entry Level





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INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

This entry-level guide to digital marketing strategy will look to present an overview of the digital marketing landscape and provide an introduction to basic digital marketing concepts.

By the end of this guide, you should be able to put into place your own digital marketing plan of action designed to achieve your short-term and long-term goals and objectives.

Compared to traditional methods of advertising (print, TV, radio), digital marketing offers a more realistic cost alternative and an effective platform from which to generate awareness and revenue, particularly for start ups and small to medium sized businesses.

A digital marketing strategy will give you a foundation on which to build all your key online marketing activities, and ensure business objectives are being met.



AS A MARKETING FUNCTION, WHAT SHOULD BE IN YOUR REALM OF RESPONSIBILITIES?

- Apply a customer-centric approach by thinking as the consumer thinks
- Keeping up with the competition through constant research
- Brand management; ensure marketing activities match the desired image of the business, and manage perception of this image, both positive and negative
- Being creative and innovative; to stand out from the crowd
- Budgeting; to deliver value from marketing activities
- Measure; being aware of ROI and whether marketing activities have delivered effectively, efficiently and on budget
- Manage the marketing strategy from conception to planning to execution to measurement



WHY DO YOU NEED A STRATEGY?

A s a SME business owner, a strategy might exist in your head and be manageable in that form; but what if your business grows and you develop a larger and more defined marketing department, can you replicate what's in your head to a new employee in a clear and succinct way? A defined strategy ensures that as your business grows, everyone continues to work off the same page

SO WHY DO YOU NEED A STRATEGY?

- A strategy ensures direction
- Clearly sets out a <u>definition of the business goals and objectives</u>, and how exactly you will reach those objectives
- Allows you to map out and consider internal and external influences
 to the business that would affect your marketing activities what
 are our strengths and threats, and what do we do about them?
- Helps to identify your online customers who are they?
 Where do we find them?
- Guards against future competition / new entries to the market / developments to the market by fully understanding the various forces at play and how you can react to them
- Ensures your customer's needs are being met effectively
- Sets the foundations to create brand and customer loyalty



WHAT BUSINESS ISSUES COULD ARISE WITHOUT A STRATEGY?

- Could affect opportunity for growth
- Ineffective tactics and strategy execution wastes time, effort and resources
- Can lead to *ineffective budgeting*, potentially impacting on wider business areas
- You will be targeting unqualified leads through a lack of proper audience research and targeting
- Lack of a defined strategy could restrict chance of funding or outward investment



MARKETING MODELS TO ASSIST WITH PLANNING

A quick search for "marketing models" or "marketing planning models", and chances are you will uncover recurring models that have withstood the test of time, some of which you may have heard of before.

Concepts like the 4Ps, the Boston Goal Matrix or Porter's Value Chain were conceived before the Internet but can still be considered valuable references when building a digital marketing strategy.

We have listed out some of the more commonly used models below:

- 4Ps / 7Ps
- AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action)
- Ansoff Matrix
- BCG Matrix
- Porter's five forces
- SWOT
- PESTLE
- SOSTAC

While these models all serve a purpose, as a starting point to your digital marketing strategy we refer to a simple step-by-step marketing model that looks to answer the key, top-level questions required in the success of any strategy.

As your knowledge progresses and you become more comfortable with implementing your strategy, this model will evolve to include additional elements, platforms and tactics, however by using this initially you will ensure that all of your marketing activity is aligned and that everyone who is involved is working towards the same goal.



This guide will look to follow an outline of the SOSTAC model framework. SOSTAC is a marketing planning model created by PR Smith in the 1990s and is incredibly useful in helping organisations plan their marketing activities.

It focuses on six key business areas and ensures that the marketer is thinking about each in turn by answering the associated question on each.

We have laid out the framework below, and the key questions we are trying to answer at each stage:

- 1. Situational analysis where are we now?
- 2. Objectives where do we want to go?
- 3. Strategy how do we get here?
- 4. Tactics what channels do we use to get there, and how exactly?
- 5. Action who is responsible for what?
- 6. Control measurement, was the strategy successful?



SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS - WHERE ARE WE NOW?

I n order to get wherever it is you want your business to go, you need to know your starting point, where your business stands in the present, your strengths, weaknesses, market opportunities and threats.

To find this out, we refer to a tried and tested method of conducting a SWOT analysis that covers exactly these points:

- i. Your internal **Strengths**; what does your business do well?
- ii. Your internal **Weaknesses**; *what does your business not do so well?*Be honest!
- iii. Your external **Opportunities**; what are the *external trends and issues* related to your business that you *do not have full control* of, yet could be *favourable* to your business?
- iv. Your external **Threats**; what are the *external trends and issues* related to your business that you *do not have full control* of, that could affect your business *unfavourably*?

To assist you in completing this step, traditionally your SWOT analysis would be set out as follows:

| | | Internal factors | |
|------------------|---|---|--|
| | | S – Strengths Key strength 1 Key strength 2 Key strength 3 Key strength 4 | W – Weaknesses Main weakness 1 Main weakness 2 Main weakness 3 Main weakness 4 |
| External factors | O – Opportunities Market opportunity 1 Market opportunity 2 Market opportunity 3 Market opportunity 4 | The attacking strategy: Combine your internal strengths with favourable external market conditions to maximize opportunities | The future development strategy: Aim to build your weakness into a strength to exploit market opportunities |
| | T – Threats Business threat 1 Business threat 2 Business threat 3 Business threat 4 | The defensive strategy: Make full use of your internal strengths to minimise threats | The business protection strategy: Aim to develop internal weaknesses to counter threats to the business |



To help you complete the gaps, we have listed some examples of key questions to ask of your business and its external environment in order to analyse your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Not all questions need to be answered, but the more you can answer the more informed your digital marketing strategy will be.

Try and answer each question as you go through. It is important to be honest with your answers, even if the answer might be a little tough to accept if you find your knowledge or resources are lacking, or you realise your competitors are doing something better than you are. By identifying these key insights now, you will be able to improve on them as you move forward.

Questions to ask to determine your internal strengths:

- What have been your main achievements to date?
- What are your business' most significant assets?
- What do you do that is better than your competitors?
- Do your customers repeat purchase? Do they engage with you regularly?
- What is the one thing that makes your business unique?
- What advantages do you hold over your rivals?
- What are your competences? What knowledge, skills and attitude do you have that can help you?
- Do you have a secure financial position?
- Does your business have a good reputation? Are you able to build effective relationships with those you wish to influence?
- How effective are your management systems and processes?
 Is your organisation well structured and efficient or overly bureaucratic?

Questions to ask to determine your internal weaknesses:

- Which is your weakest asset?
- In what ways are you not efficient?
- What knowledge, skills and attitude are you missing?
- What areas of your business are in most need of improvement?
- Where does the competition have an advantage over you?
- Do your employees have the necessary skills to do their job?
- Do you have a secure financial position?



Questions to determine your external opportunities:

- What are the current trends in your market/industry?
 Are there any external factors that will bring you opportunities?
- Do any current trends or external factors affect you in a positive way?
- Is there a gap in the market that you are able to fill?
- Are there any shortcomings in the competitor offering that you can exploit?
- What is going on around you that might be useful?
- Can you identify potential partnerships or collaborative working opportunities that can support you?
- Are there opportunities for extending your current service offering to new/wider audiences?

Questions to determine your external threats:

- What is stopping you fulfilling your company mission right now?
- Who might cause you problems in the future and how?
- What is the competition doing that might cause difficulties for you?
- Are there any potential damaging circumstances in the current market?
- Have you conducted any business in the past that may lead to a possible lawsuit?
- Are your key staff members satisfied with their current remuneration and/or benefits? Is there a possibility they could be headhunted by other companies?
- Do you envisage a change in consumer taste in the near future?
 Would this be a threat or opportunity to your current service offering?
- Are there governmental/local authority regulations that affect you currently, or might affect you in the future?



OBJECTIVES WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO / WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

ow that you should have a better understanding of your business in terms of how it sits related to both internal and external factors, you can start to look at setting objectives for your digital marketing strategy.

Scenario 1 – If for example, you established your social media assets to be a weakness where your competitors are well established, you might start looking at how to increase your social media following and start generating leads and sales from this channel.

Scenario 2 – Perhaps you have already established your business on social media due to previous budgetary limitations, but now you have the financial means to better develop your branded website, do you know what your website should be looking to achieve? Should it generate awareness, educate your audience, generate leads, generate sales etc.?

Scenario 3 – Perhaps your current assets (brand website, social channels) are performing well and you are running some initial advertising campaigns to grow your business; do you know what channels to look at, and how to measure success on these channels?

When establishing your objectives, there is a simple, easy to remember outline that has held true for years within marketing literature, and that is the *SMART framework:*

Are you looking for an uptake in website sales of 500%? Is this really a SMART objective?



SPECIFIC

If a new employee was to join your business today, would they be able to understand your objective quickly?

MEASUREABLE

"We want our business and service offering to be the best in the market" vs. "We want to increase sales through our website by 25%"; in the first scenario, how is "the best" measured? But by using onsite analytics platforms, the reworked scenario can be easily tracked and measured.

ACHIEVABLE

Based on your SWOT analysis research, do you have the resources, budget and capability to actually achieve the objective?

REALISTIC

"We want to be shipping worldwide within 12 months" vs. "We want to secure some local market share within 12 months with the aim to start looking at the national market in year 2". Be realistic – make sure your not punching above your current weight!

TIMELY

Can your objective be delivered in the given timescale? If not, either the objective should be modified, or the timescale lengthened if you feel the objective is correct.



TACTICS - WHAT CHANNELS DO WE USE TO GET THERE, AND HOW EXACTLY?

ow that your SMART objectives have been established your next stage is actually detailing how your objectives will be achieved.

To do this, we begin to touch on the concept of content marketing and content strategy. Internet users today are faced with a surplus of content, and choose to only engage with content that is relevant to them. Content marketing is about building a long-lasting relationship with current and potential customers by providing stories with valuable content.

Companies online today have realised that by telling these stories, it has become a more effective and efficient way to engage with users, both in the moment and more importantly over the long-term.

At this stage, we look to develop a basic content marketing strategy that will cover two key steps:

- 1. The What A look at content types. Which ones make sense for your business, your available resources and your target audience?
- 2. The Where Your distribution strategy. What tactics, techniques and channels will you use to distribute your content and reach your audience and your objective?



SECTION 8A

CONTENT TYPES - THE WHAT

The digital marketing environment is extensive, dynamic and constantly changing and it can be tricky to keep up to date with everything that is happening within it. One area in particular that is constantly evolving is the sheer volume of content types at your disposal and the platforms on which to share them.

But based on everything you have been able to establish so far – your objective, your business strengths and weaknesses and market opportunities, among others – we can start to determine what kind of content will assist in engaging your users and achieving your end goal.

Are you looking to entertain your audience? Educate on a key government change to legislation that will affect your customer? Inspire people to donate to your charity/non-profit? Convince a crowded market that you offer the best solution? There is a whole suite of content types to choose from that can help educate, entertain, inspire and convince your audience.

Smart Insights have created a useful content matrix, where each content type falls under the headings of Entertaining, Educational, Inspirational and Convincing. It is not an exhaustive list, nor is each content type exclusive to its associated header, but these should serve as a good starting point for you to think creatively around how they can be applied to your particular business, product or objective.





[Source: Smart Insights]

SECTION 8B

DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY -THE WHERE

ow you have an idea of your most relevant content types, the big question is how are you going to make sure that your audience see them? You need to drive traffic to your site to see this great new content and also push your content out onto other sites and platforms to gain maximum exposure.

In this section we take you through some example, top-level digital marketing channels and techniques that can help you drive more traffic to your site and distribute your content onto other platforms or sites. We'll provide a brief introduction to each digital marketing channel and how they can benefit your business.



SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION (SEO)

Simply put, SEO is the process of increasing your visibility in organic search engine results.

Search engines aim to serve the most relevant results to their users for any given search query. You can no longer "cheat" your way to the top of the results by cleverly stuffing keywords into every nook and cranny of your website. Now, as a basic rule of thumb, if you want to rank as number one you have to be number one!

You have to deliver quality, engaging and genuinely useful content relevant to the search terms that you want to rank for. Therefore it is very important to carefully consider the keywords that your site should rank for. Key ranking factors can include:

- Domain-level PageRank
- Quality of linking sources
- On-page optimisation of keyword usage, i.e. not stuffing keywords into every paragraph, on every page
- Content related scores quantity, quality, relevance, uniqueness etc.
- Mentions of brand/domain in the news/media/press

So ask yourself what your target audience is looking for and make sure your site delivers it. As a first step, you should optimise your site for your most relevant keywords – your brand name and the most accurate descriptor of your product or service.

SEO can drive large volumes of relevant traffic to your site and around your key content and should be considered a key channel within the digital marketing mix.



SEARCH PAY-PER-CLICK (PPC)

PPC is an advertising model used on search engines, where advertisers "bid" on a large number of selected keywords (the words or phrases that a user searches for when looking for your product or service). When a user searches using one of the selected keywords, or a variation of that keyword, the advertisers ad appears in the ads section of the search engine results page (SERP).

It is called "pay-per-click", as the advertiser only pays when a user actually clicks on an ad to visit the advertiser's website.

PPC can be a very effective method of driving cost-effective, highly qualified leads and relevant traffic to your website with the ability to drive conversions – a sign up, contact request or even an all important sale.

With PPC you have the unique opportunity to arrive just at the point of need – you already know that the user is searching for your product or service, you just need to show up!

Such is the prevalence of search in everyday life (estimates place the Google daily search volume at around 3.5 billion) Google's PPC platform – Adwords – is the most popular among marketers.

PPC is particularly relevant to your business if you have a product to sell or if you are looking to generate enquiries and leads for your service. It can be a very cost effective way of driving sales or enquiries but only when managed carefully.

PPC can deliver very strong conversion rates and low costs per action, as you are grabbing the user at their point of need. However PPC is generally not considered a tool for generating awareness, it is an action based marketing channel, for people who are already searching for your brand or for what you do.



SOCIAL MEDIA

We've all heard the term "social media", but do you really know what it means or are you just following the crowd?

Social media involves utilising various social media networks and platforms to communicate your brand, product or service through the sharing of content – images, articles, videos etc. – for marketing purposes.

Social media is one of the best platforms at your disposal to connect with and talk to your target audience, depending on who that audience is. It can be a very effective way of pushing your key content and messaging out to a wider audience and generating conversation and engagement.

However, consider your SMART objectives, it might be a rare case, but do you even need social media? If you do, almost certainly you do not need all social media channels. You can easily end up lost in the social media wilderness.

While social media can be somewhat of a minefield with the array of platforms out there, the following would largely be considered the main platforms worth a look:

- **Facebook** is the largest social network in the world, with over 1 billion users, that allows you to connect and share with friends and family through posting updates, sharing photos, links and exchanging information.
- **Twitter** is the real-time, micro-blogging platform, where users can communicate and stay connected with the world through the exchange of quick and frequent messages. Updates or "tweets" can include photos, videos, links and up to 280 characters of text. [At the time of publication, Twitter was rumoured to be expanding this character length to 10,000]



- Instagram is a mobile photo and (short) video-sharing network.
 Compared to other social networks, it is a relatively simple and straightforward process in which to share your photos and does not have the same array of features of the likes of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.
- Pinterest takes the idea of bookmarking to a new and visual level, enabling users to post or "pin" content from around the Internet to personalised "pinboards" that are usually collated into a common theme. Users are then able to browse and view others collections of pins publicly.
- **LinkedIn** is the professional social network. LinkedIn's mission is to connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful. This is achieved through the sharing of business-related information and connections, while allowing the individual user a personal and publicly available profile with which to communicate their own skills, interests and achievements.
- **YouTube** is the world's largest search engine behind Google, but YouTube is solely for video content. It is a free video sharing website that anyone can upload a video which then acts as a distribution platform for original video content creators to engage with, inspire, entertain or engage with an audience.



SOCIAL ADVERTISING

Social advertising is another PPC channel to consider in driving traffic to your site and pushing your key content or messaging out to a wider audience.

Where search PPC serves ads based on what a user is trying to find at any given moment on search engines, social PPC involves targeting ads based on an on-going interest in a certain topic. It can also target specific demographics – location, gender, age, level of education, whether you have taken a holiday in the last 2 weeks etc. – which is a level of segmentation that opens up a whole new range of possibilities when it comes to targeting your customer with a relevant and engaging communication.

Social PPC provides a different opportunity from search PPC. Where search PPC shows your ads when a user is actively searching for your brand or product or service, social PPC allows you to talk to your target audience when they are not thinking about the product or service on offer. This allows you to generate awareness and push out to a wider audience. However social PPC ads will have a slightly different effect on conversions than search PPC, as they are talking to the user at a different stage in their awareness/action cycle.



EMAIL

In the face of the social media juggernaut, the humble email can often get overlooked, but it is *still one of the best ways to communicate with your customers*.

With email marketing you can easily and quickly reach your customer without the need for a huge marketing budget. It is one of the most cost-effective forms of communication available to a digital marketer today and can drive large volumes of high quality, engaged traffic to your site.

Most email software platforms like Mailchimp and Vertical Response allow you to efficiently maintain an email database, segment that list based on likes/dislikes, previous behaviour etc. to allow for the creation of emails that can be sent out to specific target audience segments, providing a more customised experience for your customer.

In short, a cost-effective marketing tactic that can build trust and loyalty, drive traffic and increase conversions.

While relatively straightforward to set up and start sending emails, it is also relatively easy to get your strategy wrong...consider some of the following best practices before you jump in:

- Make sure you have received permission from your recipients to actually receive email from you; it is illegal to contact people without prior permission!
- Make your emails genuinely useful
- Send out relevant and timely communications
- Don't send too many emails that would annoy your users
- Make sure your subject line and general content is void of words like "free" or money in any form (getting money, paying less etc.)
 your email might get flagged as spam
- Avoid ALL UPPER CASE and too many exclamation marks!!!!!



OUTREACH

Do you have a unique product or service that people would just love to talk about? Have you created genuinely useful and engaging content? Then outreach might be a viable path to take.

Outreach is the process of identifying key individuals (not necessarily celebrities) who can assist in delivering your content to a relevant target audience.

Outreach activities allow SMEs to be able to compete with larger brands and organisations with larger budgets in order to promote their message. *Placement and building relationships is key.*

There are two facets to marketing outreach activities:

- Driving traffic Building inbound website links just for the sake of gaining a link is an SEO tactic that is largely outdated now. However, driving traffic to your site through achieving quality and relevant inbound links from relevant sites is incredibly important. Driving traffic should be a key consideration of any outreach programme so focus on sharing your most engaging and useful content.
- 2. Building brand advocates Social influencers are the new celebrities when it comes to the Internet everyday people on YouTube, Instagram and professional bloggers who command large numbers of followers. Some of YouTube's top stars can have follower numbers into the millions. Even "lower tier" social influencers can still command followers in the thousands. Partner with one of these modern day celebrities and you have a direct link to your target audience through a trusted source. However even small scale influencers can have a great effect on your brand and website.



Do you know who the social influencers related to your brand or industry are? Do they align with your brand vision and values? Can they connect you to your target audience? Would they be open to collaboration?

Keep in mind that given their new elevated status in the digital world, social influencers can command fees or payment for communicating your product. In some cases for lower ranked influencers, freebies might do the trick, to a nominal fee, all the way up to a full blown contract that covers the activity expected of the influencers over the course, as well as their fee too of course. But it can be a cost effective strategy worth pursuing, especially if you have a unique business or product/service, where influencers want to be seen unique themselves.

DISPLAY

Display is another type of online advertising that can come in several different forms, like banner ads or rich media. Unlike search PPC that is text-based, display ads can also rely on images, audio or video to communicate a message.

So much time is spent online reading and engaging with content on so many different websites, display ads can help reach these potential customers through the "display network".

Ads are created according to predetermined sizes – that can be text, images, interactive or video. Those ads are then placed on websites that are in the display network that are relevant to what you're selling (contextual targeting), or ads are shown to the people who are likely to be most interested (interest targeting).

Display ads can be used to generate awareness by getting ads in front of consumers so they can learn about your business while they consider options; increase sales by placing ads on relevant sites; or drive loyalty by targeting ads to people who have already visited your site, even if they didn't buy.



ACTION - WHO DOES WHAT AND WHEN?

epending on the scale of your business, the Action step could be an extensive and critically important one, especially if there are multiple internal departments and external agencies to coordinate. Without detailing this step, each stakeholder group would not know their own responsibilities, what their specific role or task is, and when they are expected to deliver.

In a smaller setup, coordination will likely be much more straightforward. But even if you are a one-man band, setting out a timeline of when you should expect to have each aspect of your strategy together should be conducted as a best practice. If anything, it keeps you accountable for each step at each deadline stage.

By this stage, you should not expect to find you are lacking a vital resource or skill that would jeopardise the execution of your strategy. These key details and insights should be established during your SWOT analysis. If you are not honest with your analysis at that stage, expect to hit a roadblock at this stage.

Just like setting your objectives, set a timeline and action list that is realistic and achievable. If you need an additional week to do things properly, take it if you are not time-dependent on external factors.



CONTROL AND MEASUREMENT – WAS THE STRATEGY SUCCESSFUL?

W ith the advent of statistics and "big data" in marketing, this has led to much more accountability when it comes to judging the success of a marketing strategy.

By knowing what you are trying to achieve from your marketing activities, as established earlier, enables the ability to conduct regular reviews containing KPIs and the measurement of on-going metrics that can assist in determining whether your strategy is on track or not.

To do this, requires establishment of a platform that allows you to keep track of this data and the implementation of goals and conversions. To introduce yourself to the next step of your digital marketing strategy, click here to read The Entry Level Guide to Data Analytics.

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GLOSSARY

4Ps

The Marketing Mix is a tool to help understand what a product or service can offer. The 4P's of marketing stand for Price, Product, Promotion, and Place. An extended 7P's model also includes People, Process and Physical evidence.

AIDA

Stands for attention, interest, desire and action. AIDA is a four step marketing model used to describe the different stages that a customer engages with a product/service.

Ansoff matrix

A marketing planning tool to help a business determine its product and market growth strategy.

BCG Matrix

The Boston Consulting group's matrix is a four-celled matrix for portfolio analysis. Designed to help with long-term strategic planning to help a business determine growth opportunities.

Advocate

A person who supports or promotes the interests of another. Active advocates are passionate and will respond to inquiries about your brand.

Customer-centric approach

This approach offers a great experience throughout the whole customer journey. This strategy is based on putting your customer first and at the core of the business.

Digital marketing strategy

Provides a foundation for all online marketing activities and will assist in making the right decisions to make a company successful online.

Display advertising

A type of online advertising which includes: banner ads, video and logos on a website or search engine.

PageRank

An algorithm created by Google. It measures the quality of links and link equity; a site with a higher quality of incoming links in a higher number will have a better PageRank.

E-mail marketing

E-mail marketing is directly marketing e-mail based campaigns to a targeted list of recipients.

Goals

Marketing goals are measurable short-term goals and long-term goals. They describe how your digital marketing will contribute to you business in order to increase growth.

On-page optimisation

Refers to all the activity taken within the website in order to improve its position in the search rankings.

PESTLE

A framework used to scan an organisations external macro environment. The letters stand for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environment.

Porter's five forces

A framework that models an industry by five forces to show competitive positioning. These are: Supplier Power, Buyer Power, Competitive Rivalry, Threat of Substitution and Threat of New Entry.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

SEO is the process improving a site's ranking within the organic results of a search engine results page for a chosen set of keywords.

Search Engine Results Page (SERP)

A SERP is the page returned by a search engine in response to a search query.

Search pay-per-click (PPC)

An Internet advertising model used on search engines in which advertisers pay their host only when a user actually clicks on an ad to visit the advertiser's website.



Glossary

SMART

Refers to Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant and Time-bound objectives.

SOSTAC

A planning model that stands for: Situation, Objectives, Strategy, Tactics, Action and Control.

SWOT

A structured planning method that evaluates the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats for a company, product, place or industry.

