

Digital Marketing for SMEs – NEW!

This series was written for a UK digital marketing agency in 2011. After it was taken offline, I reposted it on this blog back in 2012, but it still features in the top posts in April 2022, so I made the decision to rewrite/improve it and link it to my very own PowerPoint presentations, hosted on SlideShare. The series is structured in four sections:

1. 7 steps to digital domination
2. Creative content to capture customers
3. What is SEO? Search Engine Optimization for SMEs
4. Social media: your launch pad for interactive engagement: B2C & B2B.

1 Lucky 7 steps to digital domination

Integrated marketing has become a business buzzword, taking in advertising, public relations, direct marketing, digital and social media marketing – all as a unified, cost-effective and far-reaching force. If, however, you are keener on omnichannel and want to know about CRM (customer relation management) and e-commerce, read/download the paper I co-authored with David Cattrall at <https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202105.0359/v1>.

Research has shown time and time again that customers check out products and services online before making a purchase. Having an online presence not only increases trust in your brand - vital for small businesses without a big marketing budget - but also reaches a wider, cross-generational audience.

So here are seven steps to create an effective digital marketing plan and boost your ranking in the process.

- Step 1 Create a keyword strategy. Any internet search starts with typing a few words in an engine, so the trick is to find which phrasal keywords can best describe your products or services. Google AdWords' Keyword Tool can list the most popular searches at local and global level – all you have to do is pick the keywords that suit your business and match your content (or develop your content around them if you don't have content yet).
- Step 2: Optimize your website. Once you have identified your keywords, use them in your website's source (i.e. where the html code is) and sparingly in your website's

copy as keyword stuffing is penalised. Use your keywords judiciously in body copy, headings, crossheads and picture captions.

- Step 3: Enhance your website with evergreen content (blog and/or news page). Content is still king, meaning that quality copy (articles, reports, e-books, etc), photos, videos, podcasts and infographics all contribute to making your website rise in search engine rankings. Content should be developed with your customer in mind and allow for the short-span attention of web users. If potential customers cannot find the information they require fast, they will go elsewhere.
- Step 4: Promote your content with social media. Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest are the main digital platforms. As a rule of thumb, Twitter and LinkedIn are used for B2B interaction, while Facebook and Twitter are used for B2C. However digital divides often blur, with companies using all platforms and most getting onto Pinterest's and Instagram's bandwagons – a picture (or infographic) is still worth a thousand words.
- Step 5: Convert your website's traffic into leads. Your website is ranking well, you have plenty of visitors, your blog is well received, but how can you turn your followers into customers? Don't spread yourself too thinly, keep up with social media platforms and engage with your customers by giving away expert advice, product samples, consultations - whatever it's suitable for your business to offer as an incentive to close a deal. Nurture your leads with email marketing using newsletters. Customer's on-going engagement is key - your registered users want to hear from you and are keen to receive your e-newsletters. Focus on their problems and offer solutions – a pull rather than push strategy involving building a relationship and earning trust. For instance, if you sell gardening/outdoors products, registered customers can get emails with gardening tips, short tutorials for easy makeovers and seasonal advice to showcase how your products can enhance their lifestyle.
- Step 6: Be mobile friendly. A good chunk of your customers might be web surfing from a mobile phone, so check that your website displays and performs well on mobile devices. Google Analytics can give you a helping hand by indicating how mobile impacts your business – you can get free reports showing how your visitors are accessing your website.

- Step 7: Analyse and refine your marketing strategies. Many businesses still think that once their optimised website is up and running and they have a few successful social media campaigns under their belt, they have done well... Yes, but not for long. In the fast-changing digital world, new platforms are constantly created and trends come and go at the speed of lightning. Your competitors won't be standing still either. Small businesses should review their website at regular intervals. Refresh your content, keep up with social media, regularly monitor your visitors and their behaviour with Google Analytics (and native social media analytics for your digital platforms) and speak to the sales team, they are not your enemy, they can give you some useful insights to what customers need and want.

2 Creative content to capture customers

Customer engagement is your mantra. There is much more to online communications than setting up a website – think sharing optimised/quality copy, blog posts, podcasts, videos, photos, infographics, e-newsletters, e-books on social media platforms and on your website to find and retain customers. It's a simple commercial equation: engagement equals competitive advantage equals sales.

The first step is to create optimised, persuasive copy that draws customers to your website. However, a “wordy” website is not enough to keep your visitors coming back for more. So here is an overview of creative content you can use to create leads:

- Blog posts - perfect for disseminating up-to-date information on your business and tell your customers about new products/services, awards and industry news.
- Blogger outreach – offering samples to influential bloggers in exchange for reviews and exposure, placing articles in high-ranking blogs or involving top bloggers (Vuelio does top 10s in any topic you can think of).
- Curated content - articles written by a well-respected writer or industry figure shared on your channels.
- Videos – a visual introduction to your company, product tutorials, a short clip with viral potential...
- Podcasts – a recording that can be played over and over again, easier to produce than a video.

- Webinars – an online workshop that showcases your products/services, a more interactive option than a video or podcast.
- Slideshow presentations – easier to produce than a video or podcast, they could just be PowerPoint files saved as a pdf and uploaded to your website. You can also record your voice presenting the slides...
- Infographics – a colourful snapshot of your business with graphs, pie charts or eye-catching images.
- Q&As – a regular fixture on most websites informing customers about aspects of your business (do ask the sales team for an input).
- Survey and polls – a quick and easy way to get feedback to test your new products and services (or even the demand for a potential new service/product).
- Case studies – a must-have for many businesses, especially B2B companies. If you are B2C you go for reviews and testimonials...
- E-books – a popular format to share longer documents, including live links.
- White papers – perceived as old school or stuffy by some, but still relevant for companies that need to educate customers about products/services.
- Free report/bespoke consultation – useful for companies selling services.
- Apps – a useful application for mobiles and a great promotion tool; you can go for free, paid (premium) or freemium apps.
- E-newsletters – the cornerstone of email marketing.
- Last but not least, photos – a high number of internet searches focuses on images; photo captions are a great place to sprinkle in your keywords.

The next step is to use social media platforms to broadcast your commercial message – your creative content can be tweeted, shared on LinkedIn or in industry discussion forums and posted on Facebook. Multimedia content can be showcased on Pinterest/Instagram and uploaded to YouTube. And if you have a very good case study or a story with plenty of human interest, you can also get in touch with traditional consumer or trade media and get exposure in newspapers, magazines, radio and TV.

3 What is SEO? Search Engine Optimization for SMEs

In the virtual world you need to optimise to capitalise. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving the visibility of your website in search engines. This is achieved by:

- High-ranking keywords: as explained in section 1.
- Creating quality content: as listed in section 2.
- Backlinks: a recommendation and endorsement, so you need trustworthy sites willing to link to your website – blogger outreach might help, see section 2. Backlinks can be organic, which means earned through quality content shared online or paid for (i.e. ads that will place your website in a prominent position).
- Online authority: gained through a consistent social media presence (see section 4 for more information). Each of these practices breaks down in a variety of activities. For instance keywords can be deployed in visible copy (your website’s blurb and blog posts), invisible copy (where the html code is), page titles, even picture captions and ALT copy. Social media and analytics help you to find out what type of content works for your business. Internet users typically have a short attention span, so if your website is listed on page one of a search, it’s bound to be seen by a greater number of people. Dedicated surfers might make it to page three/four, but most web users do not venture past page one.

So far so good, except that the SEO landscape keeps changing as search engines make changes to their ranking algorithms. SEO practices are also getting more sophisticated so just using Google’s keyword tool is not enough. Then there is local SEO - Google Business Pages leads the way with a listing system that lets you pin your business to the map of your operating area. The page is free but you might want to consider Google Ads to pin your business on the map. For instance if you google “shoe shops in Cambridge”, you will see a list of shops linked to a map high on the first page.

Once you get it right, you can’t rest on your laurels. You should constantly monitor digital trends and update your website and blog with fresh content. If it’s all too much for you and you’d rather leave it to the professionals, make sure you choose the right agency for your business. Although black SEO methods are frowned upon and penalised by search engine when detected, SEO practices are not monitored by an industry body and there is no

code of conduct as such — so it's important that your agency of choice is transparent with you, can explain in plain words the services it provides and shows you results for the work they have carried out on your website.

4 Social media: your launch pad for interactive engagement

Promoting your business and creative content with social media – whether it's news about an award or a prestigious contract, a blog post, a great photo or video showcasing your business or eye-catching infographics - is a crucial part of internet marketing. Think of it as a relatively inexpensive way to raise awareness of your brand, get more traffic to your website and foster visitors' loyalty, which all lead to increased sales and advocacy (when someone recommends you). But which social media platform should you invest your time and resources in?

There is a multitude of social media channels, however, for all this mind-boggling variety, there are six main social media platforms you need to get to grips with first: Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest and Instagram. The rest is up to you and what your business needs, depending on customer's demographics (age, locality, mobile use, etc). There are plenty of clever tools and digital platforms to help marketers; I have been using Hootsuite (social media scheduling and measurement of engagement), Brandwatch (social media listening), MailChimp (e-newsletters), Buffer (social media scheduling), SoundCloud (podcasts), Google Analytics, Blogger (blog for non-profit garden), Keyword Planner (keywords courtesy of Google Ads) and attended a lot of HubSpot (CRM) meetups. I am keen on using Answer the Public and Google Trends a bit more.

Nearly everybody knows **Facebook**, which originated as a social network for recreational use in 2004. It has now been embraced by B2C businesses trying to ignite and boost engagements with their customers while promoting their brand. With over 2.8 billion monthly active users, you are bound to find customers and engage them with samples, competitions, interactive discussions with prizes to incentivise participation and even raise awareness of worthy causes. You can set up a page, a group and use their ever-growing features. If you are running events, Facebook integrates well with Eventbrite.

Twitter has been around since 2006, has over 187m daily active users and is defined as a micro-blogging platform (originally it had a text restriction to up 140 characters, now up

to 280). You can easily set up a free account and tweet your content - links, photos, views, even ask a question - and follow online influencers, celebrities and reporters – news tend to break on Twitter before they are broadcast.

Boasting 722 million members, **LinkedIn** is the favourite networking platform for professionals across the world. It has been around since 2003 and is a great platform for finding people, recruiting staff and discussing industry topics and trends. LinkedIn lends itself well to the promotion of B2B services and the engagement of a professional audience. The aim is to set up your very own business network, post your news as updates and engage with like-minded individuals through groups. You can also set up your own group and/or business page.

Pinterest and **Instagram** are photo-sharing digital platforms, which have been around since 2010. **Pinterest** allows users to create theme boards - each photo can be linked to a website or blog. E-commerce websites and creative makers use Pinterest as a virtual storefront to attract customers, after all it boasts over 450m monthly active users. Pinterest is also very good to share articles, provided you have great photos to go with them. **Instagram** was originally a mobile only platform but it's now possible to use it on desktop; it boasts over 1bn active users each month. You might have to work harder than with Pinterest as photos vanish fast, but you can create stories and target younger generations more effectively. Pinterest's median age is 40, although younger generations are joining in as it's a great place to store photo albums and interact with others.

YouTube is the largest search engine after Google. It was launched in 2005 and acquired by Google in 2006. It boasts over 122m visitors every day. It is mostly commonly used to store videos that are embedded on websites and blogs or shared on social media channels. It has a live streaming function that was well used during the pandemic.

PowerPoint presentations

- [How to plan, build and implement a digital marketing campaign](#)
- [How to build a successful digital presence](#)
- [Website analytics](#)
- [Social Media analytics](#)
- [Marketing measurement for startups and SMEs](#)