

This series was written for a digital marketing agency in 2011. It has been quite popular with the readers of my SEO blog, so here are the articles:

- **8 steps to digital domination**
- **Creative content to capture customers**
- **What is SEO? Search Engine Optimization for SMEs**
- **Social media: your launch pad for interactive engagement: SM for B2C & B2B**

8 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 force, making it a cost-effective and consistent promotional strategy.

Market 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. Recent research by BT revealed that many young Britons don't own a TV but rely on the web to watch TV through catch-up services and download films, music, games and videos, bypassing high-street stores.

So here are eight steps to create an effective digital marketing campaign from scratch 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 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 high-ranking words that suit your business.

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 by search engines. Use your keywords judiciously in body copy, headings and picture captions. Typical source code looks like this:

```
<title> Name of your company</title>  
<meta name="description" content="Short description of your business"/>  
<meta name="keywords" content="keywords go here, separated by commas"/>
```

Step 3: Create a blog and other content

A national digital marketing conference recently proclaimed that “content is king”, meaning that quality copy, pictures, videos and infographics all contribute to making your website rise in search engine rankings – the top-five currently being Google, Bing, Yahoo, Ask and AOL Search. Your website should be worded with your customer in mind and allow for the short-span attention and time-poor behaviour of internet users. It should be brief, to the point and allow easy navigation – if potential customers cannot find the information they require, they will click away. More in-depth information can be conveyed through a blog, ebooks, videos and podcasts.

Step 4: Promote your content with social media

Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Pinterest are the main social media platforms. More specialised platforms include YouTube for videos, Digg and Stumbleupon for web links, and Instagram and Flickr for photos. As a rule of thumb, Twitter and LinkedIn are mostly used for B2B interaction, while Facebook is more B2C. However digital divides often blur, with companies using all platforms and most getting onto Pinterest’s bandwagon – a picture (or infographic) is indeed worth a thousand words. There is plenty of free information online to keep you up to date with social media trends – Mashable and Search Engine Watch offer excellent e-newsletters.

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 free advice, samples, consultations - whatever it’s suitable for your business to offer as an incentive to close the deal.

Step 6: Nurture your leads with email marketing

Email marketing is the 21st century answer to junk mail – but not as we know it. Customer engagement is key - your registered users want to hear from you and are keen to receive your e-newsletters via email. 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 products, potential customers could get emails with gardening tips, short tutorials for easy makeovers and seasonal advice to showcase how your products can enhance their lifestyle.

Step 7: Be mobile friendly

Portable internet and wifi mean that some of your customers might be surfing the net from a mobile phone, so check with your designer that your website displays 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, whether from a smart or a basic phone.

Step 8: Analyse and refine your marketing strategies

Many businesses still think that once their optimised website is up and running and they have one social media campaign under their belt, they are there... Yes they are, 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 with Google Analytics and use all the free tools and information available to improve or maintain your ranking.

Creative content to capture customers

Customer engagement is the mantra of digital marketing. There is much more to online communications than setting up a website – think using optimised copy, blog posts, podcasts, videos, e-newsletters, ebooks and social media platforms to find and retain your customers. It's a simple commercial equation: engagement equals competitive advantage equals higher 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 build up your mailing list and boost leads.

Creative, multimedia content comprises:

- Blogging - perfect for disseminating up-to-date information on your business and tell your customers about new products, awards and industry news
- Blogger outreach – offering samples to influential bloggers in exchange for reviews and exposure
- Curated content - articles written by a renown writer or industry figure
- 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, but easier to produce than a video
- Webinars – an online workshop that showcases your product, 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
- Infographics – a colourful snapshot of your business with graphs and pie charts
- Q&As – a regular fixture on most websites informing customers about the way you operate
- Survey and polls – a quick and easy way to get feedback from your site's visitors to test your marketing strategies
- Case studies – a must-have for many businesses, especially B2B companies

- E-books – a popular format to share longer documents including live links
- White Papers – longer than ebooks and perceived as old school but still relevant for companies that need to educate lay customers about complex products and services
- Free reports – a bespoke consultation, popular with companies selling services
- Reviews – essential for retail websites – think Amazon and John Lewis
- Apps – a useful application for mobile devices and a great promotion tool
- E-newsletters – the cornerstone of email marketing, essential for a truly integrated marketing campaign
- Last but not least, photos – a high number of internet searches focuses on images and 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 in LinkedIn or industry discussion forums and posted on Facebook. Multimedia content can additionally be showcased on a Pinterest board and/or 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 and periodicals.

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:

- Creating quality content: as listed in Creative Content to Catch Customers
- High-ranking keywords: as explained in 8 steps to digital domination
- Backlinks: a recommendation and endorsement, so you need trustworthy sites willing to link to your website
- Online authority: gained through a consistent social media presence.

Each of these practices breaks down in a variety of strategies. 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. Social media helps you to unearth good keywords and find out what type of content works for your business. And subscription tools like SEMRush let you create reports to pinpoint which keywords your competitors rank for.

Backlinks can be organic, which means earned through quality content and online authority or paid for (ie ads in search engines that will place your website in a

prominent position). A top ranking will make your website stand out from competitors. Internet users typically have a short attention span, so if your website is listed on page 1 of a search, it's bound to be seen by a greater number of people. Dedicated surfers might make it to page three or four, but research shows that 87% of 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. Google's Panda and Penguin updates penalised shoddy content, poor quality backlinks and black hat SEO practices such as keyword stuffing and fake pages to trick search engines' crawlers into granting a high page ranking.

SEO practices are also getting more sophisticated so just using Google's keyword tool is not enough. Your best bet is to use all the webmaster tools offered for free by search engines. These are also handy to measure the impact of mobile devices on your business - with iPads and smart phones on the rise, you can't afford to ignore this growing stream of potential customers. However, according to a Google study only 33% of advertisers have a mobile optimized site.

Then there is local SEO - Google Places leads the way with a listing system that lets you pin your business to the map of your operating area. It's a cool free service to try that will raise your ranking in local searches. For instance if you google "shoe shops in London", you will see a list of shops linked to a map on the first page.

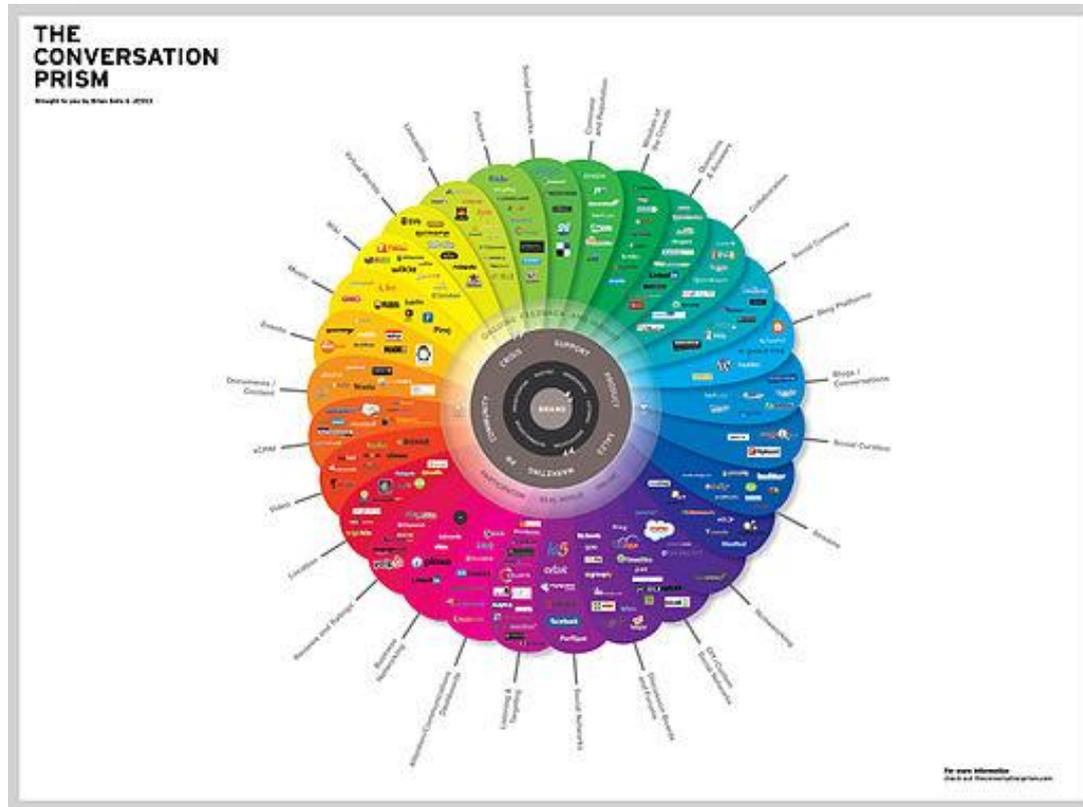
But it's not only about words, image optimization works very well, so it's important to use popular keywords in captions and post your photos on social media platforms - Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Pinterest allow you to share visual content with millions of users. Video and podcasts are a great optimisation strategy too, although they might be more costly as you might need to hire a professional cameraman or voiceover artist.

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, 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 they provide and show you results for the work they have carried out on your website.

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. But which social media platform should you invest your time and resources in?



A snapshot of the social media universe by Brian Solis & JESS3 - Creative Commons

Just take a look at this multi-coloured social media prism, but don't get cross-eyed or panicky about it. There is a multitude of names on display on the colourful petals – some of which you might have never heard of. However, for all this mind-boggling variety, there are four main social media platforms you need to get to grips with first: Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and newcomer Pinterest. The rest of this lot is up to you and what your business needs - whether you want to promote a video on YouTube or join Yelp to list a local branch. There are plenty of clever tools too, such as Disqus –which allows visitors to leave comment on your blog with ease and Flipboard, an app that transforms your social media and news feeds into an eye-catching magazine for iPad, iPhone and android devices.

Twitter has been around for six years, has over 500 million accounts worldwide and is available in over 20 languages. It's defined as a micro-blogging platform because of its text restriction to up 140 characters. 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 LinkedIn before they are broadcast. Once you have a Twitter account, place a link on your website or a

widget so visitors can follow your tweets – this is a really basic thing to do, but it's amazing how many businesses still don't promote their social media presence on their website.

Boasting over 175 million members, **LinkedIn** is the favourite networking platform for international professionals. It has been around for nine years and is available in several languages. A great platform for finding people, recruiting staff and discussing industry topics and trends, it lends itself well to the promotion of B2B services. You can set up a free account and take it out for a spin - a premium subscription will allow more in-depth searches, full reports of profile visitors and being able to contact people outside your network. The aim is to set up your very own business network, post your news as updates and engage with like-minded individuals through groups, which can be public or members only. You can also join regional groups and start discussions - useful if you want to gain insights into a local market.

Nearly everybody knows **Facebook**, which originated as a social network for recreational use. It has now been embraced by B2C businesses trying to ignite and boost engagements with their customers while promoting their brand. With over one billion 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. It's currently showcasing the success story of The English Cheesecake Company, which increased its fan base from 2000 to 23,000 running campaigns of sponsored stories resulting in 30% new customers.

Last but not least, **Pinterest** is a photo-sharing website that allows users to create theme boards - each photo linked to a website or blog. Popular categories include travel, cars, film, humour, interior design, sports, fashion and art. Launched in 2010 as an invitation-only network, it is still free and now open to all, with a popular mobile version - think iPad and smart phones. With over 11 million users worldwide and a high percentage of female users, this has been the fastest growing social network of them all. E-commerce websites use Pinterest as a virtual storefront to attract customers. British Airways runs several photo boards showcasing holiday destinations. It's free to join – all you need is eye-catching photography that shows off your products.