

Don't Believe the Hype! De-Mystifying Digital Marketing

A Primer on What to Know & Where to Start

Mainstream media gives you the impression that we've entered this miraculous age in marketing; that your world will go instantly "viral;" that business outcomes will come more quickly, efficiently, and easily; that the adoption of new digital marketing practices will automatically lead to a larger bottom-line, with less effort, and less human interaction. In simple truth, most of these statements are based in fallacy. Beyond the pioneering adopters who "got in early," thereby leveraging a brief window of novel innovation, the vast majority of businesses will find that efforts to establish a unique voice, intercept potential buyers, generate qualified leads, acquire customers, and service clients will be just as costly and complex as before this age of digital marketing - even more so. As more brands flock to better digital practices, industry competition will dilute outcomes while increasing or shifting marketing spend.

Don't Believe the Hype! - Know Thyself. Know Thy Customer. Choose Accordingly.

What's most important is to understand that there is a wealth of new digital and mobile marketing channels that allows for a natural evolution in the way you can engage your audience. So set aside all the hype. Do a bit of homework. Learn about some of the vehicles, technologies and data-metric tools that really could enhance your marketing insights. Verify where your audience now resides. Recognize where you may need to refocus your branding efforts. Then start to experiment in a gradual, measured fashion. Here's a primer to get you started.

It's Just Another Set of Tools & Tactics

Whether a new venture or an established business, the first thing to remember is that digital marketing (with all its offshoots - content marketing, social media marketing, mobile-marketing, etc.) simply embodies another set of tools and tactics to message and sell your prospective customers. It's not a "revolution," but simply an "evolution" in sales and marketing practices. While you may need to recruit for new technical skills-sets, many of the core marketing paradigms you rely on to prospect, engage, and close your client base remain the same. Marketing theory and the basic psychology behind a buyer's purchase hasn't changed.

Don't Ditch What's Already Working

By extension, don't ditch what's already working for you. The potential for digital marketing to help you engage your core audience faster and more effectively is unquestioned. Having said that, many more traditional avenues of engagement may still serve you well. Print ads, television, radio, billboard, merchandising, guerrilla marketing, event marketing, sponsorship, community outreach, trade shows, mass telemarketing, cold-calling, direct mailing, email campaigns - any of these methods of market engagement could still easily help to generate noise, leads, and sales. For a sample list of 52 established marketing models (old and new-school), check out the following link:

<http://cultbranding.com/ceo/52-types-of-marketing-strategies/>

You Won't Spend Less, Just Differently

When building your sales and marketing budget, don't assume that digital marketing will enable you to accomplish more, faster, and *more affordably*. Yes - your kit of marketing tactics and technologies may be changing. But as more businesses and competitors adopt the same digital practices, you'll find you'll be competing as aggressively as ever to win attention and sell product to your target market. Yes -- early adopters may realize a temporary cost-savings windfall. But basic market forces will very quickly decimate the arbitrage advantage. Ultimately, your annual marketing bill will resemble levels you've seen in the past. In short, your marketing and sales tactics may change, but your pressure to spend will stay the same.

Know Thyself. Know Thy Customer. (B2B, B2C, B2B2C)

Before revisiting your best mix of marketing tools, technologies and tactics, make sure you start by reviewing who you are, what you solve, what you sell, who your customer(s) looks like, how they behave, and where they reside. Also, what exactly is your market model? Are you a B2B, B2C, or B2B2C operation; or something else entirely?

Answers to these questions will directly inform the kind of tactical and technological deployment your marketing and sales team should consider, or otherwise completely rule out.

The Road May Be Different, But the “Journey” is the Same

No matter what set of marketing and sales tactics you deploy (new vs. old / high-tech vs. low-tech), you must remind yourself that the customer journey, sales process, and marketing narrative remain unchanged. Prospective customers still ultimately have either “essential *needs*” or “discretionary *appetites*.” And their psychological path to purchase is still fundamentally the same, no matter how many different ways and times you attempt to engage. You may think you have new and creative ways to intercept your audience. But the milestones to a sale are no different. It’s essential you always map out, in parallel, the customer journey, sales process, and marketing narrative. It will help you to understand when and where to deploy persuasive sales and marketing tactics and technologies, whether digital or otherwise. For quick reference, the stages of engagement are outlined in the following table:

STAGE	CUSTOMER JOURNEY	SALES PROCESS	MARKETING NARRATIVE
1	Awareness	Identify Targets	Intercept, Tease, Tempt
2	Contact	Engage	Support Engagement
3	Research / Knowledge Building	Pre-Qualify & Inform	Demonstrate Expertise
4	Preference Building	Qualify	Demonstrate Prominence
5	Conviction-to-Purchase	Build Fit & Trust	Demonstrate Credibility
6	Decision-to-Purchase	Convert & Close	Support Sales Offer
7	Post-Purchase Evaluation	Fulfill, Support & Survey	Fulfill, Support & Survey
8	“Re-Up”	Retain, Renew, “Re-Up”	Support Sales Offer

Get Your Alignment Straight (Marketing + Sales)

Once the customer journey and sales process is properly mapped, it’s equally important to ensure that your sales and marketing teams are perfectly aligned in their activities; that they understand clearly how their respective programs are working in tandem to achieve what should be shared, measurable objectives (e.g. increased sales volume, increased revenue, increased customer count, increased retention / renewal rates, etc...). Company-wide targets should be set according to the SMART principle (Specific. Measurable. Achievable. Realistic. Timely.). Critical metrics should be identified and agreed upon along all stages of the journey to assess whether both sales and marketing activities are aligned, and delivering quantifiable results.

Choose Wisely (Both “Vehicles” & “Practices”)

Google, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Reddit, YouTube - The vehicles for digital marketing can be overwhelming, most especially for a new venture. And the latest “practices” that business gurus claim you must master appear endless and ever-changing – content marketing, search marketing, intercept marketing, social media marketing, peer-to-peer marketing, influencer marketing, inbound marketing, cloud marketing, mobile marketing... you get the idea. But here are some simple things to bear in mind:

1. A lot of these “leading practices” are rooted in older, more familiar marketing paradigms.
2. You’re simply applying new technologies and processes to the way you’ve always marketed and sold.
3. Many vehicles, channels, and practices won’t even apply to your business model.
4. Choose only 2 (maximum 3) digital avenues/channels/practices to start, and learn to do them well.
5. Give yourself time to master the process, and harvest the results.

And regardless of your tactical mix, always remember that you’re still in a fundamental race to capture “eye-balls,” intentions, prospects, and sales. Target buyers may be spending more time on digital (and mobile) platforms, rather than traditional print, television or radio (as examples). But your audience still has “needs” and “appetites,” and still wants straight facts, a demonstration of your expertise, a belief that you’re credible, and testimonies of your reputable service record and reliable product. Buyers may now go looking for these things via a digital eco-system of search engines, social media, vlogs, chat-boards, peer-to-peer user groups, and so forth. But their core customer journey remains the same. It’s your job as a business venture to evaluate when and how some of these new and

latest digital tactics will mesh with traditional sales and marketing programs. Let's compare two simple examples to understand where your options and tactical choices may vary widely, depending on the nature of your business:

MICROBREW BRAND

You're a microbrewery, with three flagship recipes, and a storefront/tasting bar at your brewing location. You're a B2C consumable, appealing to discretionary spenders, ages 19-55. Odds are high that you're going to want to factor in any combination of the following digital vehicle and practices:

- Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and/or Mobile Apps
- Embedded Brand Placements & Paid Advertising
- Customer Feeds, Digital Contesting, & Peer-to-Peer Posting & "Voting" Campaigns
- In-Store Receipt-Scanning Programs via Mobile Device
- Media Feeds leveraging Public Taste-Testing Events / Beer-Brewing Championships

All of this would be deployed alongside a range of more traditional marketing efforts – event marketing, guerrilla marketing, print advertising, product sponsorship, merchandising, etc. (You would also need to consider a B2B2C program once your brand is ready for distribution in liquor stores and large-scale bars.)

BEER BREWING TECHNOLOGY COMPANY

You're a beer brewing equipment manufacturer that sells to and services senior brew-masters. You're a B2B hardware provider. You'll want to consider some of the following digital practices:

- Google ("Key Word" Search Engine Optimization) / Google Ads
- LinkedIn – Sponsored Feeds. Sponsored InMail. (Targeting Industry Professionals and User Groups)
- Posted Case-Studies, Client Testimonials, Industry Vlogs/Blogs, Webinars
- Digital Publications - Best-in-Class Industry Practices
- Password-Protected Partner Portal

Yet you're also well served to test coded ad placements across print and digital industry publications, attend & sponsor trade shows, pursue a direct email campaign, supported by a call campaign.

Devil's in the Device

No matter what digital vehicles you choose (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter...), or tactical programs you deploy, always be mindful that your audience is spending far more time consuming information via personal and mobile devices. Ensure all of your programming is formatted to be equally presentable on desktop monitors, flat screens, laptops, personal devices, and mobile devices of all makes, sizes, and compatibilities. The same goes for the various search engines in the market – Google Chrome, FireFox, Safari, etc. A consistent UI/UE (user interface and user experience) guarantees a more sophisticated brand exposure, and demonstrates a higher standard of customer engagement.

From Publishing to Broadcasting

In all forms of marketing, content is king. You're trying to grab a buyer's attention in a market that's getting louder and ever more cluttered. Your content has to be original, visual, succinct, compelling, authentic, and even entertaining. And it needs to be regularly refreshed. Written text and picture images alone are not necessarily what will engage and sustain your target audience. Consider an infographic over a text description, or video content instead of a fixed photo image. In short, be ready to create marketing content in high volume, because digital platforms must be continually fed with new, engaging material. Whether you outsource this effort, or recruit a team for in-house deployment, recognize that your digital marketing function is equal parts publisher and broadcaster. You will need to source talent to reflect this new approach to content marketing in a visually intensive, digital world.

"Word-of-Mouth" By Any Other Name...

Peer-to-Peer Marketing. Micro and Macro-Influencers. Community Mobilization. Customer Advocacy. Employee Advocacy. What do they all mean? How do they fit into your marketing mix? Simple – they all speak to contemporary, digital representations of what's essentially "Word-of-Mouth" endorsement. Any veteran sales and marketing professional will tell you that "Word-of-Mouth" referrals are one of the most qualified means to secure new prospects. They always have been. Publishing quotable testimonials and anchor client case-studies on your

website are common ways to demonstrate market validation. And social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit, LinkedIn, etc...) provide exceptional opportunities to cultivate a “following” of advocates for your brand and products. It’s essentially “Word-of-Mouth” marketing on a highly visible, scalable, measurable order of magnitude. Offering ways for customers to publicly and transparently “like,” “share,” “review” and “rank” your products and services enables you to build a community of support around your brand. But you need to be attentive, responsive and nimble in your activities. If you’re making customers happy, then you’ll likely get favourable reviews that may help to propel business. On the flipside, if you mess up, you’ll hear about it fast, and on a large public soapbox. As a result, you’ll need to empower your marketing, sales, product development and service teams to be able to “make good” quickly on negative feedback. Receiving bad comments and hearing about service shortfalls is not necessarily a bad thing. It instructs you on where you need to improve. And it allows you the opportunity to demonstrate your willingness to problem-solve. But you need to move quickly and address things in a timely fashion. Because your service standards and customer resolution policies are now visible for all the world to see.

Bring Tha Noise! – Interruption vs. Interception

Don’t waste time debating the merits of “interruption” marketing and “interception” marketing, or whether “interruption” marketing is falling out of favour. The simple truth is that you’re going to be trying a bit of everything through the course of your growth and development. And different tactics will most definitely be required at different times. Yes – in an ideal world, you want to “intercept” a buyer exactly at the time when she has a specific need, a sense of urgency, the authority to make a decision, and the money to buy. But it’s a pipedream to think you’ll perfect (and automate) this approach with any single set of tools, tactics, and technologies. There will be days when you intercept individuals at exactly the right moment. But there will also be situations where, strategically, you’re simply trying to “make noise” and get noticed. Interrupting an audience, especially if done creatively and with humour, can be just as effective. Think, too, about the mindset behind an individual who’s buying something they “need,” as opposed to an individual who purchases something they “want.” The first individual is addressing a pain-point, priority, or imperative. Now in many instances, those moments can be predicated, especially in the world of B2B. Consequently, you might have a better chance of crafting an interception strategy. But “wants” are about appetites. They’re discretionary, whimsical, spontaneous, random, emotional, and even irrational. Which means they can be much more difficult to predict. High-priced luxury items still require a bit more time to research, and so a seller can generate an interception plan to a degree. But low-priced frivolous items are much more difficult to track or predict. A “spray-and-pray,” interruption campaign may still prove the most effective way to get noticed, at least at the start, if you want to steal someone’s focus, in order to pull their limited dollars away from another temptation of equal value. Once again, know thyself, know thy customer, and choose your tactics accordingly.

Take the Road Less Travelled

Be warned – the more industry embraces the better practices of digital marketing, the more diluted will be the overall impact on the buying audience. Get in early, focus on just a few channels, be as innovative and entertaining as possible, while still delivering value. But most importantly, always ask yourself if your voice is unique, succinct, and standing out. It’s all about getting attention. And that requires creativity, novelty, and constant change. One of the better ways to ensure you’re standing out is by taking the contrarian approach from time to time. Regularly conduct an audit of all the various traditional and digital marketing channels that are available to your venture. Is there a channel once favoured that’s now under-used across your entire industry? Is it even under-valued, now? What might happen if you reverted back to an earlier program that may have been retired? Going “retro” may actually revitalize your brand and re-energize your voice. These can be short-lived tactics. But if they give your brand exposure a jump-start, it could be exactly what you need to get you back into the “centre position.”

Test-Drive Your Business Development

Don’t place all your eggs in one basket. And don’t feel you need to lock down your entire strategy and budgetary spend all up front. Coders build product via “test-driven” development. They attempt a few new lines of code, and then verify that the overall functionality of the application is still intact; that no glitches have inadvertently been introduced. Use the same approach when testing new digital marketing programs. In most cases, you can deploy a small-scale test at a relatively low cost, and measure market response in relatively short order. If you see positive results, re-double your efforts. If not, try something else. And be sure to try various means of “A-B testing.”

Marketing is always about getting the right message out, at the right time, in the right way, to the right people. If you're uncertain about any of these variables, then split the difference and do a sample test exploring a range of options. Again, the advantage to digital marketing is that you can test variations in your approach at low risk, low cost, and with a quick market response. It can make you remarkably nimble in your market outreach efforts.

Measure. Measure. Measure.

As Peter Drucker once wrote, "What gets measured, gets done!" In this day-and-age of digital reporting tools, Google analytics, turbo-charged CRM solutions, social media metrics, MailChimp "click-through" tallies, etc... there is no reason why you shouldn't be able to reasonably assign KPI's (key performance indicators) and benchmarks against every stage in your sales process and marketing narrative. The two should be quantifiably tracked in parallel. Total web traffic, cost per eye-ball, visitation metrics, quantity of inbound inquires, volume of outbound calls, lead acquisition, lead-to-dialogue conversion, frequency and volume of "touches," length of sales cycle, rate of sales conversion, average deal valuation, cost of acquisition, retention rates, renewal rates, average life-time-values, customer satisfaction levels, customer profiles, behavioural statistics, product rankings, and predictive insights. You have a wealth of quantifiable data available to you, now – more than ever before. Get out there and start measuring.

It's A Process

No matter what tactics you choose and where you start, always remember that it's a process of experimentation, execution, and evaluation. It will take time to figure out, and its constantly changing. You will never be able to "set it and forget it." All industries need to adopt certain base-line digital practices if only to remain "relevant" in the contemporary marketplace. Ideally, however, you are also setting aside budget and bandwidth for more creative innovation. Remember, one of the core objectives in marketing is to find new ways to "stand out" in a crowd. Platforms, technologies, tactics and approaches are always changing. And so this core exercise never ends. At the very least, you're trying to "keep up." Ideally, however, you're working hard to stay ahead of the rest.

Wonder Twins Unite!

Regardless of the overall business development model you choose, it is paramount that you ensure your sales and marketing efforts are perfectly aligned, working in tandem, consistently measured, and jointly rewarded. Sales and marketing operations have always been inextricably linked. But it's only with the advent of digital marketing platforms, robust CRM solutions, and comprehensive data analytic tools that ventures can more accurately evaluate how well the sales and marketing machinery is working together, in real-time, across the entire customer journey. As a result, there is no excuse not to have a clear line of communication between your sales, marketing, and digital data analytics personnel. These three functions should be jointly contributing to your business development strategy and plan. In fact, in many instances, you should be recruiting a new generation of talent that feels equally comfortable managing a sales process as they do administering a marketing narrative across multiple digital platforms. Sales representatives need to be at least proficient in digital marketing practices, and vice versa. Most ventures can no longer afford to have the two functions working in silos, as may once have been the case in some corporate settings of old. And "data analytics" is now a core skill-knowledge for all involved.

Surpass Competition. Replicate What You Admire

Lastly, if you're stumped on how to engage your market using digital strategies, there are two simple ways to find inspiration. We recommend this exercise no matter what aspect of your marketing, sales and service program:

- 1. Surpass The Competition**
- 2. Replicate The Brands You Most Admire**

Your target market is weighing its options all the time. So take a look at the competition, and strive to surpass their approach. Then study other brands you personally admire in the markets. And be sure to choose a few outside your immediate industry. Because often winning ideas come from non-conventional places.

Good luck! And let us know how we can help. Contact www.canadastartup.com for your mission critical needs.