
5 things you can do to make your digital strategy succeed

More people than ever are glued to devices. Nearly 90% of American adults use the internet, and over three-quarters own a smartphone.ⁱ We're more connected to technology than ever before, and that creates opportunities for marketers — a lot of opportunities. It can be overwhelming to manage a comprehensive digital marketing strategy, particularly for local business owners, start-ups, and small non-profit organizations, but here are few things you can do right away that will help reign in the chaos.

1 Make a plan

Making a plan can be daunting — and even frightening — if you've never done it before. One thing to remember is that you're not locked into anything just by making a plan. It's just a useful structure to help keep everything straight. Once you have a plan written down, you should always feel free to break it, but at least then you always have the baseline for comparison.

Start with a short period of time, a week or a month, and don't even worry about at-

taching specific dates to it — that can come later. Identify the channels available to you to communicate your message such as your website, email list, various social media platforms (Face-



book, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat and others, depending on what is relevant for your target demographics), digital display ads or even platforms like blogs and video sharing services like YouTube and Vimeo.

Try to be comprehensive, but don't overdo it. If your target audience is empty-nesters over 60, you can probably leave off SnapChat. Likewise, if you're targeting college students, Facebook is probably a waste of your time.

Even if you have no budget whatsoever, many email service providers (ESPs) offer free plans for sending to a limited number of contacts, which can be a great way to ramp up your email marketing program. Posting content (without boosting) to social media or blogs also costs nothing but the time to make the content.

Map out your schedule, and add and adjust tasks as you go.

2 Be consistent

Consistency is vital for any marketing effort, whether digital or in meatspace. If you don't already, take some time to work on your visual brand to ensure that it is consistent across all channels. Ideally, a professional designer would help you with this, but even if that's not an option, just making sure that your brand is expressed

in the same way every time it appears will boost the effectiveness of your digital marketing efforts.



Inconsistent branding can confuse consumers, and will make your product look inconsistent, as well as low-quality.

Beyond the visual brand, you should develop a consistent message to deliver across channels. In part, this is dependent on your brand voice. Try to think of four adjectives to describe how your brand should sound and write them down. Is your brand professional or informal, classic or contemporary, rough or clean, exciting or mellow? Keeping those descriptors in mind, envision your audience and speak to them. Avoid sloganeering, as that comes across as insincere, and consumers are savvy enough to spot it. Instead, try to tell a story, as briefly as possible. For example, if your product is socks, your message could be something like “Sally had cold feet. Sally doesn’t have cold feet anymore.” You may find that writing out a simple mes-



Consistency in branding — both visual and voice — is relatively simple to achieve, and will help consumers to feel more secure with your brand. The success of many well-known brands can be attributed at least in part, to successful branding.

sage can lead to other ideas. “Cold feet,” for example, calls to mind wedding jitters, and you can play off that with a picture of wedding shoes as contrasted to a comfy

pair of socks. Other scenarios could be added to the mix to make a series. Even if the stories are different, they will be recognizable by their tone and imagery as consistent messaging.

3 Create content

The internet runs on content: articles, videos, memes — viral content, bingeable content — and every brand has a story to tell, whether your product is plumbing fixtures, tax preparation, fast fashion or slow food. Find your stories and include them in your plan. Video seems to be king lately — and with the technology to create reasonably high quality video in most people's pockets, there's no reason not to create videos to tell your products' stories. As with everything, consistency is key. Be consistent, not only in your voice, but in quality and most importantly in the frequency of your posts. Video content lives and dies by frequency, so if you're building out a video content plan, jot down ideas for 3-6 videos ahead of time and plan to release at least one a week. If you can plan out a whole series' worth, even better, and then plan yourself a well-deserved break.

If you (or anyone on your staff) can string two sentences together, plan out a blogging calendar. Even short 200-word articles on hyper-specific topics can be great for driving traffic to your website, or for driving foot traffic



through your doors. If you have more people to distribute the task, it's that much easier to get some kind of editorial calendar going, but even if you're a one-person shop, it's worth it to put something out 4-6 times a year.

At the most basic level, anyone with access to the internet has the ability to create "image macros" — one of the most basic forms of meme. These, as well as animated GIFs, are a great way to build social currency, but again, pay attention to your brand's voice when using these media, and make sure you sound genuine.

4 Connect with your audience

The first few items listed here can be accomplished by anyone in a vacuum, whether you're a one-person show or have an army of interns looking for something to do. But no one is an island — at least no one with a product or service to sell. Use the communication tools afforded by the internet to make connections with your customers. Reach out with surveys, or poll them more informally to find out what it is about your product or your voice that resonates with them. Find out what you're doing well, what they'd like to see you do better, or what they want more of.

Engage your customers on social media. Beyond taking their temperature on specific questions, it helps customers emotionally connect with your brand if they can get a sense of real people behind it, as opposed to a cold, mechanical marketing machine.

Another great way to boost the power of your existing customer base is to seek out potential influencers. Try to identify who among your audience are the most engaged. Some may be converted into brand

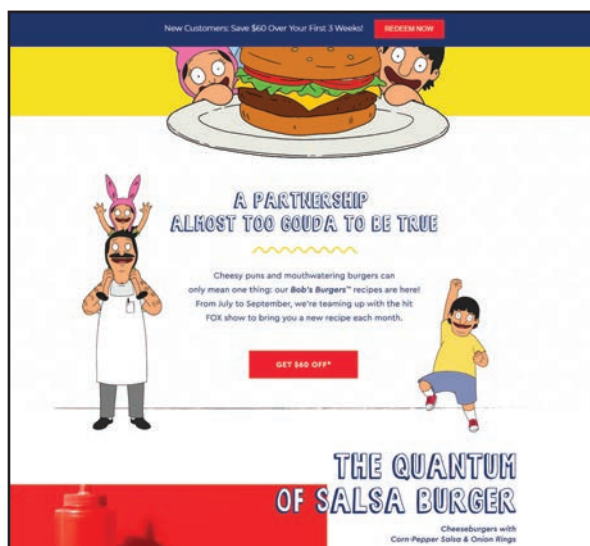


evangelists, with the right incentives. Draft up an affiliate program or influencer incentives and reach out to a select few who you think might make the most impact. If it doesn't stick right away, find out what would be sufficient enticement. You may even be able to kill two birds with one stone and find a guest blogger (or vlogger) to create content on your behalf.

5 Build partnerships and experiences

Another great way to make your digital marketing more successful is to partner with other like-minded organizations. You can get creative with this and come up with some interesting partnerships. A notable example would be Blue Apron's tie

in with Bob's Burgers: offering home delivery of the quirky animated show's burger recipes. Bringing it closer to home, a clothing retailer might partner with a local homeless shelter — buy one pair of socks, and a pair goes to the shelter; or an outdoor outfitter store



might partner with a restaurant to offer themed après-hike meals. The possibilities are only limited by your imagination.

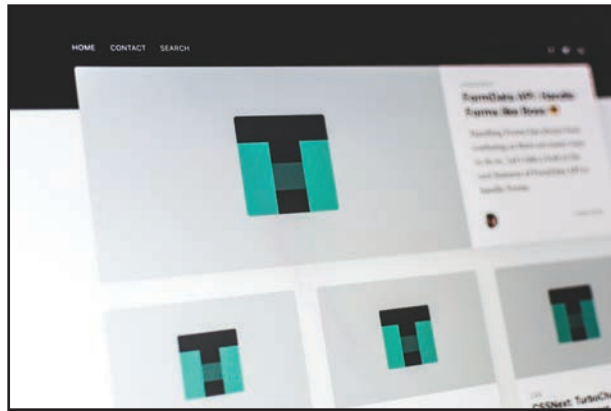
Create unique, once-in-a-lifetime experiences, and FOMO (fear of missing out) will help sell out your bookings.

A few more thoughts

Depending on your business, your industry and your existing digital footprint, there are a number of things beyond what we've touched on that you can do to boost the effectiveness of your digital marketing. If you haven't already, try—

Updating your website: Assuming you have a website, make sure it's up-to-date. If you haven't done so recently, take the time to give it a thorough audit and go through page-by-page to make sure

all of your content is current and relevant. Make sure it's mobile-friendly, since 50% or more of your audience is likely to be viewing your site on a mobile device or tablet.



If you don't have a website, there are many services where you can build one for free, or have someone build you one for very little cost.

Optimizing your content: SEO can be scary — and is worthy of a whole paper in its own right — but do whatever you can to make sure your page ranks highly. Most people will click one of the first two or three links on a page of search results, and almost no one clicks onto the second page. Do some keyword research, and make sure that your site discusses relevant content, but in an organic and human-sounding way.

Making it better all the time: Always strive to do better. If you think you've got it, great! How can you do better? Can you produce a more detailed plan? Can you make more relevant content? Find more effective influencers? Can you find out

from your customers how to make your product even better than it is? Whatever you can do to push that extra bit farther can only help in the long run.

Thinking of your digital ads as billboards: What happens if people don't click on your digital display ads? Younger audiences in Gen Z and Gen Alpha are less inclined to click on digital ads than previous cohorts, and less likely in general to pay attention to such ads. To reach them, it's been suggested that traditional media

such as out-of-home and print publications are more effective, but since these potential customers are highly active on digital platforms, it's worthwhile to think of how your ads can grab eyes



and make an impact even without the click. Don't overcrowd your ads with too much information, and don't be annoying (remember the banner ads of the 1990s)!

Adopting techniques that work: Researchers from Oxford University and the social network analysis firm Grafikaⁱⁱ found that the Internet Research Agency (yes, that Internet Research Agency, i.e. the Russian group accused of meddling in the 2016 U.S. election) "adapted 'digital advertising techniques'" in their campaigns. Specifically, they did nearly everything this paper has touched upon: they made a plan to push out a consistently branded message across digital media, produced massive amounts of written and video content, and developed an audience and a network of influencers and partners willing and eager to help spread the word. This is important because, whatever the outcome, it demonstrates the power of these basic digital marketing practices.

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- i <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology/>
 - ii <https://www.adweek.com/digital/russian-trolls-used-digital-marketing-best-practices-to-sow-discord-senate-reports-find/>

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