



Marketing 101

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Today, marketing has exploded across all kinds of digital platforms. Whether it's through newsletters, blogs, or social media, online advertising grants the opportunity to reach a large number of people. However, this has also made it extremely hard for small businesses to navigate and stand out. With so many options, platforms, and digital marketing avenues, it is hard to create a plan that is effective that 1) makes a difference; and 2) doesn't break your bank.

The Basics

A good start is to create a website page or build upon an existing one. Every business should have some sort of online presence. This is best achieved through a website and a Google business listing. Websites can be very simple, informative pages which clearly communicates what that business does and how to get in touch for more information. On the flip side, they can also be complex with many pages, galleries of photos, and information across the different business departments, services and products offered. Similar to any other area of a business and its operational plans, the website needs to be updated regularly. These updates can be daily social media posts, or monthly blogs/links to relevant industry information. It is also a good idea to do a yearly tweaking of the entire site for the purpose of removing outdated information and replacing it with relevant data.

Google business listings are the modern version of Yellow Pages. Although many different listing platforms can now be found online, nothing beats a Google search. The tricky part is how to prioritize your business to be at top of the search engine and on the first page of results. The easiest way to get near the top is 1) create a Google business listing; and 2) collect as many Google reviews as possible. Additional things that can be done to boost your businesses rating is 1) managing the Google reviews by responding to comments, especially damage control for poor ones; and 2) making sure that the listed information is up-to-date; and 3) adding regular photos to the account.

Digital Vs. Print

Many businesses that have been operational for many years have relied solely on print media marketing, and struggle transitioning to the digital world. While the online world has undeniable power, popularity, and growth potential, this does not mean that print marketing strategies need to be pushed aside. The use of print depends entirely on your specific business and target audience. For best results, a combination of both strategies is strongly advisable. Here's what to consider when creating a marketing plan for your business' future:

MARKETING GOALS

What is the goal for the marketing strategy? Is it a promotion with a goal to reach as many people as possible? Is it to build brand awareness? Each of these marketing goals require a different strategy. Outline all of the marketing goals as specifically as possible.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Who is your target audience? A younger market relies heavily on digital marketing in the form of social media. However, some platforms such as Facebook is equally effective between the younger and older generations. In this section, the ideal customer should be described, along with all of the variants of potential customers. Include information such as demographics and a market analysis of the targeted audience. Competitor research can also be included.

TRACK RESULTS

Tracking results is a step that is often considered after a plan is implemented. However, this is not always the best approach. It is hard to create a plan if you don't know what needs to be addressed. As such, measure your current results and create a plan that boosts outcomes instead of undermining success. Once a new strategy is rolled out, it is important to regularly manage and adjust as necessary to maintain steady growth.

BRANDING

Remember to stay true to your brand by selecting specific marketing strategies that would support its image. For example, a weather network would likely use Twitter as their primary social media platform. By using Twitter, their audience would have access to regular updates on the weather forecast and changes. In contrast, a banquet hall would gravitate towards Instagram to showcase a gallery of event photos, attendees, and the space that it offers to its clients. In this case, Twitter would be a poor social media choice for a banquet hall, and a weather network would struggle portraying valid information through Instagram.

BUDGET

Budget is an important factor in creating any marketing plan. How many resources can you allocate to the project? Will those resources also help shape your plan?

Digital Marketing Categories

1. At the bare minimum, your business should have a basic online presence in the form of a website and Google listing.
2. Have at least one social media account. Select one that resonates the most with your target audience, but also consider the time commitment that is required to manage an account. For example, Instagram is great for businesses with a lot of visual creativity. With proper planning, it requires minimum work on a daily basis.
3. E-mail marketing is one of the easiest and least expensive forms of marketing. Often overlooked by small businesses, these can be in the form of newsletters, e-mail promotions, and updates.
4. Print marketing material can be in the form of promotions, handouts, or information. All businesses require some form of printed material to be able to provide to potential clients.

5. Additional social media platforms to reach a wider audience group.
6. Printed ads in a very small selection of media outlets specific to the industry of the business. This can be as few as one ad a year but no more than a dozen.
7. Content marketing online through a blog or informative social media platform, such as LinkedIn. This form of marketing is long term and positions the business as an expert in its field.
8. Online sales is the most time consuming form of online marketing. Depending on the business industry, it can include e-commerce and live chats.



The Most Popular Social Media Platforms



Facebook is the original and oldest social media platform that is still highly used. While others have come and gone, Facebook has stayed relevant by including modern features and providing many different posting options. Some of these features are specifically designed for consumers, while others are great for businesses. A business does not have to employ all the features but should, at the very least, create and maintain a page with regular posts and engagements. It is very important to interact with your audience through any social media platform. Regular management allows a business to stay relevant and gain “likes,” which boosts the page’s popularity by showing up on newsfeed more. Posts can range from single photos, complete photo albums, articles, promotions, events, and much more. Facebook is a easy to use platform for both original content and reposts of relevant information.



Instagram has been acquired by Facebook but is still its own platform. It is a visually driven application and relies heavily on imagery. Similar to Facebook, Instagram is always evolving to launch new features that are unique to its interface. Recently, it has deployed a ‘stories’ feature that allows you to post without cluttering your regular feed. Alternatively, these stories can be “highlighted,” creating a bubble where they can be viewed on demand. This is a unique feature that many businesses have seamlessly incorporated into their social media marketing.



Twitter is a live social media platform that requires regular input. Considered the short message service (SMS) of the internet, it is one of the easier platforms for navigating and is used worldwide. Ideal consumers of Twitter are those who have live and regular messages to convey to the general public. Like most platforms, a Twitter account is only relevant with consistent activity.



LinkedIn is considered the professional version of Facebook. It operates very similarly with its posting capabilities, except with a user base that is primarily made of professionals. LinkedIn for businesses is generally for educational purposes, informing its followers with relevant news but with little selling. Often, this platform is used to post blogs (especially when a business doesn't have a blog section on its website) and relevant industry information and articles. It is normally linked to a business' website where the business can put more effort on selling its products and services to the potential consumer.

Other platforms may include Google+, Pinterest, and Snapchat, etc. Although widely used, these platforms are generally difficult to convert for business gains as it operates primarily for personal use. As such, many businesses do not allocate any resources to them and, in many cases, do not have an active account.



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