

Defining digital marketing



By Louise Marsland

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"Digital marketing is the engine that drives today's business, big or small."



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The term 'digital marketing' is a bit of a misnomer. It's all marketing say the experts, with digital integrated into the application and big data making it easier to measure the customer and track consumer purchasing behaviour.

Digital marketing used to be defined as using electronic media to promote products or brands, but that is too simplistic now, with big data and other social tools transforming the industry and bringing brands ever closer to their customer base. Digital intelligence is now very much a part of marketing and digital marketers - a growth title at one point - are now the marketing leaders of the future.

International digital marketing company [Smedio](#), founder of the Digital Marketers' Academy in Canada, says "digital marketing is the engine that drives today's business, big or small". They assert that while traditional marketing is all about impressions, digital marketing focuses on creating an experience for users and gives marketing the direct feedback missing in the past from traditional channels.

SAS insights, which provides handy [video tutorials](#) on defining digital marketing, as well as digital intelligence, highlights three keys to doing digital marketing right:

1. Manage complex customer relationships across a variety of channels - both digital and traditional.
2. Respond to and initiate dynamic customer interactions.
3. Extract value from big data to make better decisions faster.

I like the [Financial Times](#) concise definition of digital marketing: "The marketing of products or services using digital channels to reach consumers. The key objective is to promote brands through various forms of digital media. Digital

marketing extends beyond internet marketing to include channels that do not require the use of the internet. It includes mobile phones (both SMS and MMS), social media marketing, display advertising, search engine marketing, and any other form of digital media.

"Most experts believe that 'digital' is not just yet another channel for marketing. It requires a new approach to marketing and a new understanding of customer behaviour. For example, it requires companies to analyse and quantify the value of downloads of apps on mobile devices, tweets on Twitter, likes on Facebook and so on," according to the *Financial Times*.

Says Douglas Idugboe from Smedio: "In a broader sense, the internet is the heart of digital marketing. The internet offers several applications such as web, email, IM, RSS, (and) video which can be leveraged by marketers to launch campaigns. The explosive growth of smartphones and tablets has meant that mobile has emerged as a widely accepted digital marketing channel in recent times.

"And last but not the least, social media has been a great ambassador to the cause of digital marketing. While the primary motivation for social networks was in-person interaction, leading social networks such as Facebook and Twitter have transformed into valuable digital marketing tools."

Digital strategy

SmartInsights.com, always a great resource, goes a step further in a recent post, giving [10 reasons why marketers need a digital marketing strategy](#). They found that 50% of organisations do not have a digital marketing strategy, yet are using digital marketing tools as a channel. (SmartInsights surveys marketing members based in over 50 countries).

In its 'Managing Digital Marketing' report published earlier this year to their member database, Smart Insights urged larger organisations, particularly, to develop digital marketing strategies to fully integrate digital into marketing strategy as a "core activity".

"I find that companies without a digital strategy (and many that do) don't have clear strategic goals for what they want to achieve online in terms of gaining new customers or building deeper relationships with existing ones. And if you don't have goals you likely don't put enough resources to reach the goals and you don't evaluate through analytics whether you're achieving those goals," writes Dave Chaffey for Smart Insights.

He highlights a common problem and one which the digital agencies rail against: the fact that digital is often dealt with in silos, with separate digital marketers sitting in the IT department, a separate digital agency, or a separate digital division within an advertising agency. "It's easier that way to package digital marketing into a convenient chunk. But of course it's less effective. Everyone agrees that digital media work best when integrated with traditional media and response channels."

SmartInsights.com urges marketers to optimise their analytics: improve search marketing, site user experience, email and social media marketing. Each company has website analytics and CRM data - but how many companies actually share that information with their teams regularly so that strategies can be adapted and improved?

Chaffey warns that failure to implement digital strategy in business, will impact on market share over time. A strategy allows a company to get the basics right and builds in continuous improvement of key aspects like search, user experience, email and social media marketing. Companies that fail are often found to have put insufficient resources into skilled people or budgets.

"It's all too common for digital to be completed in silos whether there's a specialist digital marketer sitting in IT or a separate digital agency. It's easier that way to package digital marketing into a convenient chunk. But of course it's less effective. Everyone agrees that digital media work best when integrated with traditional media and response channels," advises [Chaffey](#).

The result is a lack of agility to catchup or stay ahead, "disintegrated" business units that still operate in silos, superficial relationships with customers and competitors gaining market share. Companies that continually innovate to stay ahead, include Apple, Google, Amazon, Facebook, Dell, Tesco, Zappos - which are all dynamic, responsive and continually test new approaches to gain new audiences to stay ahead in the game. Sometimes they fail. Most often, they succeed.

The fact is that digital amplifies every other channel, from TV to radio to billboards, adding the dimension of direct consumer feedback that marketers always aspired to. Of course that comes at a price because social media has unleashed real time communication which brands still need to learn to handle effectively. Coherent strategy and top down CEO buy-in is required to meet the challenges of the next five years.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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