

DIGITAL MARKETING FOR BEGINNERS

Guide for Small Businesses Getting Started
with Digital Strategy



Welcome



Getting into digital marketing can feel like taking a dive into the unknown for a lot of small business owners, especially if you don't spend all your time online yourself. But relax. Nobody starts at the deep end, nobody has all the answers before they begin and, even better, getting going is probably cheaper and quicker than you might think.

Speaking of budget, there's plenty you can do in the realms of digital marketing without spending a penny – but when it comes to reaching new audiences, that's when a little budget can go a long way. Every part of your digital marketing is a great opportunity to learn something – so it's all about starting small, testing, learning, and growing over time.

In this guide, we're going to take you through the easy-access ways to get started – from making the most of search engines to buying your first online ads. All the channels will be familiar to you – Facebook, Twitter, Google, email and your own website – but we'll give you the steps you need to feel confident you're testing and investing in the way that's right for you and the growth of your business.

“Nobody starts at the deep end, nobody has all the answers before they begin and, even better, getting going is probably cheaper and quicker than you might think”

What's inside?

What you'll find in this guide has a lot to do with what we call inbound marketing – the tactics you can use to attract, convert, close and delight visitors to your website, social and blog.

Digital platforms are great for this because we now have more ways, places and routes to attract people to visit our website where, we hope, they'll become our customers. We can also be much more creative with this kind of marketing – it's not just about what we think of as traditional outbound marketing activity.

It's your website, blog and social media channels that are at the heart of any digital marketing plan – so always keep in mind that you're optimizing for these destinations when planning digital marketing tactics.

We hope this guide gives you what you need to get going, but if you'd like a little more of an in-depth introduction, you can contact us here.

THE BIG IDEAS – FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF HERE FIRST!

1

Digital marketing
This is an umbrella term for all of your online marketing efforts. Businesses leverage digital channels such as Google search, social media, email and their websites to connect with their current and prospective customers. From your website to your online assets like digital advertising, email marketing, online brochures and beyond there's a huge spectrum of tactics to consider. The best digital marketers have a clear picture of how each asset supports their overarching goals.

2

Inbound marketing
This is about using marketing to bring potential customers to you, rather than having your marketing efforts fight for their attention. Sharing is caring and inbound marketing is about creating and sharing content with the world. By creating content specifically designed to appeal to your dream customers, inbound attracts qualified prospects to your business and keeps them coming back for more.

3

Content marketing
This is a marketing program that centers on creating, publishing and distributing content for your target audience – usually online – the goal of which is to attract new customers.

4

Buyer's journey
This is the process buyers go through to become aware of, evaluate and purchase a new product or service. The journey is a 3-step process:

1. Awareness stage: the buyer realises they have a problem
2. Consideration stage: the buyer defines their problem and researches options to solve it
3. Decision stage: the buyer chooses a solution

Set your strategy

Strategy, in spite of being a word favored by the shiny suits of the world, really just means thinking about why you're doing something before you do it. So starting your digital marketing strategy is as simple as deciding what you want to do, how you're going to do it, what you expect to happen, and when and how you'll measure your success.

RESULTS: WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Brand awareness:

Do you want more people to know about your brand and get your products and services more widely known?

Acquisition or lead generation:

Do you want to reach people who've never bought from you before and bring them into your buyer's journey?

Growth from existing customers:

Do you want people who've already bought from you before to buy more frequently or a different kind of product?

If possible, set a specific goal – one with metrics attached to it and a time limit. These might include:

- X Number of leads from a piece of downloaded content in 1 month
- % of old customers buying a secondary product within the year
- % Follower growth on social media within 2 weeks

5 steps for setting your strategy

① SET A MEASURABLE GOAL

Looking at the types of goals we've set out on the previous page, pick one to concentrate on. Really understanding the goal you're trying to hit is the first step to reaching it!

Give me an example!

Misha is a photographer and recently, she's started producing video for clients too. She wants to let all of her regular customers know that now she offers this extra service so that some become both video and photography customers. She writes the following strategy for this campaign:

"I want to make sure %100 of my current customers know I now offer video services as well. I will run email and social promotions to share this message for 2 months. After 3 months from the start of the promotion, I want to have at least 1 video commission from %15 of my current customers."



"Really understanding the goal you're trying to hit is the first step to reaching it"

② KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Get to know your audience! If you don't understand enough about who you're trying to reach, you'll struggle to deliver a message that's relevant enough to cut through.

The easiest way to make sure you don't come up with a watery 'general' campaign is to make your own buyer personas – fictionalised, general descriptions of your key customer groups.

- Think about who your customers are and group them into 3 or 4 buckets.
- Take each of those and create a character from each.
- Give him or her a name, a photo, a personality and a few favorite things.

Our biggest tip: rank them! Before you start, be totally clear which of them is the most important. You'll find a template a couple of pages over to help get you started.

Give me an example!

Misha will always be called on for weddings – that's her bread and butter. While she'll frequently deal with anyone from the groom to the bride's sister on the actual day, it's usually the bride-to-be she knows she needs to win over first to land the customer. So Misha's first buyer persona is a nervous bride.

Next up for her is photography for small, local businesses – usually people who want some nice images for their website, catalogues or brochures. So her second persona is Jake, who's run a coffee shop for 3 years and is about to redecorate his café and launch a new website.

Misha knows that her opportunity to grow her business will only come from reaching bigger clients with a regular requirement. She doesn't have any customers like this yet, but it's where she wants her business to go next.

So her 3rd persona is the marketing manager for a big retail brand headquartered in her city. They launch new products every month, and every time they do, they need photography.

③ KNOW YOUR BRAND

Your brand is how and why your customers choose you over your competitors. You can think of it as your company's personality. So it's something that's worth defining clearly – what do you stand for? What are your strongest character traits? And how does that translate into your presence – from the images you use on your website to the language you use in your emails?

“What are your strongest character traits? And how do they translate into your presence - from images to language”

BRAND HEALTHCHECK – DO YOU REALLY KNOW WHAT YOUR BRAND STANDS FOR?

- ① Who is your customer?
Get your personas lined up, visualized and ranked first of all – use them to help you answer the following questions.
- ② What problem do you solve?
From your customer's perspective, what challenge are you solving for them? Visualize your perceived value.
- ③ What are your distinctive benefits?
List three to five benefits your customer gets from choosing your product/service that customers don't get from going somewhere else.
- ④ What's your brand promise?
This is like a pledge. What will you always do for your customers? This is the other key part of your proposition that separates you from the competition.
- ⑤ How does it fit together?
Take your answers so far and try to craft a single paragraph that covers them. It's ok if things merge and overlap – the aim is to end up with a unique message.
- ⑥ Can you make it shorter?
Now, refine. Take your time, review again and again until you've distilled your value proposition to one clear line that captures everything you want to say.

④ WATCH YOUR COMPETITION

Your competitors aren’t just those who offer a like-for-like product or service. You can think of your competition in 3 ways:

- Direct competitors – those brands who offer the same products or services as you
- Indirect competitors – brands that may offer different products but compete for the same space or budget as you
- Comparators – these might have a similar look and feel as a brand to you, or be other brands that your target customers use frequently too

You want to know what you’re up against, and you can learn vicariously from both triumphs and mistakes. Get inspired by your competitors’ wins, and use your differences to highlight what’s unique about what your offering.

USER PERSONAS: A TEMPLATE

Name and bio – job, family, age and location	
Goals at work	
How you can help them reach their goals	
Challenges	
How you can help them overcome their challenges	
What they like about your service	
Their objections	
Your elevator pitch to them	

NOT SURE HOW TO GATHER INTEL? HERE'S HOW
TO GET STARTED:

- Search for a few key terms related to your industry, and note where each brand ranks on the results page.
- Try out your competitors – buy their products, read their reviews, explore their website and sign up for their newsletter.
- Ask your customers what they think your rivals do well, and what they love about brands in other sectors too.
- Note where and when you see your competitors' ads and screenshot them.
- Follow lots of other brands' social channels.
- Use paid-for online tools like Alexa for analysis on how well your competitors' sites do in search rankings and web traffic.

FOR MORE ON THIS, CHECK OUT ABSOLTZS' GUIDE
TO INBOUND MARKETING



“Try out your
competitors – buy their
products, read their
reviews, explore their
website and sign up for
their newsletter”

⑤ GET READY TO MEASURE

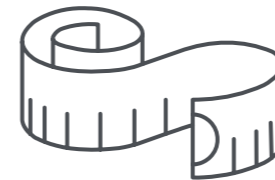
Having brilliant ideas for how you'll drive traffic, build brand awareness, and grow your customer base is just the beginning, it's crucial you know how you'll track progress, so you can adjust your plan based on what gets the best reaction. There are lots of different things you can measure (metrics) – but a benchmark of what a 'good' score is (KPI), will depend entirely on you.

Give me an example!

If you posted a new blog post that included some video content on the page, look at how many:

- Views you get
- Views of the video
- Engagement with the video (likes, comments, shares)
- Clicks to your blog CTA
- Leads from the post
- Increase in leads from the post vs. posts without videos

Before you start any campaign, familiarize yourself with important metrics associated with your goals, like those



“There are lots of different things you can measure (metrics) – but a benchmark of what a ‘good’ score is (KPI), will depend entirely on you”

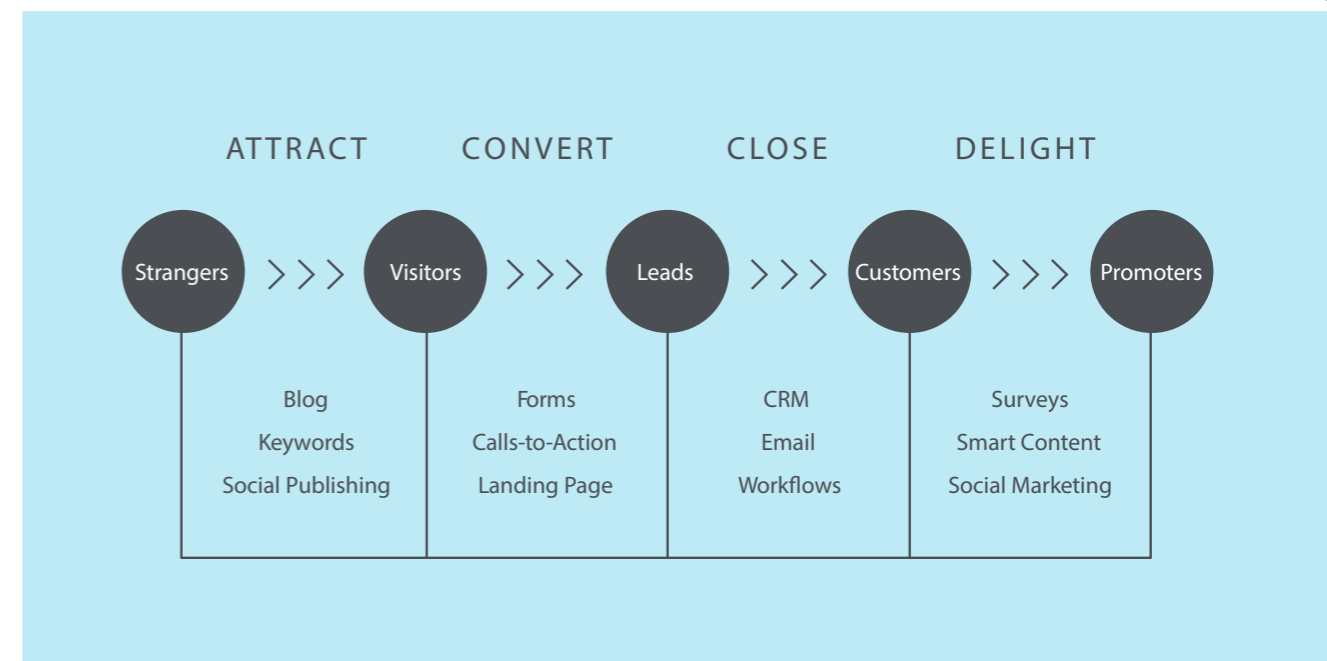
examples we've listed above. There are plenty of different things you might want to measure depending on your goals – so bear in mind things like geographic or demographic information that you're interested in tracking as well. Track performance of these metrics and you'll start to get a benchmark number for how your content is performing.

Digital marketing techniques

So, you've got your plan. You know who and what you're going after, you know what you're going to measure, and you know what you're trying to achieve. It's time to get going.

The good news is that it's easy to experiment with different ideas to reach your audience on social media, search engines, and your own website. You can try different types and formats of content to find the best results.

The great thing about most digital marketing campaigns is you can begin to track reactions soon after they're launched. That means you can soon work out which campaigns are delivering the best return on investment (ROI) and which techniques are most efficient for your brand.



SEO



One of the best ways to reach new customers is to make sure your site's appearing when your customers are searching for answers to their problems or questions. You do this through search engine optimization (SEO) - optimizing your site in the right way to improve the rank of your results when people search for terms related to your market.

Google accounts for nearly %90 of searches on desktop, so if you want to go direct to the source, read their SEO guide to help the indexing of your site. This will happen automatically – Google's 'spiders' continuously crawl, categorize, and rank all web content against a huge number of factors.

When you're looking at your site content, make sure it is:

- Relevant - update it regularly, and use the same words people are searching to find your product or service.
- Easy to read - don't use images as headlines, and make sure description tags for pictures or videos are accurate.
- Credible - if another site links to yours, that's a vote in your site's favour. So if other people have recognized this expertise by linking back, that will help.

- Honest - similarly, if you try to load up your site with keywords or links on hidden pages that are intended to be seen by crawlers but not customers, that counts as a deception and can incur ranking penalty.
- Well-built - if it's easy for people to navigate, Google will probably like it. Make sure the links to your sub-pages are logically named, and minimise add-ons like auto-playing videos or pop-ups asking for email addresses.
- Accurate - like most people, Google doesn't like spelling mistakes or broken links. They can count more than you might expect.
- Optimized for mobile - more people now search on mobile over desktop, so sites which are more mobile-friendly are rewarded over those which are not.

[DOWNLOAD OUR BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO SEO](#)

SEO audit



An SEO audit will give you an idea of how SEO-friendly your website is overall. Here's how you do it:

Get a list of your pages

- Export all of your site pages to a spreadsheet, then sort them by the most frequently visited.
- Take your keyword categories and see which fit best by page. Add that category into a column alongside the page name
- Add another column for any keywords you've not currently got covered

Add keywords – naturally, of course

This is where your content comes in. You'll need to work in those keywords to your priority pages on:

- Titles
- Descriptions
- Headings & Content
- Images Titles & Alt Text
- URLs

Learn to avoid search penalties

Don't hide your keywords – or stuff too many of them into your copy. This includes forcing them into places they don't belong to try and rank for terms that don't come naturally to the page you're on at the time.

Keyword stuffing is the oldest trick in the book when it comes to SEO – and nowadays, search engines have been developed specifically to detect it. Not only does it look spammy, but it's not approved by search engines and will result in penalties.

Promote a good user experience

The most important thing to consider is your visitor's user experience. While optimizing your website for an algorithm sounds purely scientific, remember that the goal of search engines is to deliver the best experience possible to their end-users: searchers. If you keep that goal in mind with your SEO strategy, you'll be more likely to make good choices. Think about humans first and search engines second, and you'll be alright.

User experience

Your website is your chance to show off exactly what your brand is all about and connect with your customers on your home turf. Here's where you want your customers to go for information, helpful content, and to buy your products.

Your conversion rate is the number of visitors to your site that end up converting into leads through a form submission.

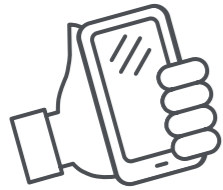
Thinking about user experience when you're putting your site together means you can help visitors find which product is right for them, help them decide yours is the brand they want to buy from, or help them keep in touch – for example, by signing up for a newsletter.

So check your site's analytics and note how people are behaving on your site - where they click, which pages they spend the most time on. Your overall user experience probably needs improvement if you see a high bounce rate (people leave the site after clicking on only one page) or a low dwell time (if it's less than 30 seconds, it's likely visitors haven't found what they're looking for).

[WANT MORE? GET IN TOUCH WITH US](#)



“Thinking about user experience when you're putting your site together means you can help visitors find which product is right for them”



“More people are ditching desktop computers for phones, so make sure your website works on any device”

GOOD EXPERIENCE BASICS

- Update content regularly – stay relevant
- Check that your pages load quickly - every second counts when it comes to keeping someone's attention. It's better to have less functionality or simpler design in order to keep pages loading quickly
- Ensure your calls to action - newsletter signups, buy buttons for products - are emphasised through attractive, logical design
- More people are ditching desktop computers to get online via phone or tablet, so ensure your website can automatically resize for smaller screens, and works well with tapping, swiping, and one-handed operation
- As with many things in life and digital marketing, the most elegant user experiences have the simplest design structures. You wouldn't fill your shop window from floor to ceiling, so try to resist the temptation to do the same on your website

PRO TIPS

Less need to drive traffic - if visitors to your site are buying from you easily, you don't need to spend as much effort and money on other ways to attract more visits

Cost-effective - a good conversion rate means you get more bang from bucks spent (i.e., higher ROI) on the advertising that lured visitors to your site in the first place

Builds brand loyalty - a great user experience encourages return visits

Tricky to master - creating a brilliant user experience involves a keen eye for design, copy, and user friendliness

An ongoing process - there's no one-size-fits-all solution, and you'll have to monitor how visitors are using your site

Paid search ads



Having a great website helps you organically turn up higher in search results, but you can also leapfrog to the top of a page of results by using paid search ads linked to a set of keywords relevant to your brand.

You pay for each click on your ad (which is why these ads are also known as pay-per-click, or PPC).

Getting an ad into that highly visible area involves winning an automated auction that takes into account the price-per-click you bid on a given keyword, as well as the quality (as determined by SEO principles) of your site.



“Having a great website helps you organically turn up higher in search results”

“You have one line to catch their attention and get them to click your link in a sea of similar-looking links”

GETTING STARTED

You can have an ad built and online in a matter of minutes using platforms such as the most widely used Google Adwords, as well as similar offerings from Yahoo and Bing.

Find which keywords your ideal customers would search for. Start with a specific description of the product or services you sell and include your location to help you target the most likely buyers. Instead of ‘knitwear’ (too broad), go for ‘hand-knitted angora sweaters, North London’. Write your ad. Who’s your customer? You have one line to catch their attention and get them to click your link in a sea of similar-looking links.

Set your maximum daily budget. Keep in mind that popular keywords cost more per click than less common terms (because other companies are bidding for them too).

Use your platform’s conversion tracking. If an ad isn’t driving the traffic or sales, reword it, and test, test, test!

PRO TIPS

You know your leads are quality - the people who clicked on your ad had searched for something you’ve got

Fast results - much quicker than waiting for your natural search ranking to rise

Easily targeted - you can bid by keyword, and by region

Competitive - common search terms might be expensive

Text only - you can’t show images or have much control over how your ad will look

Costs are easy to manage, as you pay on a cost-per-click basis

Display advertising

Display advertising can be a great means to get your brand in front of potential buyers when they're browsing their favorite sites. You buy display ads through ad servers which use data on someone's recent search and click history to automatically determine the website and user to show a particular ad to.

GETTING STARTED

You can build, post, manage and track ads on Google Display Network, which also ranks your ad quality to determine how visible it is on the pages it appears.

Pick good imagery - either your own, or from your ad server - to win attention and clicks.

Make it obvious where users can click on the ad, and what happens when they do. Does it take them to your homepage, or directly to a product page?

Track your clicks and conversions. If you never get clicks from a particular site, you can exclude it; if a particular site and ad wins you a lot of conversions, you might want to increase how much you spend on the ad.

PRO TIPS

Wide reach - Google's Display Network can reach over two million websites

Easily targeted - by both context (ads are intended to appear on related sites) and audience (who've shown an interest in what you're selling)

Eye-catching - you can create simple text or image based ads, use video, or build interactive ads in a variety of sizes and shapes

Lack of control - you have to trust your ad server to choose where to place your ad, plus you have ad-blockers to contend with

In terms of costs, you'll usually pay either:

- Per thousand impressions
- Cost per acquisition
- Cost per click

Sponsored social posts

Having a great social media presence is a prerequisite for this one. If you're already writing brilliant content that shows off what your brand is all about, paying to promote posts can get those posts into the news feeds of people who aren't following you - yet. If you happen to be active on the lesser-used Google+ (which all companies should be, as it boosts search ranking), its sponsored +Post ads let you embed a call to action, like a Buy Now button.

Here's how you can target your audience on different networks:

- Facebook - interests they've marked
- Twitter - user networks
- LinkedIn - job description



"Paying to promote posts can get those posts into the news feeds of people who aren't following you"



“Choose the social network where your buyer personas are, and always optimise and test your content”

GETTING STARTED

- Choose the social network where your buyer personas are, and always optimise and test your content
- You may want to create a post around a new offer or simply word it to attract users to your page.
- Do a ‘dry run’ - try out your offer or call to action as an ordinary post and see what style and wording attracts the most likes, shares and comments before putting money behind them.
- Start with simple image or video posts and track how many clicks and follows you get, before moving into the more complex and expensive formats, like multi-image carousel or canvas ads. Check out Canva’s post for non-designers on creating beautiful social images.

PRO TIPS

- Cheap - cost per click can start at as little as 5 cents
- Effective - Facebook ads can have a click-through rate up to nine times higher than banner ads on other sites
- Easy - you can have a campaign up and running in a couple of clicks
- Community management – you need to be prepared to deal with comments, and bear in mind that some users can find business messaging in social spaces annoying. So your content will need to be respectful of that difference

Email marketing

In the process of building your empire, winning new customers is as important as nurturing the relationships with customers you already have. Stay in touch with your loyal followers with emails that go beyond announcement of new products.

Instead, build connections with

- Newsletters - increase brand awareness and drive traffic with what's new on your site
- Seasonal emails - stay on your customers' radar with Christmas or birthday emails
- Exclusive offers - make loyal customers feel special with the odd discount or gift
- Reminders - if a subscription is ending, drop a friendly email
- Flash announcements - boost sales with flash discounts, like a -48hour sale



“Stay in touch with your loyal followers with emails that go beyond announcement of new products”



“It’s most effective to build your email list naturally, by giving your customers the opportunity to sign up themselves”

GETTING STARTED

- Collecting email subscribers depends on the optimization of your digital marketing efforts: make sure your blog, social media and paid campaigns are driving to a landing page that’s optimized for conversion to collect lead information.
- There are dozens of easy-to-use email services (including Hubspot!) that let you design emails, manage your address list and track analytics such as the number of opens and clickthroughs.
- Less is more. Figure out a clear objective for every email you send - to promote your new line of soaps, remind customers you exist, get them to download your app?
- Test, test, test: What types of subject line words result in the highest number of opens? Where are your readers clicking?

PRO TIPS

- Quick - you can develop and dispatch an email in a matter of minutes
- Builds strong relationships - you can communicate regularly with the same individuals
- Cost-efficient - email marketing can be really cheap
- Easy to ignore - we all receive too many emails, so your message can be overlooked
- High consequences for misstep - if you send just one annoying or irrelevant email you run the risk of having your customer unsubscribe

Native advertising

Native advertising is just the term for a type of advert that looks and sounds exactly like the content that surrounds it. Much advertising on social media counts as 'native', especially if the style and tone of the ad is similar to the content surrounding it. Sponsored content is another important native stream and indeed many online publishers - like BuzzFeed - have come to rely on it as an important revenue stream.

For a small business, large-scale publisher partnerships probably aren't realistic. But if you've got something useful and interesting to say about a particular issue related to your business, you could explore having an appropriate third party site with a similar target market to you publish your blog articles or any video content you make as advertorial.



“Much advertising on social media counts as 'native', especially if the style and tone of the ad is similar to the content surrounding it”

Ready to go

Bearing in mind what we said about the importance of keeping things simple and light-touch when you're starting out, don't be afraid to use a combination of marketing techniques and ideas. It's useful to think of your marketing activity as an ecosystem - when all your tactics (online or offline) work together, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

You might not always get it right every time, but if you keep a keen eye on the performance of your activity it's possible to minimise your risk, since you can more or less switch your tactics on and off at will. And, whilst it's obviously important to focus your attention on what's working, as you start to gain confidence in digital marketing, and your strategy starts to pay dividends, let yourself have some fun and experiment with different tactics too.

Good luck!



"You might not always get it right every time, but if you keep a keen eye on the performance of your activity it's possible to minimise your risks"

THANKS FOR READING!

