Six Steps to a Successful Digital Marketing Strategy

Wrangle the data, glean the insights, and get in front of your customer
There’s no question that having the right digital marketing strategy is critical to winning over customers. But many brands are still not getting it right. As marketing strategies have shifted from transaction-based to customer-centric — powered by the bigger and better data sets that are now available as well as by the number of platforms — being able to distill real opportunities that will help drive revenue has become key for marketers.

There is one certainty: Any successful marketing strategy, digital or otherwise, requires a solid rationale. Without benchmarks, established goals, and a clear vision of how to define success, marketers will miss the opportunity to fully leverage the ability to measure and track customer engagements in a holistic way.

Take a look at the six steps outlined in this eBook, designed to help create an effective digital marketing strategy.

**Step 1:**

**Know thyself: your priorities and your customers’**

Marketers hoping to create a successful digital marketing strategy need to establish firm priorities in order to make decisions about the best channels and tactics in which to invest, says Lisa Henderson, MD, client services, Epsilon. “This starts with knowing which channels and media your prospects and customers use to identify, evaluate, select, and purchase your products and services. You can then concentrate your messages in those places.”

Begin by leveraging the data you’re gathering by consolidating customer information into a single multidimensional data location. This will reduce redundant or conflicting messaging while enabling better targeting, relevancy, personalization, and timeliness.

Be sure you maximize each investment by providing an integrated customer experience, following through on each response, and extending it to the next stage, thereby capitalizing on your channel investments. “This requires that data across the channels you invest in be integrated and centralized into a single customer

“Work with a partner that understands audience and individual targeting, knows how to work across devices, mobile and PC, and has the ability to utilize data from both”

Nancy Hall, Conversant
view,” Henderson says. “Having robust customer-recognition capabilities as the foundation of your digital marketing efforts enables marketers to reach consumers across devices, time, and media in the moments that matter most for their brand.”

It all comes down to the brand taking on the perspective of the customer. Charlene Li, founder and principal analyst at research and consulting firm Altimeter Group, told DMN that marketers need to work with other departments, such as sales and service, to form “one revenue team.” That team can then budget and align its plans and offerings for customers. This will allow various teams to grow their customer insights, relationships, and wallet share.

**Partner up**

Joining up with a knowing partner is an insightful place to begin, says Nancy Hall, SVP, eastern sales, Conversant. “I don’t think starting with a data management platform is the right place for a newcomer to begin,” she explains. “It’s important to learn and gather some experience first before going all in with a DMP and the rest of the tech stack.”

Her recommendation? Pick a partner that can do the heavy lifting, while the brand’s team learns and gathers experience.

“Work with a partner that understands audience and individual targeting, knows how to work across devices, mobile, and PC, and has the ability to utilize data from both,” she says. “Work with a partner that can activate data on social media and can control brand frequency and duplication.”

The partner, Hall adds, should offer transparency in terms of methodology and strategy and have complete understanding of the privacy issues surrounding the modern marketing arena.

**Step 2: Acquire data**

The “always on” customer requires that you have the data and insight to act immediately to support the customer experience, Henderson says.

Marketers must acquire the right data, create deep customer profiles to derive insights out of that data, and be sure they are then ready to act on these customer profiles. “Digital marketing requires marketers to make data-driven decisions in real time, and actionable data is what will drive digital marketing success and business growth for brands,” she adds.

But how does someone acquire that actionable data?

Start with identifying buyer personas, says M. J. Anderson, CMO of Trekk. “Start with information you know about your current customer base, using your best analysis of that base.”

Within a buying group there are many shades of gray. There are customers who are kind of good, there are your best customers, and then there are consumers who probably aren’t worth too much effort.

“Take whatever data you are able to collect and use and determine what your best customer looks like — what is her buying persona?” Anderson says.

Look at your total sales and then find your top 20% of customers. Then look at past behaviors and geodemographic characteristics to view those top spenders segmented both as parts of a group and as individuals. Look for predictors that show what the consumer has done in the past, which is good for understanding how that consumer will buy in the future.

Focusing on the needs and wants of a particular audience and hyper-serving those needs let marketers
see that audience’s behavior. “I can anticipate what they are and address that need, in some cases, before they’re even aware that they have that need,” Li said.

Seek out data sources that are part of everyone’s arsenal — especially your competitors’. It’s key to reach different users, users your competitors probably aren’t reaching, says Hall.

For example, if you start a search with “Bahamas hotels” as a keyword, that is a likely indicator that you have some intent of going there. From there, you may go to travel review sites. For a travel brand, “These types of additional data sources are key,” explains Hall, “because they aren’t being sold or necessarily made available to everyone.”

Matching users to their devices and to actions is also critical. And consumers, as every marketer knows, perform different actions on different devices at different times of day. Where is your customer at 3 p.m. during the workweek versus 3 p.m. on Saturday? And don’t forget about offline activities, either, reminds Hall. Do not overlook such activities as grocery shopping, what kinds of video they watch, and where they spend their money — perhaps at AMC theaters or Starbucks?

Insights are gleaned from looking at both the individual and the groups into which she fits. Kathy (the individual who loves the color blue and oversized sweaters) is also Kathy the mom of a toddler and Kathy the marathon runner, among other personifications of Kathy.

Step 3:
Translate insights into action

Digital interactions happen in milliseconds and consumers leave digital footprints behind, Henderson says. “Marketers today have both the time and data to effectively test marketing messages. Yet we are making the same mistakes with digital channels that we have historically made with older direct marketing channels.”

“We aren’t taking advantage of existing data to help us shape our strategies and tactics,” she continues. “We need to take advantage of available data assets to further advance the core tenets of direct marketing — test-and-control strategies, personalizing through targeting and segmentation, and measuring.”

Take the attributes of your best customers and go into the marketplace. Either purchase models or lists or create campaigns to attract the same kind of people.

Find your best customer

“It’s a process of finding out who your best customers are,” Anderson adds, “and using that information to go into the marketplace to find people with similar attributes to begin more conversations.”

The idea is to find the people who are likely to want to engage with your brand. “Assume that of all the people in the world who drink soda pop, half the world prefers Pepsi to Coke,” professes Anderson.

“People feel strongly about that particular preference,” she says. “There is nothing you can do to make them switch. By using the process of elimination, you’ve already eliminated half the market of people who will never hear your message, no matter what you do. By using that process before you do anything else, you determine who is your best customer.”

That process also includes using that data to understand how, when, and how often your customer wants to be communicated with. “That’s why working with a partner is a great place to start,” Hall emphasizes.

“Marketers today have both the time and data to effectively test marketing messages. Yet we are making the same mistakes with digital channels that we have historically made with older direct marketing channels”

Lisa Henderson, Epsilon

SIX STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

IBM Marketing Cloud
“Part of that partner’s job is to control frequency and duplication throughout the process,” she emphasizes. “Understanding that messaging someone four times within a seven-day period is too much, for example, or that it’s necessary for the brand to know that someone already purchased a particular brand of boots so he or she shouldn’t be in a pool to retarget is important.”

You need to have a process that considers all the data points that help describe the individual and then use that info to create communications that are conversational and intelligent. “People don’t want relationships with brands, they want relationships with people,” Anderson notes.

“Consider all the tactical capabilities so you can have a dialogue and meet people at their point in need and not assume something,” she adds. “You can’t just place things front and center and hope that consumers immediately respond.”

To help establish that dialogue, you need the right kind of content.

**Step 4: Content rules**

In today’s digital-centric world, content is king. Here’s why: Eighty to ninety percent of all consumers conduct online research prior to making a purchase.

“Are they going to find the answers you provide, or are they going to find your competitor,” asks Caryn Komensky, principal, director, digital marketing, Gladstone Marketing Group.

“The more content you have, the easier it will be for someone looking for your product or services to find you,” she adds. “But not just any content will do. Effective content is well optimized, relevant, and valuable. It is also published across multiple platforms in a consistent, frequent manner.

“Content can include anything from blog posts and social media updates to videos, eBooks, and webinars,” Komensky continues. “Effective content improves SEO rankings, offers opportunity to position your company as a thought leader in your industry, drives traffic to websites, offers opportunity for conversion, and helps to nurture existing leads.”
“Inbound marketing is designed to create a funnel that allows us to identify who wants to have a relationship with us and who doesn’t,” Anderson says.

Think of it like speed dating: You either like this person or he or she isn’t your type. “Part of the process is being OK with the reality that your message isn’t for everyone,” he admits.

It all comes back to knowing who the customer is, based on intelligence gathered through data, and then using that intelligence to create messaging that resonates with that particular consumer. It’s also using that data to determine when and how your customer prefers to engage with you.

So part of your content strategy needs to consider how to speak to customers and prospects at various stages of the buyer’s journey. “Are they at the top of the funnel” — TOFU — “casually gathering information to solve a problem or meet a need? If so, you’ll need content that educates buyers and shows them how they can solve their problems,” says Komensky.

“Or, now that they are aware and educated,” she continues, “are they more interested in finding the best solution to solve their problem or need? Those looking for the best solutions are considered to be at the middle of the funnel” — MOFU. “MOFU content shows why your products or services are the best choice.

“By the time a lead reaches the bottom of the funnel” — BOFU — “they are ready to buy and the only question is who they will buy from,” Komensky adds.

“Often, BOFU leads just need a gentle nudge to get them to take action. The right BOFU content offer can be very effective in helping you to close deals.”

Refine the message
What’s happening with mobile is a perfect example.

“Consumers expect personalized and timely experiences when it comes to mobile,” Josh Todd, CMO, Localytics, says. “Failure to enable those experiences is detrimental for any brand.”

However, the type of content used can make a big difference. Look at push notifications, Todd says.

“Just because push content is deemed valuable because of a successful ‘open’ rate,” he continues, “doesn’t necessarily mean that every individual user is finding those messages to be useful. In fact, over half — 52% — of consumers view push messaging as an annoying distraction.”

Also, show your customers that your relationship with them doesn’t end with the purchase.

For instance, celebrity manicurist Deborah Lippmann distributes her luxury nail lacquer brand to about 1,500 stores nationwide. The company sends its customers a follow-up email 10 days after an order is received. The emails thank customers for their purchase and also lets them know that the brand is there in case of questions or concerns.

“The analogy I like to use is that of a relationship,” says Anderson. “When you and I talk on the telephone, we have a conversation. When I talk, you listen; when you talk, I listen. We respond to each other. What we need to strive for as marketers is to use our intelligence about a customer to respond to a need they have.”

Step 5:
Channeling the right platform

No modern marketing strategy would be worth its salt without cross-channel orchestration, integration, and delivery of email, SMS, and social media based on agreed-upon business goals. Marketers need to not
only define the message, but also choose the customer’s preferred channel.

Being where your customers are, says Henderson, goes back to customer recognition.

“The only way to effectively communicate with your customers and be where they are is to have a robust recognition capability,” she says. “This includes a deep understanding of who your customers are, their online and offline behaviors, and their interactions. With customer recognition as the foundation, you can better reach your customers through personalized digital marketing.”

**Matching message to medium**

If you need a lesson in how to be where your customers are, pay attention to late-night television hosts, Nancy Lim, director of marketing, PureCars, told DMN. “The late-night TV hosts are so smart about being where their viewers are.

“Just because a channel is popular doesn’t mean it is right for your product or brand,” Lim says.

Lim points to Snapchat. “What it has done has been incredible. Snapchat is a testament to why marketers have to follow the consumer.”

Snapchat has capitalized on the way millennials consume media — short bursts of video, emojis — and it has capitalized on what its demographic is already doing, as well as on natural behaviors that mobile phone users have already adopted.

“We’re talking about being able to speak to consumers and tell them a story that makes sense,” explains Jeff Hirsch, CMO of personalized video platform SundaySky, to DMN.

“You want to be able to tell that story wherever they are and on whatever device they are using,” Hirsch says. “To do so, technology has to play a role.”

Pay attention to your customer’s preferred communications channel. While many brands prefer social media as a prime way to engage customers, Mark Lippmann, cofounder and managing partner of Deborah Lippmann, told DMN that the brand finds that email allows it to engage in a more direct and personal way than it can with social.

Lippmann has the numbers that back that up: The brand’s initial welcome email has a 33.3% conversion rate, while 47.21% of online transactions come from email.

**Step 6: Build in flexibility**

Never think of your digital marketing strategy as a finished work of art. Rather, adopt the mindset that it is a work in progress.

One of the biggest mistakes today’s marketers make is that they don’t take a launch-and-learn mentality, says Anderson.

“They tend to put all their eggs in one basket and then, if it doesn’t work, they throw out the baby with the bathwater,” he says. “You have to take a long view of the process. You don’t necessarily get it right the first time out of the box.”

He recommends that brands have primary, secondary, and tertiary goals — all tied to business aims. You should be able to track and measure any kind of success — big or small — to verify your thinking and reconfirm your analytics, or not.

Data automation allows brands to test how their customers interact with their content, on which platform, and at what juncture. Testing and measuring are critical, not just with the initial release of your strategy, but going forward, as customer attitudes and behaviors don’t stand still, but continually evolve.
2016 Email Marketing Metrics Benchmark Study

To build a world-class marketing program, it’s crucial to compare yourself to the best performers. Discover how you measure up across 25 open, click-through, list churn and mobile metrics – broken out by industry and geography – and get related tips.

Download Today!