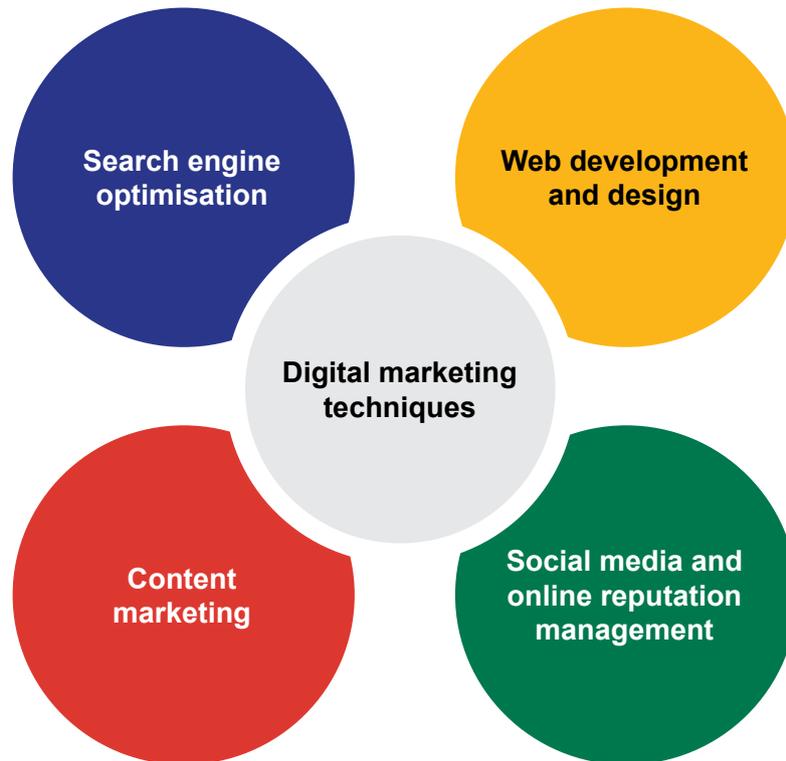# Digital Marketing Techniques

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Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of key digital marketing techniques. The advent of the internet has provided the opportunity to share and receive information instantly. Simultaneously, the number of digital devices used to access the internet is growing. Today they include cellphones, laptops, tablets, smart devices and wearables. Digital marketing is marketing that is done via online channels and platforms, whereas traditional marketing includes adverts in print (for example, billboards, magazines and newspapers), television, radio and word-of-mouth. As more consumers use the internet digital marketing has become a vital marketing tool.

What are digital marketing techniques?

During the early years of digital marketing (also called electronic marketing or e-marketing), there was an emphasis on how the internet and the proliferation of digital devices was changing the nature of marketing. Although this is true, consumer marketers must stay grounded in the fundamentals of marketing strategy and integrate these tools into strategic and tactical plans. The idea of a 'digital strategy' has already lost much of its meaning as most platforms (even billboards) are now digital. This chapter provides some of the key building blocks for using digital tools in the implementation of a marketing strategy. The chapter starts by discussing the phenomenon known as content marketing followed by search engine optimisation. This is followed by a discussion on web development and design, social media and online reputation management, illustrated in Figure 20.1.

Figure 20.1: A sample of some fundamental digital marketing techniques

Content marketing

Consumers are constantly faced with an influx of information on the internet. This has led to consumers questioning the authenticity of information online. Most brands can easily share their content online; therefore, to stand out from other brands it is important to do so strategically. This can be done by considering the following questions:

First, who will read it? The target market is crucial to a digital marketing strategy. For example, some consumers have access to slow internet while others do not have access to the internet at all. This is particularly the case in South Africa, as it is a developing country. However, access to free WiFi is growing exponentially in South Africa.

Second, why is it being written? Content can be shared for a number of reasons, such as educating, assisting or selling to consumers. Although marketing is primarily based on selling to consumers, many consumers appreciate it when brands add value to their lives through the content they share.

Third, what are the marketing implications? A call-to-action (CTA) refers to an action the brand aims to encourage the consumer to do through their content. CTAs do not always need to be of direct benefit to the brand. Often consumers appreciate when brands share information simply to add value to their lives. This generates a favourable perception of the brand in the consumer's mind. While it may not lead to a direct sale in the short-term, consumers may purchase from the brand in the long-term because of this favourable perception.

Last, is the content appropriate for the platform? Each online platform has its own ambience. This is elaborated on later in the chapter on social media.

There are four types of shareable content, as shown in Table 20.1.

Table 20.1: Created, curated, commissioned and crowdsourced content

Content type	Definition	Example
Created	Original content created by the brand.	Writing an article on five ways the consumer can use the brand's latest product.
Curated	Content written by someone else and re-posted by the brand.	Sharing a reputable influencer's YouTube review of the brand's service.
Commissioned	Paying influential personalities to share content about the brand.	Sending a local celebrity a product to use for a month in return for sharing their experience on social media.
Crowdsourced	Getting consumers involved in the marketing campaign.	Starting a competition where consumers compete for a prize in exchange for sharing ideas for new flavours of the brand's product.

E-newsletters are commonly used to share content. Brands can use emails to keep consumers informed and updated about the brand or to maintain a relationship with them. The following best practices are suggested for email marketing. First, writing emails with a personal tone by referring to the receiver's name such as, 'Hi Khanya' instead of, 'Hi there'. Second, many consumers receive multiple emails in their inbox daily. To ensure that an email stands out, an effective and brief subject line is needed. Consumers often use the subject line to decide whether to open the email or not. Third, today's consumers are pressed for time. Long emails can encourage consumers to stop reading and unsubscribe from the mailing list. Emails should be brief and visually appealing, with short paragraphs, bullet points and more visuals. Under the Consumer Protection Act (2008), all email newsletters should give consumers the option to unsubscribe from a mailing list and by choosing to unsubscribe consumers will be able to opt out of further e-newsletters from the brand.

Search engine optimisation

Search engines are used to search for information online. The most widely used search engine in South Africa is Google. When consumers search online, many do not look beyond the first page of the search results. This means that a brand's exposure on Google is limited. It is beneficial to ensure that the brand's website is among the first, or at least one of the top ten results that appear.

There are two types of search engine results: paid results (i.e., online adverts) and organic results. Brands can pay for search engines to place their advert on the top of the results page when consumers search using particular keywords. These are pay-per-click advertisements. Google charges a brand each time the consumer clicks on the advert after landing on the search results page.

Organic results appear below the paid results. Brands cannot pay for their website to appear as an organic result. Although paid results are effective, consumers generally consider organic results as more credible and relevant. Google positions organic results based on relevance and usefulness to the consumer by using an algorithm, which is regularly updated. To meet Google's algorithm requirements, brands can adopt search engine optimisation (SEO). SEO refers to the efforts a brand makes in getting its content to appear higher up in a search engine's ranking. It involves all the activities undertaken to get the brand to the top of the organic results. Without a good SEO, the brand may never appear on Google's search results. This means that consumers can miss the brand and use a competitor instead. SEO is a slow and steady process. It should be carefully incorporated as early as possible. Brands should implement and avoid certain techniques to ensure a favourable SEO ranking (see Table 20.2).

Table 20.2. Best Practices for SEO

Techniques encouraging Google to trust the brand's website	
Healthy links	Quality links with other quality sources and content across the internet. These links should be diverse rather than all from the same source and increase in frequency over time.
Content	Content should be well-written and reader-friendly. The content that others post about the brand should be favourable.
User friendly	The easier it is to navigate the brand's website, the better the chances of gaining a favourable search result ranking.
Techniques discouraging Google to trust the brand's website	
Buying links	Google is able to recognise when links are not organic or are of a poor quality.
Fake reviews or comments	Google recognises fake comments and reviews as spam.
Article spinning	Some brands try to gain a favourable SEO ranking by copying and pasting articles throughout their website. Google picks up on this and will downgrade a website.
Keyword stuffing	Some websites are overloaded with the same keywords to ensure that the website appears at the top of search rankings. This is recognised as keyword spam and compromises the website's reputation and credibility.

Web development and design

In a digital marketing strategy, all roads usually lead to the brand's website. The website is the brand's home on the web. It is the starting point of a digital marketing strategy. A great deal of time and effort needs to be spent on designing and developing an effective website. Ideally a brand should have a website before other online platforms to give consumers a platform to find out more information. Every social media page, email newsletter or online advert should link back to the website.

The advantage of having a website is the brand has complete freedom in controlling it (this is an example of 'owned media' from Chapter 7). Design and development can be controlled to appropriately reflect the brand's positioning and identity. On most social media sites, for example, the content, images and messages need to fit in to a predefined format. With a website there is more freedom in making the brand come to life for its consumers in its own unique way.

Website design involves creating all the visual aspects of the brand's website from images, colours, logos, links, tabs and so on. At the most basic level, every website should have a home page. This is the first page consumers see when they open the website. This is the page which introduces consumers to the brand. The website should also have an about page. This gives the consumer more detail as to what the brand does and a bit of its history. One never knows who is looking at the brand's website or learning about the brand for the first time.

Next, there should be a contact page. This page informs consumers of how they can get hold of the brand via phone, email or a physical address. If one of the purposes of the website is to sell directly to consumers, the brand should also have a page displaying their products and services and a simple way for consumers to purchase. Some websites also have a blog or social media page to provide interesting content that is relevant and appealing to the brand's target market and encourages repeat visits. Finally, consumers should easily understand how to navigate the website and find what they are looking for within seconds of arriving on the home page, otherwise they may go elsewhere.

Web development is the process of taking finished web designs and transforming them into functioning interactive websites. Web development involves everything that goes on at the back end. Web design is what consumers see. Web development is what makes it possible for them to actually use the website for the purpose it was intended. The brand's website should also be quick to load. If the pages on the website are large and complex and take a long time to load many consumers will be put off and will give up, especially if they have slow connections.

The website should also be easy to find. Search engine optimisation will be explored in detail later. It is worth noting here that it should be easy for consumers to find the brand's website when searching online. The website developer should ensure that the website is protected from spammers, viruses and other web risks.

It is also worth emphasising how important responsive web design is. A responsive website is one which changes its layout depending on the device it is displayed on. When a consumer opens it on a personal computer, for example, it will appear in full. But when they open the website on a cellphone, its layout should change to suit the smaller screen and it will appear simplified.

User experience design is concerned with all the experiences consumers have when interacting with a digital tool. The principles of good user experience revolve around creating a website which consumers find easy to use and navigate, entertaining or enjoyable and which achieves the desired conversion goals. These goals are what the brand wants the consumer to do on their website. Is the purpose to encourage consumers to sign up for a newsletter, to browse the brand's products and to buy these products? The user experience should gently guide the consumer to that desired outcome whatever it may be.

When it is easy for the consumer to use the brand's website, they are more encouraged to continue doing so and use the brand. Good user experience design on a brand's website can increase conversion. If a clear, appealing, and simple call to action is placed on the website it is more likely that consumers will click on that call to action and complete the desired task. This obviously differs from website to website. Some websites' main objective is to drive sales. These websites should have clear calls to action such as 'buy now' placed prominently on their site. Other websites encourage consumers to sign up for a free trial and others to sign up for a weekly newsletter. Compared to websites, mobile searches are usually more locally focused and specific. Consumer's generally have their mobiles with them and use them to search for information on the go. This makes it easier to frustrate consumers with poor user experience design.

Social media

Social media has infiltrated many aspects of a consumer's daily life and influences their behaviour. It would be unwise for marketers to overlook the importance and influence of social media. To use social media strategically in digital marketing campaigns, marketers need to understand the various social media channels available to them and the characteristics of each.

Larger brands tend to have a significant social media presence across multiple channels. It is important to remember not to simply put the brand on social media for the sake of it. Channels should be chosen based on their suitability to the brand in terms of their user profile and their characteristics. Questions that should be asked include:

- Do the consumers in the brand's target market actually use this social media channel?
- Will the brand's presence on this social media channel suit its positioning and brand personality?
- Will this channel assist the brand in meeting its marketing objectives?

Facebook is a social networking site which has become massively popular across the globe. After registering with the site, users are able to create a user profile and add other users as 'friends'. They can exchange messages, post status updates and photos, share videos and receive notifications when others update their profiles. Facebook has an advertising tool which brands can use to advertise to users directly based on their demographics. Brands can use Facebook-captured data such as age, geographic location and interests to create highly targeted and relevant Facebook advertising campaign. Brands are also able to track the efficacy of their Facebook advertising efforts and update their ads accordingly.

Twitter allows users to post short updates. Twitter's immediacy lends itself well to breaking news or events, customer service and content sharing. Many brands use Twitter for customer service as it allows interaction and engagement with followers. While a customer on Facebook may expect an answer to a question or complaint within a number of hours, or even a day, on Twitter they expect a response in a matter of minutes. This means a brand's social media team always needs to be on the ball. While real-time capabilities of Twitter are definitely an advantage, the channel needs to be managed well. Hashtags are used to collect all discussions centred around one common theme in a central location. If a certain hashtag is being used very often on Twitter, it means the topic is trending.

Twitter users expect interesting and relevant content from the brands they follow. Many brands share pictures, videos and articles which they know will appeal to their target market. The retweet button allows users to share tweets immediately with their network. A brand always needs to ensure they are sharing interesting and relevant content their users would want to retweet. Twitter has advertising options for brands; these can be tracked so brands can update adverts depending on their performance.

LinkedIn is a professional social network. It offers business owners and company leaders an opportunity to network and make connections within their field and establish credibility within their marketplace. This channel allows users to share their CVs, qualifications and skills, which can be endorsed by other users, creating credibility. The features and capabilities of LinkedIn make it a suitable channel for business-to-business marketing.

Pinterest has a visually striking virtual pinboard interface allowing users, also known as pinners, to create their own boards according to categories they choose. Onto these boards pinners pin photos and links to things they like and enjoy, such as images, articles, ideas, and hobbies. Pinterest also allows users to follow other pinners' boards. Users can follow their favourite brands to see what they are sharing. One key advantage of Pinterest is that it acts as a traffic driver to your website. A user may find one of the brand's articles as a pin on Pinterest and then clicks through to the brand's website to see more. Brands which share relevant and interesting content with their target market on Pinterest increase brand awareness and meaningful engagement with their consumers.

Instagram is an online mobile photo and video-sharing social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos and share them on a variety of other social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Flickr. Users are able to apply digital filters to their images, which adds to the interactivity and creativity of the platform.

YouTube is a video-sharing platform on which most of the videos on the internet can be found. Users can create channels categorising the videos they 'like' and comment on videos. It holds videos of myriad lengths and topics.

Tik Tok is a video-sharing platform most widely used by Generation Z. Users often follow 'challenges' by creating videos following a recent trend. Brands create Tik Tok videos to share content about their products, for example, showing consumers how to use its lipstick for different events.

Each channel has its own characteristics and uses and by the time you read this there may be new channels to choose from. It is not necessary for a brand to be on every social media channel. Brands should rather choose the appropriate platform and ensure consistency in the content shared. This will strengthen the brand's positioning.

Online reputation management

Reputation is the beliefs or opinions generally held about someone or something. Brands will generally have a reputation associated with them by various consumers based on their perceptions or interaction with the brand. To ensure that a favourable reputation is maintained, the posts from and about a brand should consistently reinforce a positive image of the brand. Managing an online reputation is about managing the perception that consumers have of the brand. Think of each post as adding a brick to a wall. The wall, in this case, is the brand's reputation. As Warren Buffett said, 'It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five seconds to ruin it'. Online reputations are particularly fragile, as a single post can tarnish a brand's reputation overnight. When this happens the brand's response is crucial. Managing an online reputation involves responding to both positive and negative mentions about the brand. For example, in the case of positive tweets by consumers you can respond by politely thanking them.

Brands have always had to manage their reputations carefully. Managing a brand's reputation online, however, adds another level of complexity. Online channels and social media have put the power in consumers' hands. Have a complaint? Tweet about it. Had a negative experience with a brand? Share it with friends on Facebook.

Brands need to ensure they closely monitor what is being said about them online and have a plan of action on how to respond and engage with these conversations quickly and effectively. The best way to learn about online reputation management is to observe how other brands handle and think strategically about it. When observing how other brands manage their reputation, ask yourself the following questions:

- They should have rather…?
- I appreciate how they…?
- That was a good move because…?
- Their response was inappropriate because…?

There is a saying that 'any publicity is good publicity'. This may be true at times in the world of celebrities but, when it comes to brands, bad publicity that is not handled correctly could cause lasting damage to a brand's reputation and its profitability.

Bad reviews and negativity are part of online channels, especially social media. Every brand has to deal with these comments in a professional, honest and transparent manner. Getting emotional and aggressive towards consumers online will only be destructive for the brand and harmful to its reputation. In South Africa, the firm BrandsEye has become a global industry leader in understanding and monitoring online reputation and customer experience.

Conclusion

The internet has provided myriad opportunities for brands to market their offerings and position themselves online. As most brands are implementing digital marketing techniques, it is important to do so in a way that makes the brand stand out. Throughout the brand's digital marketing strategy, the brand should be positioned in a consistent and authentic way that informs and adds value to consumers' lives. Doing so requires constant monitoring of online mentions and sharing quality-driven content. It is recommended that, if feasible, the brand has a team dedicated to its digital marketing strategy. The techniques mentioned in this chapter should be considered in the early stages of a digital marketing campaign. As the online world is ever-evolving, new techniques and tools are available daily. It is essential to constantly learn about these to maintain the brand's digital marketing competitive advantage.