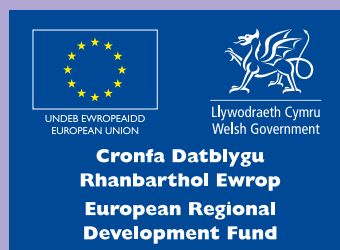For a digital strategy to deliver success there must be a consistent message in any and all activity. You have to maintain a brand message across a variety of channels so that your customers know how and when to connect with your business.

BUSINESS GUIDE

Creating a Digital Marketing Strategy

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Contents

> "Don't yell and sell! Instead, focus on building two-way conversations that connect and engage."

Introduction

Superfast Broadband has driven the exponential growth of digital technologies such as cloud computing; mobiles, tablets and apps; web technologies (content management, ecommerce, location based services); and customer engagement tools (social media, CRM, e-marketing).

All of this makes digital marketing a more important discipline than ever, but creating a digital marketing strategy for the first time is often overwhelming, confusing and frustrating. With an endless number tools available and new platforms being created on what seems to be almost an hourly basis the question for many businesses is 'how do I get started?'

Digital Marketing Strategy

When it comes to developing business relationships digitally there are four critical strategies to consider:

1 **ACCESS** – make your business accessible to customers and prospects anywhere and everywhere

2 **ENGAGE** – position your business as the ultimate source for quality, meaningful advice and content

3 **CONNECT** – become a part of the conversation with your customers

4 **COLLABORATE** – encourage your customers to actively contribute to your bottom-line

4 THE FOUR CRITICAL STRATEGIES

The goal of each is to keep your customer in focus, because if done right you will not only win over new customers, but retain existing ones too.

Five Steps to Developing Your Digital Marketing Strategy

STEP 1: Plan and assess – evaluate your current status

The first step to developing a rewarding digital strategy is to determine what you wish to accomplish:

LEAD GENERATION?

BRAND AWARENESS?

ENHANCED CUSTOMER SERVICE?

With the goal(s) in mind, you can start to set related objectives and KPIs. Setting these at the outset is vital in providing direction, as having no objectives will almost certainly lead to mediocre results.

Examples of digital strategy objectives could be:

WHO YOU WANT TO CONNECT WITH ONLINE

THE TYPE OF CONTENT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE

HOW FREQUENTLY YOU WANT TO INTERACT

The related KPIs might be tied to metrics such as:

INTERACTIONS AND ENGAGEMENT (likes, tweets, re-tweets, etc.)

VOLUME OF SALES

VOLUME OF WEBSITE TRAFFIC

Each digital platform (email, website, Facebook, Twitter) should have its own objectives.

Five Steps to Developing Your Digital Marketing Strategy

STEP 1: Plan and assess – evaluate your current status

As well as evaluating your business it's imperative that you analyse your main competitors too. This will give you an idea of where you currently sit in the local market, as well as an insight into what might or might not be working in your market.

Look at your competitors for the following:

TYPE OF CONTENT
What are your competing businesses using and doing from a digital perspective?

FREQUENCY
How often are they communicating via digital media?

FOCUS
What is the nature of message being talked about?

WINS
What are the stand out areas they are getting results from?

It's vital that this evaluation is not only done at the outset, but that you also have a process in place to listen and constantly evaluate what is being talked about online on an ongoing basis.

With regular listening you can look out for negative digital commentary about your business as well as being able to spot online opportunities. Fortunately there are some free online listening tools that can automate this process for you and flag any anomalies:

Google Alerts – www.google.com/alerts

Hootsuite – www.hootsuite.com

Five Steps to Developing Your Digital Marketing Strategy

STEP 2: Connect – knowing your online market

Once you know your position in the market, the next step is to answer questions around your audience and their digital habits:

- WHERE DO THEY HANGOUT ONLINE?

- WHAT ARE THEIR PREFERRED CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION?

- WHERE DO THEY LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS ONLINE?

- WHAT ARE THEIR PREFERRED SOCIAL PLATFORMS?

- DO THEY ACTIVELY USE MOBILE TECHNOLOGY TO ENGAGE WITH BUSINESSES?

- DO THEY HAVE ACCESS TO HIGH SPEED INTERNET?

- CAN THEY GET 4G INTERNET ON THEIR SMARTPHONES?

- HOW DO YOUR CUSTOMERS LIKE TO VIEW ONLINE CONTENT; READ, WATCH, LISTEN?
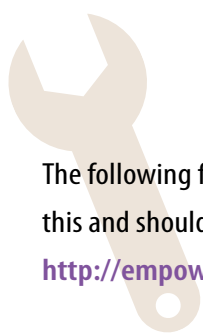
The following free tool from Forrester Groundswell will help you with this and should provide a good starting point to obtain some context: **http://empowered.forrester.com/tool_consumer.html**

With the answers to these questions in place, you next need to establish your business' tone of voice and the messaging that you wish to portray online. Ask yourself:

- What do you want to convey to your target market?

- Why should your target market care about the story you've put forward?

- Is your story able to successfully evoke the desired emotion?

- Does your story incite the intended response?

History has shown that brand stories have been immensely successful in driving interaction with a customer base digitally.

Five Steps to Developing Your Digital Marketing Strategy

STEP 3: Choosing the right platforms

With a wide range of digital tools available, your business is spoilt for options. However, to get the best results, it's imperative that you only use those tools that save you time, save you money, and that help you to connect with your customers. As a rule of thumb only use those tools that offer the best possible potential for reaching your ideal audience. Here are just a few of digital platforms to consider:

Email
relevant to both B2B and B2C markets, and still one of the most effective channels of communication

Pinterest
a picture driven social site all about discovery

Twitter
a micro-blogging platform that limits each post to 140 characters

Facebook
a social sharing site with over 1.3 billion users worldwide

Google +
the social network from Google

YouTube
the second most placed search on the web, behind Google

LinkedIn
business-oriented social networking

When it comes to generating real customers, a report (State of Inbound Marketing – Hubspot, March 2012) cited the following percentage of channel users that actually acquired a customer by using that specific channel:

57% Company blog

62% LinkedIn

52% Facebook

44% Twitter

Five Steps to Developing Your Digital Marketing Strategy

STEP 4: Engage and cultivate – brand building to boost business image

For a digital strategy to deliver success there must be a consistent message in any and all activity. You have to maintain a brand message across a variety of channels so that your customers know how and when to connect with your business.

The most effective way to ensure this happens is via a digital marketing timeline. This is, in essence, a calendar that not only shows all upcoming activity but also keeps track of performance against key objectives. The easiest way to manage this is with a spreadsheet, and as a guide your timeline should include the following column headers:

The message (text for tweet, body of email, focus of advert)	Web address or URL the message will point to	Target audience	Goal of message	Keywords	Campaign go-live date

With the headers in place simply fill the rows with each piece of digital marketing activity - whether that's a tweet, a post on Facebook or an email marketing blast.

At any point you should be able to refer to your digital timeline to know exactly what's happened in the past, what's happening now and what's going to happen in the future.

The online marketing tools that you choose are only as good as the online marketing strategy they fit into.

Five Steps to Developing Your Digital Marketing Strategy

STEP 4: Engage and cultivate – brand building to boost business image

SCHEDULING YOUR CONTENT

With a timeline created it's easy to slip into the trap of thinking "I haven't got time to do this each day." Fortunately there are a variety of tools that let you schedule your content months in advance. This means once you have your spreadsheet created, you can allocate time on a weekly or monthly basis to batch schedule your digital communication using a variety of automated tools. If you personally have limited time, these tools make it simple and easy for any member of staff to take your pre-determined timeline and schedule the content accordingly. When it comes to scheduling automation there are a huge host of tools available, but the ones listed below have stood the test of time:

Social media scheduling and automation

- **Hootsuite:** allows you to schedule nearly all of your social profiles in one place *(www.hootsuite.com)*

- **IFTTT:** excellent for automating tasks between platforms. For example, automatically tweeting about each and every one of your blog posts *(www.ifttt.com)*

Email scheduling and automation

- *Awebber:* allows you to schedule bulk email campaigns as well as set up automated emails to follow up people that fill out forms on your website *(www.aweber.com)*

- **Mailchimp:** very similar to Awebber, although it has a free platform for accounts under 2,000 contacts *(www.mailchimp.com)*

- **Boomerang:** a clever plug-in for Gmail that allows you to schedule personal rather than bulk emails *(www.boomeranggmail.com)*

Blog scheduling

- **Wordpress:** the world's largest blogging platform, allows you to schedule blog posts to be published into the future. With a host of plugins on offer, any blog posts can then be automatically promoted on your business social channels, too *(www.wordpress.com)*

- **Blogger:** a platform similar to Wordpress that is provided by Google *(www.blogger.com)*

You should note that although a pre-planned timeline is a must and scheduling can be a great time-saver, this shouldn't stop you posting and promoting ad-hoc stories via your chosen platforms. Off-the-cuff and interesting anecdotes often drive the most engagement and achieve the biggest reach.

Five Steps to Developing Your Digital Marketing Strategy

STEP 4: Engage and cultivate – brand building to boost business image

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Any business with multiple employees who are likely to be engaging and connecting with customers via social media platforms should consider setting up a social media policy.

The goal of a social media policy is to lay out a clear set of criteria for any social media activity that ensures consistency. It should:

BE SIMPLE TO UNDERSTAND

PROVIDE GUIDANCE FOR EACH PLATFORM

BE UPDATED REGULARLY AS CHANGES OCCUR DIGITALLY

BE ALIGNED WITH YOUR CORE BUSINESS VISION AND VALUES

GAP, the clothing chain, has an excellent social media policy that's well regarded, its core principles being:
- Simple language
- Humour
- Not overly authoritative

To see more examples of other corporate policies visit:
www.socialmediagovernance.com/policies.php

Five Steps to Developing Your Digital Marketing Strategy

STEP 4: Engage and cultivate – brand building to boost business image

PLANNING FOR NEGATIVE COMMENTS

One aspect of your digital strategy that cannot be included in a scheduled timeline is your ability to manage and respond to negative comments. Although these cannot be scheduled on a weekly basis, there should be a best practice procedure outlined as part of your strategy document on how to respond to any such activity.

As a rule of thumb you should consider the following:

Respond as quickly as possible. Even if it will take time to solve the problem, let the customer and the rest of your engaged audience know that you're dealing with it as a matter of priority.

Always respond to any comments in a professional manner, no matter what the tone of the initial posting is. Remember anything said online will be there forever and could be seen by thousands of both existing and potential customers.

If comments have been posted on a social channel, consider replying in the public forum first. It's important for your audience to see that you're actively recognising and dealing with any criticisms. Once the initial reply has been made then look to take the conversation out of the public domain e.g. on to phone, email or direct message.

Use your listening tools to ensure that you are notified any time your business is talked about online, since not every negative comment posted will be directly on one of your own social profiles. This will ensure that you can stay on top of any and all cases where your business might have been portrayed online in an unflattering light.

If a comment posted is irrelevant, generic or obscene – remove it. Some of the social platforms will allow you to mark such comments as 'spam' so that they can't post again.

Don't just respond to negative comments, reply to the positive ones too!

Each digital platform should have its own timeline, but each platform's timeline should share the same common message.

Five Steps to Developing Your Digital Marketing Strategy

STEP 5: Evaluate and measure – putting your success on 'autopilot'

MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF YOUR DIGITAL STRATEGY IS A MUST

Without constant feedback on your digital activity you'll never know or fully understand if your strategy is on track or meeting the goals and objectives you outlined in the first step.

After each piece of digital communication, make sure you update your timeline spreadsheet with data from the campaign. Details such as:

- Number of retweets
- Number of likes
- Number of website clicks
- Number of sales
- Number of replies

By historically recording this information you'll be able to refer back to it when creating new campaigns. Importantly, this will enable you to replicate the things that worked, while ignoring those that didn't.

To help make this measurement easier there are a variety of online tools that will provide you with key metrics so you can quickly evaluate performance. Many of these offer free basic versions, with a small monthly fee for those looking to get a little deeper.

Social media measurement tools:

► Sprout Social . . . . *www.sproutsocial.com*
► Hootsuite. . . . . . . *www.hootsuite.com*
► Klout . . . . *www.klout.com*

Website visitor analytics:

► Google Analytics . *www.google.com/analytics*
► Kiss Metrics . . . . . *www.kissmetrics.com*
► Woopra . . . . *www.woopra.com*

Measure and evaluate

Setting up an online dashboard can be a great way to pull all your digital stats into one place. Giving you a one-stop-shop to measure and evaluate all digital activity from a overview perspective. Luckily there are a couple of online dash boarding tools that make this a quick and simple job, by tying into all the main online marketing systems:

► Ducksboard . . . . . *www.ducksboard.com*
► Geckoboard . . . . *www.geckoboard.com*

FOLLOW THESE

TOP TIPS

1

Align your digital marketing strategy with business goals

Set your businesses priorities and goals for the next 12 months and focus your digital strategy on achieving these.

2

Make your goals SMART

Ensure that your digital goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-based. For example, increase website visits by 20% in next six months.

3

Create an ideal customer avatar or persona

Give them a name and identify characteristics that would make that prospect profitable and a good customer. When running campaigns, think about whether your ideal customer would respond, or not.

4

Document your digital strategy

It should be available for everyone in the business to see; so individual teams and departments are all working towards the same set of goals.

5

Gather competitive intelligence

It's important that you know exactly what your competitors are doing digitally and how you can use your own digital strategy to best compete.

6

Conduct a content audit

Look for case studies, 'how-to' guides, resources and checklists that you currently provide to customers and start to leverage these as part of your digital strategy. You'll be surprised how much content you already have.

7

Review regularly

You need to track progress and evolve your strategy over time.

8

Manage negative reviews

Nobody's perfect, so if someone posts something negative online about your business make sure your digital strategy outlines how these comments should be responded to in a friendly and professional manner.

9

Take advantage of automation and scheduling tools

Use these tools for posting digital content - they'll save hours of time, energy and resources on a daily basis.

10

Make two-way conversations the goal

The focus of your digital communication should be to leverage engagement with your audience.

Superfast Business Wales

NEXT STEPS

1. Register to attend a fully-funded Business Development Workshop:
   www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/events

2. Make an appointment to see a Business Adviser who will help you
   create a personal action plan to grow your business:
   www.business.wales.gov.uk/contact-us

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

See how other businesses in Wales have exploited Superfast Broadband:
www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/superfast-success-stories

Find out how much your business could save with our savings calculator:
www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/savings-calculator

Other Business Guides that may interest you include:
www.business.wales.gov.uk/superfastbusinesswales/superfast-business-guides

For monthly updates on business development, technology news and events
subscribe to the Business Wales Newsletter:
https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKWALES/subscriber/new

For more information call 03000 6 03000 or visit:
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