

# A Digital Marketing Plan for Small Businesses

## A Simple yet Comprehensive Guide

### Introduction

In today's world, everything is digital. People are constantly on social media, now so more than ever before as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Small businesses may find it challenging to navigate the intricate digital landscape they suddenly find themselves immersed in. This is why it is crucial to be properly equipped with a digital marketing plan to help organize your business campaigns. This Digital Marketing Plan for Small Businesses can easily be split into 5 simple steps, that all revolve around one simple concept - research. Research is critical in understanding your target audience and will play a major role in any digital marketing plan.



## Step 1: Establishing goals, Demographics, and Image



The first thing in any business plan is to set a target, something you can aspire to and work towards throughout the implementation of your digital marketing plan. A strategic method in doing this would be to set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound) goals.

### What are SMART Goals?

#### *S: Specific*

When setting a goal, it is important to know what specifically you are working towards. Specific goals present a tangible plan of action - for example, "I want to gain more website conversions through social media marketing and branding on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter" as supposed to "I want more conversions."

It could help to refer to the '6 W' questions (Who, What, When, Where, Why, How) as a basis for setting your goal. These questions allow you to easily identify concepts in need of improvement and aid you to develop a goal that addresses all of them.

#### *M: Measurable*

A specific goal is meaningless unless there is a method to quantify said goal. How are you going to measure how close or far you are to your goal? Measurable goals deal with clear numbers, to track your progress throughout your campaign. To build on the previous example, adding a quantifiable variable into the goal would result in something like: "I want to gain 1000 new website conversions every month through social media marketing and branding on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter."

To set this goal, some helpful questions to keep in mind are:

- How easy is this to measure in small/large increments?
- Will this criterion hold up for all aspects of my goal?
- Is there a clear objective value that can easily be compared with the current status of my goal?

#### *A: Attainable*

Next, you should make sure that the goal is realistic. A near-impossible goal would make it extremely difficult to track the progress of your company, thereby compromising the entire digital marketing plan.

To ensure that a goal is attainable, it would be a good idea to do some research on your competitors - have they come close to this goal? If so, how were they able to do that? Once again updating the aforementioned goal, it could now be: "I want to gain 500 new website conversions every month through social media marketing and branding on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter." 1000 website conversions could seem daunting and unattainable, so smaller businesses should not be scared to aim lower.

#### *R: Relevant*

There should always be something of value received from the hypothetical completion of this goal - whether it's brand awareness, revenue, or conversions. The goal should be relevant to your company and will contribute to its growth.

How will this goal help further the success of the company? Will the amount of work being put into this goal be worth the final result? In our previous example, it could very well be possible that the business already has a strong website presence, and instead wants to focus its attention on mobile apps to expand its horizons. The new goal would then be: "I want to gain 500 new mobile conversions every month through social media marketing and branding on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter."

#### *T: Time-Bound*

Any SMART goal needs to be time-bound, with a start date and a projected completion date. This puts the goal on a deadline, which allows people to stay on the same page throughout the realization of the goal.

Upon integrating a deadline into the goal, the SMART goal example is now complete. "I want to gain 500 new mobile conversions every month

through social media marketing and branding on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. This project will commence on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2022, with a projected end date of September, 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022"

After setting a SMART goal, establishing a target audience is one of the most important factors when creating a digital marketing plan, or any type of marketing plan for that matter. Create a typical person that would be interested in your product/service and try to discern their likes, dislikes, home life, hobbies, etc. This will help you get in the head of the consumer and start to understand what they want and how to grab their attention. Choosing a target audience heavily depends on the situational analysis of the business.

### **How do you set a Target Audience?**

Deciding on a demographic should heavily depend upon what it is that you are offering. Who needs your product/service? Who do you want to be associated with your product/service? This select group or type of people you would like to target makes it easier to know how to market to them. Are they trendy teens who spend a lot of time on popular social media sites? Or are they homemakers who make more use of the television than they do social media? To help identify a target audience, it might be helpful to use tracking sites such as Google Analytics to check which specific demographics are your primary consumers. You could also look at your competitors and base your target audience on theirs.

Now that you've determined your end goal and your target audience, it is important to consider the approach you will take. How will you appeal to your target demographic? How can you optimize the public image your business presents itself as? The answer both these questions is personas - a personality of sorts that you assign to the public image of your business.

### **Branding and Personas**

Personas or brands are how you present yourself to the public. They tell the public not only what your business is and the things it stands for. While creating a brand has always been an essential part of marketing, the only opportunity businesses have to display that person is during crisis management or when consumers enter the business space. In digital marketing, however, the business is essentially entering the space of the consumer. The consumer has a chance to see the brand up close and even interact with it as if the entire business entity is one single person. The key is for business to be likeable. Putting your business in their space is putting your brand out there for criticism and hoping it comes out unscathed. Your business' digital presence must make your demographic think, "I like this brand and what it stands for." There are many different ways to achieve this all depending on what it is that your small business offers.

## **Types of Brand Personas**

### *Sincerity:*

Sincerity as a brand personality includes being seen as honest, wholesome, down-to-earth, etc. Many businesses in the food, hospitality and safety industries employ this type of branding. Some examples include Campbell's Soup, Hallmark and Allstate. From their colours in their logos to the voices used to represent them, soothing tones are used in order to make the consumer feel comforted.

### *Excitement:*

Businesses that want to associate themselves with a younger audience typically prefer to use an exciting brand personality. These brands paint themselves as fun, anti-establishment and witty. Many brands employ this personality. Some include Nike, TikTok and MTV to name a few.

### *Sophistication:*

Sophisticated brand types are typically used with luxury brands such as Chanel, Porsche, and Gucci. They give off an aura of prestige and glamour. Businesses with this brand type often consider their products as high-end and are often quite expensive.

### *Ruggedness:*

The rugged brand personality is built to survive the changing of trends. This brand is specifically for the tough and outdoors lovers. These brands are seen as hard-working, resilient, durable and authentic. The two main types of businesses that associate themselves with this personality are those that sell outdoor equipment and certain car brands, like RAM Trucks, LL Bean and Levis.

### *Competence:*

Competence brands are the type to let their product/service speak for itself. They pride themselves on their qualifications and reliability. They get the job done properly and punctually, no questions asked. This brand personality type often targets consumers who value consistency and competency. Examples of competent brand personality types are Microsoft, UPS, and Samsung.

## Step 2: Creating an online presence through Social Media Platforms



To increase brand awareness, it is essential to be able to be found online. In today's world, everything is digital, and people are using their phones/social media more than ever before as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown. The future of marketing is digital, using SEO for market research. In addition to this, you can target specific regions or demographics using geo-targeting. The first step to all of this is to create social media accounts.

### Which Social Media platforms should you use?

#### Facebook

Regardless of the industry, business, or brand persona, a Facebook account is always recommended. This particular social media site is seen as a staple because of its influence. Some sites, like Facebook may not serve the purposes of reaching your audience per se, but instead serve as legitimacy. The legacy and history of Facebook is such that if any business wants to establish that they are real and trustworthy they should have an account. If your target audience is younger may want to keep this account to a minimum.

#### Instagram

In recent years, Instagram is slowly gaining the same status as Facebook in terms of necessity in business growth. Since younger and older generations

are flocking to this social media, all businesses should have a well-kept and updated Instagram account. The way Instagram is laid-out is designed to accommodate different aesthetics and moods to attract those who visit your page. So coming up with the right colours and layouts is important to successfully portraying your brand personality on this platform.

### [Twitter](#)

Twitter is an excellent tool for companies that adopt the energetic personality type. This tool can be wildly successful and must be used carefully and meticulously. Successful twitter business accounts are usually highly interactive with consumers, and due to the general mood of the platform, they strive to be humorous, witty and a little cheeky. Businesses that want to use this platform must tread carefully since this close and informal interaction with people who aren't necessarily loyal to their brand can open up to severe criticism.

### [LinkedIn](#)

LinkedIn is great especially if your business centres around continuous learning, training, self-help, etc. This platform is for professionals looking to connect with other professionals and continuously looking for better opportunities, if your business aids them in any of those endeavors, you are sure to benefit greatly. However, even if your business isn't in this industry, it to a lesser scale than Facebook establishes legitimacy as well. This account doesn't need to be monitored regularly. The important steps are creating the account, putting your logo, listing certifications and achievements and posting when the company reaches a milestone, receives recognition or takes part in a social welfare activity.

### [Snapchat](#)

Snapchat is a visual platform, with the majority of its messages being images or video. The age demographic that uses Snapchat the most is teenagers. Snapchat has a very specific audience type, with the optimal brand personas being excitement and ruggedness.

### [YouTube](#)

As far as engagement goes, YouTube is one of the best, if not the best platform out there. With over 2 billion users and a user-friendly data analysis function, YouTube is great for pinpointing a specific demographic. Its large audience also makes it perfect for any brand personality type, as there is a near

guarantee that there are users interested in your product. YouTube is an all-around platform, which if done right, can boost your business in all aspects.

### [Pinterest](#)

As a platform meant for innovative ideas and creative thinkers, Pinterest is widely used across all age demographics. This makes it ideal for increasing brand awareness, especially for small businesses. In addition to this, Pinterest has a better return on investment (ROI) than other large social media platforms, making it ideal for paid advertising. Pinterest is optimal for businesses with the ruggedness or excitement brand persona.

### [Medium](#)

Medium is a blog-based platform, where companies may easily write blogs about their industry to raise brand awareness. This allows the company to be identifiable and associated with the industry in question. The age demographic that uses Medium the most is between 18 and 50. Medium works best with the sophistication and competence brand persona types.

### [Reddit](#)

Reddit is a largely overlooked platform in the business world. Although it is not optimal for gaining website traffic, conversions, or even leads, its primary purpose for business is market research. Reddit is a question-based platform where people can easily receive feedback from large groups of people. Using Reddit, you can easily ask for feedback on specific ad campaigns, website design, or even your entire business as a whole. The age demographic that uses Reddit the most is under 30 years old. Reddit works best with the sincerity or excitement brand persona types.

Now that you've chosen your social media platform according to your target audience, how are you going to stand out in the platforms? You need to optimize all of your social media profiles to show up on the recommended feed. Although there are different ranking systems which differ from platform to platform, there are some concepts which are universal.

## **How do you optimize your social media page?**

### *Market Research*

Market Research is one of the most crucial aspects of marketing. It is essential to know what is in demand, who wants it, and why they want it. It is taking your previously identified target audience and analysing them. This allows you to predict how your audience will react to certain elements of your business, and will let you know whether it is worth it to follow through on that



idea. The more you know about your target audience, and the more you implement this knowledge into your social media content, the easier it will be for your social media pages to gain traction online.

### *Keywords*

In any social media page, keywords play a crucial factor in determining your ranking position. It lets the platform know what exactly the page is about, and allows the algorithm to correctly match the page with the audience. However, it is important not to go overboard with this concept, and do what is known as keyword stuffing. This is when an unnaturally large amount of keywords are used unnecessarily or incomprehensibly in a sentence, and many platform's algorithms will punish the ranking of said page as a result.

### *Links*

What is the goal of social media? They want users to stay on their platform for as long as possible, so anything creators do that will help them do that will be greatly optimized. An easy thing you can do to help boost traffic on the platform as well as your own account is to post links. On one post, put in a few links to some of your other posts, so users who see it can check them out. Not only are you improving your ranking, you are also increasing brand awareness too. It's a win-win! One important thing to note is that it works the other way around too. Try to keep links to other platforms/websites to a minimum, as companies don't want to redirect attention to their competitors.

### *Quality Content and Retention Rate*

If the majority of users were to watch a certain piece of content all the way through, it means that content has a high retention rate. As stated earlier, companies want users to use their platform for as long as possible. So, if a video statistically manages to keep users on the platform longer by having a high retention rate, that page would be promoted to a more wide-spread audience. The only thing you can do to affect this is to create consistent quality content which will intrigue and retain viewers. Consistency is also a key factor, platforms would want to promote channels that regularly produce content to keep users engaged that channels that don't/

### *Sharing*

To promote your page, you need to make it easy for your viewers to share your videos with others. The more your followers share your content, the more traffic you drive to your social media page and/or website. Sharing your

videos is always beneficial to you, so you need to make it as accessible as possible to your viewers to do it.

### *Local SEO*

As a small business, you might not have a huge budget, so it is important to make great use of local SEO, specifically local citations. A [local citation](#) is a free way to get your business' name and information online. You need to include your business' name, location, phone number, and all other essential information. This tightens your audience and makes your efforts more worthwhile instead of spreading it thin.

## **Step 3: Choosing a marketing/campaign type and a bidding strategy**



As discussed previously in the section about SMART goals, it is always important to have specific goals. You can't go in with the mentality of "I want to grow my business" - there are way too many variables at play to properly focus on that one goal. Instead, you need to specify exactly what you want to grow in your business, and focus on one at a time through ad campaigns. An advertisement campaign is when you put together a series of promotional content which are all working towards one particular goal.

### **What are the types of Ad Campaigns?**

#### *Search Campaign*

A search ad is when you boost leads and traffic to your site by showing an ad when users are searching for similar products, services, or businesses.

### *Display Campaign*

A display campaign is meant to increase brand awareness by showing advertisements based on the user's interests.

### *Video Campaign*

Video campaigns are ordinarily done through video platforms, namely Youtube. Video ads allow you to pinpoint the audience you want to reach with the campaign, which allows for greater sales, traffic, and brand awareness. Another benefit to video ads through YouTube is that it functions on a pay-per-click system, meaning you only pay when people click on the ad.

### *Shopping Campaign*

Shopping ads allow you to share more information about your business with the customer. It does not reach quite as many people as other types of ad campaigns but the leads it does give are statistically more likely to result in a conversion. Allows for versatility in ads.

### *App Campaign*

App campaigns are used exclusively for mobile devices. It has great reach, but not much use outside of smartphones.

Now that you've established the type of campaign, you need to determine the overall goal for these campaigns. What specific goal do you have for this campaign? These are known as bidding strategies.

## **What are the types of Bidding Strategies?**

### *Awareness-based bidding strategies*

In awareness-based initiatives, the end goal is to increase brand awareness and visibility. Branding your company, and getting your name out there, and trying to associate your name with the product/service that you offer.

### *Consideration-focused bidding strategies*

This bidding strategy is built around gaining clicks from the target audience. In these strategies, it is beneficial to use keywords to maximize the effectiveness of each individual advertisement.

### *Conversion-focused bidding strategies*

Conversions and a low CPA (cost-per-acquisition) are the main focus of this bidding strategy. A conversion is a user who visits your website and becomes a customer by completing a transaction.

#### *Revenue-focused bidding strategies*

This bidding strategy is used to optimize revenue and earnings. This is done by keeping your target return on ad spend (ROAS) in account.

### Step 4: Allocating a specific budget for campaigns (Daily/Total)



If you want to ensure maximum results for your advertising campaign, you might want to set aside a budget to use on paid advertising. Paid advertising is an advertisement format where you pay certain companies to promote your page/website higher on their rankings. Rest assured, paid marketing isn't essential for the success of a business, but it does add a significant boost to brand awareness and website traffic.

#### **Budget Spending**

##### *Realistic*

While allocating a budget, it is absolutely essential to maintain a realistic attitude. You need to be able to identify where and how much money needs to be spent on each individual task.

##### *External Factors*

Oftentimes, businesses go overboard on paid advertising and campaigns, and spend more money than necessary on ads. While they can be beneficial, a lot of that money would be better off spent elsewhere. It is important to know exactly when and where to spend your money, and this includes knowing about certain external factors which could determine your money's efficiency. The first major factor is seasonality. If your business gains a

significant boost in revenue at a certain point during the year because of holidays or celebrations, it would be wise to allocate a significant amount of your budget for this time of year. This way, it would result in more conversions than at any other point during the year. Another major factor is market share, it is important to try and predict events in the market, so optimize the spent money. The last factor is growth, where you use market research to try and forecast growth possibilities for your business.

## **Deciding on a Workforce**

### *Marketing Firm*

Marketing firms are professional creatives that you can hire to manage all of your business's marketing needs, from PR to Digital Marketing. Your business's entire public image is completely in their hands. That being said, they themselves are businesses that need to generate profit, pay their workforce. So make sure your business can afford the additional expenses. Most agencies are very transparent about their prices, so the onus is on you to make an honest evaluation of your businesses financial position. If your business is still in start up stages it isn't recommended that you make such a long term commitment. Check out [this article](#)'s comprehensive pros and cons list to explore this option more.

### *Marketing Department*

The scale to which this applies depends on how small your business is. If your business boils down to yourself and founding members then perhaps the extent of your 'department' is the person who feels more comfortable with setting up a digital presence. This can save considerably on cost and budgeting would boil down to operational costs of a domain, campaigns etc. However if your business has developed to the point of having a considerable following you may want to consider bringing on staff to handle marketing. Regardless of how popular your company is, though, if it is still considered a "small business", hiring a full blown 3+ employee department is not recommended. One maybe two people should suffice and since wages would be an additional expense it would be fiscally logical to include all marketing in their job description and not just digital.

### *Self*

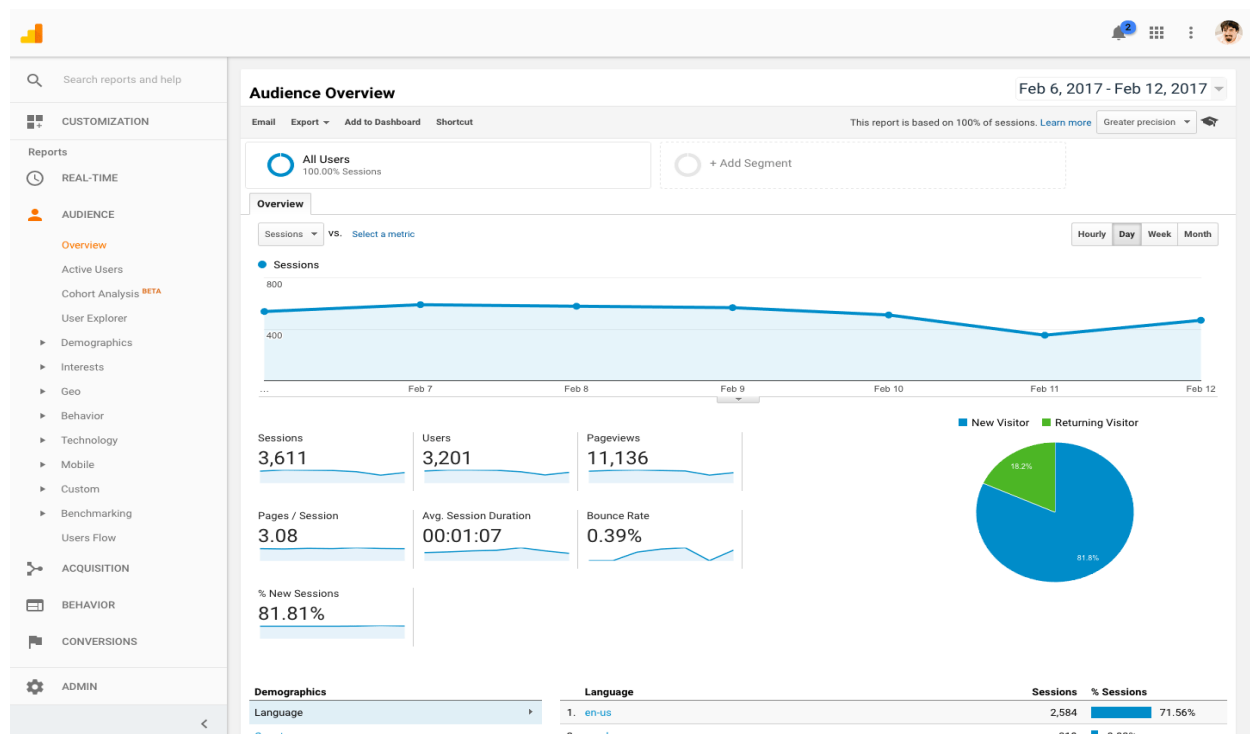
In theory if you felt confident enough to establish an online presence effectively you could do it yourself. The information here is essentially the same as under the Marketing Department heading if your business is still in its infancy. However, if your business is a little more experienced then this might be quite

the task. Trying to maintain the upkeep of a website, social media sites, blogs, etc, can be incredibly time consuming. On the other hand, doing it yourself not only saves on money but also allows for your ideas to be executed exactly how you envisioned.

### Freelancers

Freelancers aren't a part of the staff and so aren't paid for the time they aren't working or by hours. Some are paid by how much they produce or for designing your website. The price can still build up if you want multiple tasks completed or want a long term arrangement. They are an excellent option if you want one thing taken care of that you yourself have limited knowledge on. That being said, hiring a freelancer is a good idea in combination with doing digital marketing yourself. Some sites like [Fiverr](#) and [Upwork](#) have freelancers all over the world with various pricings just waiting to be commissioned.

## Step 5: Tracking Your Campaigns and Adjusting Accordingly



Now that you've set your SMART goal, target audience, brand persona, campaign type, bidding strategy, budget, and a workforce, as well as establishing a social media presence, you need to monitor your campaigns to track their successes. To observe the effectiveness of small changes to your campaigns, and then alter it accordingly is invaluable to businesses.

## **Use programs that aid you: Google Analytics, Google Ads**

Programs like Google Analytics and Google Ads help predict and track your business's digital presence online. Google Ads' machine learning capabilities allows it to predict the success of certain campaigns, and its performance planner can forecast optimal bids/budgets for future reference. It may be a little more useful when just starting out in its ability to predict keywords and trends. Its counterpart Google Analytics tracks your customer's digital footprints on your website. To track your website, place a tracking code provided by Analytics onto each page you want to track. From there, there are a multitude of funnels you can put in place to see specific data. Each funnel can be viewed separately, and you can check what specific page any particular user leaves on to adapt your approach appropriately

## **Evaluate ROI**

Evaluating Return on Investments basically involves using the data collected from Google Analytics and assessing which of the campaigns or digital efforts was the most and least successful. This information is useful for deciding what to pour workforce efforts on and understanding what your audience wants. However, a campaign that drives people to your website still isn't successful until it creates revenue. So Identify what digital initiative generated the most revenue and which generated the least.

## **Increase Investment according to effectiveness**

After completing a comprehensive evaluation, use the information you have gained to make your marketing investment decisions. For example, if a particular campaign wasn't very effective in bringing in revenue, then perhaps it may be best to discontinue it or scale it back. Whatever brought in the most revenue should be given more attention and invested in slightly more than last time in hopes of reaping more profits.

## **Closing Thoughts**

As a small business, it could seem overwhelming and difficult to create a digital marketing plan - especially during these tough times. However, as long as you make informed decisions using market research, it will make it a lot easier to keep your business on track.

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