

## 1.8: Crafting a digital marketing strategy

Any activity with an end goal (whether it's winning a war, building a city or selling a product) should have a blueprint in place for every person in the organisation to follow. In digital marketing, however, there is no single definitive approach so each business must create its own roadmap. However, there are questions you can use to guide this process.

A strategy needs to cover the questions of who you are and who you are not. It should also include what you are offering and to whom, as well as why and how you are doing so. The steps and questions below cover what an organisation should be aware of when creating and implementing a strategy that will meet its marketing objectives and solve its challenges.

### 1. Context

The first step in crafting a successful strategy is to examine the context of the organisation and the various stakeholders. We covered this under marketing strategy earlier in this chapter, but it bears repeating.

- What is the context in which you are operating (PESTLE factors) and how is this likely to change in the future?
- Who are you, why does your brand matter and what makes your brand useful and valuable?
- Who are your customers, and what needs, wants and desires do they have?
- Who are your competitors? These may extend beyond organisations that compete with you on the basis of price and product and could also be competition in the form of abstracts such as time and mindshare. Thorough market research will reveal the answers to these questions.

### 2. Value exchange

Once you have examined the market situation, the second step is an examination of your value proposition or promise: in other words, what unique value your organisation can add to that market. It is important to identify the supporting valueadds to the brand promise that are unique to the digital landscape. What extras, beyond the basic product or service, do you offer to customers?

The Internet offers many channels for value creation. However, the definition of what is 'valuable' depends largely on the target audience, so it is crucial to research your users and gather insights into what they want and need. Gathering the right data can help you evolve this value exchange over time.

### 3. Objectives

When setting your digital marketing goals, there are four key aspects to consider: objectives, tactics, key performance indicators (KPIs) and targets. Let's look at each one in turn.

#### Objectives

Objectives are essential to any marketing endeavour, without them your strategy would have no direction and no end goal or win conditions. It's important to be able to take a step back and ask, "Why are we doing any of this? What goal, purpose or outcome are we looking for?"

- What are you trying to achieve?
- How will you know if you are successful?

Sometimes, words like 'objective' can be used in different situations with slightly different meanings. Remember, the objective of a website or online campaign is aligned with the strategic outcomes of the business. The objective of a campaign may be to create awareness for a new business or increase sales of a product. The objective answers the question, "What do we want to achieve with this marketing campaign?" For example, an objective might be to increase the sales of a product, grow brand awareness or increase website traffic. A business objective (something that your business will either do or not do) and a marketing objective (a change in customer behaviour that your business wants to achieve) are not the same thing!

Objectives need to be SMART:

- **Specific** – the objective must be clear and detailed, rather than vague and general.
- **Measurable** – the objective must be measurable so that you can gauge whether you are attaining the desired outcome.
- **Attainable** – the objective must be something that is possible for your brand to achieve, based on available resources.
- **Realistic** – the objective must also be sensible and based on data and trends; don't exaggerate or overestimate what can be achieved.

- **Time-bound** – finally, the objective must be linked to a specific timeframe.

## Goals

The goal of a website or campaign in web analytics refers to an action that a user takes on a website or a type of user behaviour. This action could be making a purchase, signing up for a newsletter, or viewing a certain number of pages in a visit. A completed goal is called a conversion. Goals are derived from objectives and answer the question, “What do we need users to do in order to achieve our objective?”

### Note

Goals related to visitor behaviour, such as time spent on site or pageviews per visit, are referred to as engagement goals.

## Tactics

Objectives are not the same as tactics. Tactics are the specific tools or approaches you will use to meet your objectives, for example, a retention-based email newsletter, a Facebook page, or a CRM implementation. As a strategy becomes more complex, you may have multiple tactics working together to try to achieve the same objective. Tactics may change (and often should), but the objective should remain your focus. We’ll look at tactics in more detail in the next section.

## Key performance indicators (KPIs)

Key performance indicators or KPIs are metrics that are used to indicate whether tactics are performing well and meeting your objectives. There are many metrics to be analysed, and determining which are important will help to focus on what really matters to a particular campaign. KPIs relate closely to goals, and answer the question, “What data do we need to look at to see if goals are being completed?” For example, if your objective is to increase website traffic, you may look at the number of website visitors, the percentage of new visitors, and how long users stay on the site.

KPIs are determined per tactic, with an eye on the overall objective. The diagram below shows how a number of KPIs can feed into one goal, and a number of goals can in turn feed into one objective. A single objective can have a number of goals, each with their own number of KPIs, to ensure it is achieved.

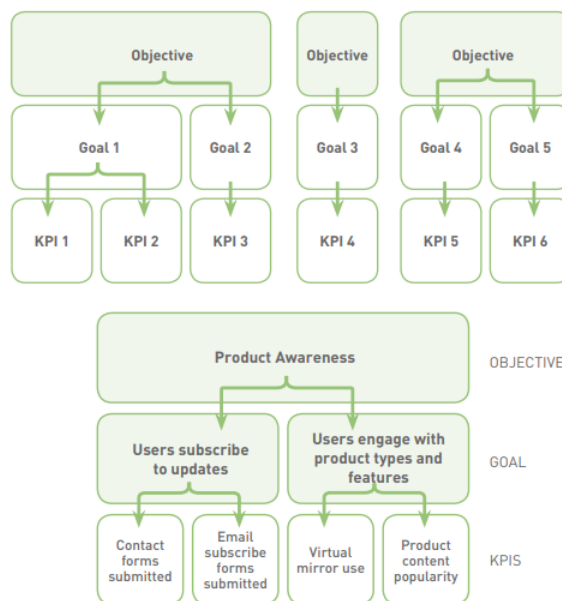


Figure 1.8.1: Objectives, goals and KPIs. *Adapted from Kaushik, 2010.*

## Targets

Finally, targets are the specific values that are set for your KPIs to reach within a specific time period. That is, they are the actual target values that KPIs need to meet in order for the campaign to be declared a success. Sportspeople need to reach targets to advance their careers, for example, come in the top ten to qualify for the final, or run 10 km in under 27 minutes. If you meet or exceed a target, you are succeeding; if you don’t reach it, you’re falling behind on your objectives and you need to reconsider your

approach (or your target). If one KPI is ‘newsletter subscriptions’, then a target might be ‘100 subscriptions every month’ so if one month falls short at 70, this will quickly reveal that a fix is required.

When setting objectives and targets for any campaign, remember to think about overlaps in customer behaviour that might impact how you measure your success. People might click on an ad and visit your website to buy something, but they could also browse and then go and buy something in the brick-and-mortar store. The total economic value of online activities needs to account for this so that you can get an idea of the true contribution digital is making.

#### ✓ Example 1.8.1

Here is an example:

##### SMART objective:

- Increase sales through the eCommerce platform by 10% within the next six months.

##### Tactics:

- Search advertising
- Social media marketing using the Facebook brand page

##### KPIs per tactic:

- Search advertising – number of search referrals, cost per click on the ads
- Facebook brand page – number of comments and shares on campaign-specific posts

##### Targets per tactic:

- Search advertising – 1 000 search referrals after the first month, with a 10% month-on-month increase after that
- Facebook brand page – 50 comments and 10 shares on campaign-specific posts per week

## 4. Tactics and evaluation

Many digital tools and tactics are available once you have defined your digital marketing objectives. Each tactic has its strengths – for example, acquisition (gaining new customers) may best be driven by search advertising, while email is one of the most effective tools for selling more products to existing customers. The table below expands on some of the most popular tactics available to digital marketers and their possible outcomes. These will be covered in far more detail in the Engage section of this book.

Table 1.7.1: Marketing tactics.

| Tactic   | Outcome   |
|--|---|
| SEO  | Customer retention and acquisition  |
| This is the practice of optimising a website to rank higher on the search engine results pages for relevant search items. SEO involves creating relevant, fresh and user-friendly content that search engines index and serve when people enter a search term that is relevant to your product or service. | SEO has a key role to play in acquisition, as it ensures your organisation’s offering will appear in the search results, allowing you to reach potential customers. A site that is optimised for search engines is also a site that is clear, relevant and well designed. These elements ensure a great user experience, meaning that SEO also plays a role in retention. |
| Search advertising   | Sales, customer retention and acquisition   |
| In pay-per-click or search advertising, the advertiser pays only when someone clicks on their ad. The ads appear on search engine results pages.   | The beauty of search advertising is that it is keyword based. This means an ad will come up in response to the search terms entered by the consumer. It therefore plays a role in sales, acquisition and retention. It allows the advertiser to reach people who are already in the buying cycle or are expressing interest in what they have to offer.                   |
| Online advertising   | Branding and acquisition  |
| Online advertising covers advertising in all areas of the Internet – ads in emails, ads on social networks and mobile devices, and display ads on normal websites.   | The main objective of online advertising is to raise brand awareness online. It can be more interactive and therefore less disruptive than traditional or static online advertising, as users can choose to engage with the ad or not. Online advertising can be targeted to physical locations, subject areas, past user behaviours, and much more.                      |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Affiliate marketing  | Sales and branding  |
| Affiliate marketing is a system of reward whereby referrers are given a 'finder's fee' for every referral they give.   | Online affiliate marketing is widely used to promote eCommerce websites, with the referrers being rewarded for every visitor, subscriber or customer provided through their efforts. It is a useful tactic for brand building and acquisition.  |
| Video marketing  | Branding, customer retention and value creation   |
| Video marketing involves creating video content. This can be wither outright video advertising, or can be valuable, useful, content marketing.   | Since it is so interactive and engaging, video marketing is excellent for capturing and retaining customer attention. Done correctly, it provides tangible value – in the form of information, entertainment or inspiration – and boosts a brand's image in the eyes of the public.   |
| Social media   | Branding, value creation and participation  |
| Social media is media in the form of text, visuals and audio, that can be shared online. It has changed the face of marketing by allowing collaboration and connection in a way that no other channel has been able to offer.  | From a strategic perspective, social media, is useful for brand building, raising awareness of the brand and its story, and encouraging the customer to become involved with the brand. The shareable and accessible nature of social media platforms allows brands to communicate and engage directly with their customers. Social media also offers brands a way to interact with their customers, instead of just broadcasting to them.        |
| Email marketing  | Customer retention and value creation   |
| Email marketing is a form of direct marketing that delivers commercial and content-based messages to an audience. It is extremely cost effective, highly targeted, customisable on a mass scale and completely measurable – all of which make it one of the most powerful digital marketing tactics. | Email marketing is a tool for building relationships with potential and existing customers through valuable content and promotional messages. It should maximise the retention and value of these customers, ultimately leading to greater profitability for the organisation a whole. A targeted, segmented email database means that a brand can direct messages at certain sectors of their customer base in order to achieve the best result. |

Once the objectives and tactics have been set, these should be cross-checked and re-evaluated against the needs and resources of your organisation to make sure your strategy is on the right track and no opportunities are being overlooked.

## 5. Ongoing optimisation

It is increasingly important for brands to be dynamic, flexible and agile when marketing online. New tactics and platforms emerge every week, customer behaviours change over time, and people's needs and wants from brand evolve as their relationship grows.

This process of constant change should be considered in the early stages of strategy formulation, allowing tactics and strategies to be modified and optimised as you go. After all, digital marketing strategy should be iterative, innovative and open to evolution.

Understanding user experience and the user journey is vital to building successful brands. Budget should be set aside upfront for analysing user data and optimising conversion paths.

Social thinking and socially informed innovation are also valuable and uniquely suited to the online space. Socially powered insight can be used to inform strategic decisions in the organisation, from product roadmaps to service plans. Brands have moved away from being merely present in social media towards actively using it, aligning it with actionable objectives and their corresponding metrics. This is critical in demonstrating ROI and understating the opportunities and threats in the market.

Managing the learning loop (the knowledge gained from reviewing the performance of your tactics, which can then be fed back into the strategy) can be difficult. This is because brand cycles often move more slowly than the real-time results you will see online. It is therefore important to find a way to work agility into the strategy, allowing you to be quick, creative and proactive, as opposed to slow, predictable and reactive. The data collected around success of your marketing strategy should feed into a larger pool of information used to drive business decisions.

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