

Digital Media Primer

10 Essential Tools for Marketers

By Drew Dorgan, President

The digital world is full of sexy lingo and products that are alluring for marketing managers — much like television and radio were only a few short decades ago, only with more possibilities. However, experienced marketers know that an inflated digital plan can lead to blown budgets and false return metrics. Digital tools are a necessary part of the smart marketer's strategic plan, but they are most effective when viewed as one channel in a well-integrated program.

For many of our large clients and all of our smaller clients, we utilize a well-balanced landscape of digital and traditional tools to support brands through expanded reach and recall. Our balanced plan calls for ten essential tools in the digital channel of a healthy marketing plan:

- 1) **Your Website:** An optimized website. Not very long ago, we were telling our clients to jump on the web with a solid, basic site. While the website has replaced corporate brochures as the top tool for supporting company and brand credibility, the options for Flash and video on a website can quickly devour a site's budget. That's not saying that you don't need a corporate brochure for distribution at tradeshow, as a leave-behind at new customer meetings, or for prospective employees. With digital printing and a carefully budgeted site, you should be able to have both. Every good website should focus on four things.
 - a. **Content:** Clearly convey your products and/or services. People go to the web for solid information, and they should be able to find it easily.
 - b. **Navigation:** Test your navigation on both the younger and older generations not familiar with your company. It should be intuitive to both. If they have trouble finding their way around your site, the navigation is not intuitive.
 - c. **Search Engine Optimization (SEO):** While SEO is a complicated subject that is highly secretive and proprietary, it is crucial to being found on the web (read #3 below for more details).
 - d. **Brand Consistency:** It bears repeating that your website should reflect, integrate AND support your brand. The messaging on your website should be consistent with all other representations of the company from employees to advertising to products and services.
- 2) **Landing Pages:** Remember to develop key landing pages for dedicated products or services. Landing pages can be included within a website or on a specified URL. The overall goal is to deliver pertinent content for a distinct target audience; landing pages must pay off the promise of the original link that

- motivated your client to click to get there. Tie e-ads to relevant landing pages so today's at-a-glance generation of users don't have to search for the information promised in the ads. Much like the headlines in a magazine article, your visitors must know they are in the right place immediately through visuals and the content. By expediting transfer time to access relevant information on properly coded landing pages, you not only have happier customers, but it will also help your Search Engine Optimization/SEO efforts.
- 3) **Search Engine Optimization (SEO):** Behind the glitz and glamour of your website should be solid, ethical SEO — tools for helping the search engines match queries to websites. Avoid companies that promise top slots on all the search engines within days of being paid for that service. If it were that easy, no one would find the things they wanted on the web. The customer or searcher is king in today's market. Search engines know that users will jump ship to another search engine if they don't find the information they want. It is extremely important to remember that 80% of individuals searching the web click on one of the top three choices in the organic search engine section of search results. Good SEO involves an understanding of basic coding, keywords, metatags and live type in relevant text. This doesn't have to be expensive, but it does require much patience. The sheer volume of webcrawlers and data being analyzed, factored in with things like the amount of traffic on your site, the number of relevant click-throughs on associated searches, and so much more means that quality SEO takes months for results to be realized.
 - 4) **Statistical Analysis:** Marketers love results. Agencies have been charged over the past several years to quantify results on everything to justify their existence. That said, beware of statistical analysis. Just as accountants can cook the books, marketers can cook the stats. Companies that do not have access to your stats may claim that they are tracking statistics on your site just to get the business. Stats may also not reconcile truly from one source. For example, HMA places a variety of button ads. We use a statistically sound average of the stats for click-throughs based on our publication's stats, our web stats and our Google Analytics. Each program may measure a unique click-through differently, so an average is a much better computation to study. Pay particular attention to conversion — defining this with your marketing partner to make sense for your program. The analysis of data trends is also imperative. Review your statistics monthly, compare them to previous year's statistics, and stay focused on the growing conversion rates rather than growing traffic.
 - 5) **E-media:** While every marketer needs tools across all mediums to drive traffic and interest in their brand, e-media is often available at incredible values. Studies show that most of us still read trade publications on a regular basis (usually in a relaxed state when we want to absorb information). However, for

quick pieces of information, the explosion of e-media choices is phenomenal. Studying the trade publications reveals that publishers have been hard at work over the past few years to develop new tools for their audiences (your customers!) that help them find what they need. There are a variety of e-media opportunities, and the good news is that most of these are relatively inexpensive and offer measurable ROI. Still don't know where to go? Today's media representatives are experts at combining digital, print and even tradeshow tools — they have to be if they want to keep their audience and their advertisers. There is still power in having your ad in print next to a great article. As indicated in psychological studies research shows that readers have better recall of information when it is in print versus on a screen. When the message is served in both digital and print formats with increasing frequency, it enhances further recall.

- 6) **Crossover linking:** Take advantage of the publishers' knowledge of combining and expanding content across mediums to retain and acquire audience share. For example, in reading an article, the author may refer to video how-to on the web, or digital content may refer a reader to expanded content and diagrams in an article.
- 7) **Syndication:** For those of us over 40, syndication is a television term for mass distribution. Syndication on the web simply means putting the tools you develop in multiple formats in multiple places. Look for opportunities to add content. If you produce a video for use in a corporate presentation, make your own channel and post it on YouTube®. Do not stop there; ask your media representatives if they have an outlet for publication of your video. The same works for press releases, technical papers, white papers, and even your latest brochures.
- 8) **Search Engine Marketing (SEM):** SEM is the term used for pay-per-click (PPC) or content search marketing. From Google AdWords to Yahoo to MSN, there are many reputable outlets for PPC advertising. However, a cautionary tale: SEM demands daily monitoring and sophisticated understanding of both web searching and the associated algorithms used by search engines. After the initial set-up, SEM also requires monitoring to filter unwanted results and exposure in the wrong outlets. This is the one tool we strongly recommend using only with the help of a professional. While these campaigns can be targeted locally or regionally, and even in different languages, the monitoring of these campaigns must be done on a daily basis to make and keep them effective. Should you venture down this lane, set up filters and funnels that will help measure ROI accurately and in real numbers.
- 9) **Social Media:** The stickiest wicket in the web world. It can extract valuable time from your day to maintain all the possibilities for social media. Before you

leap, evaluate these channels with your marketing partner to decide if they make good business sense, i.e., will they increase positive PR, leads, etc. If you decide to utilize this outlet—whether you do it yourself or have an agency set it up for you—review the following: Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Establish corporate pages and make sure they convey your brand. Carefully monitor the pages to ensure the content and tone relay the dialogue you want to have with current and prospective customers, vendors, and employees.

- 10) **Ownership:** Most importantly remember that all these amazing tools come with ownership issues. Make sure that for EACH domain name and site that you have the correct passwords, ownership rights and administrative log-ins. This includes social media sites. Client ownership security is a value-added service we provide for our clients accompanied by an agreement that states that as long as the fees are paid in full, transfer of all this information directly to the company is immediate.

The digital landscape is cluttered, sexy, useful, and wasteful — all at the same time. However, it is one of the best mediums for current and potential customers to find you, forge connections, and to receive a solid boost of credibility. Make sure you are there. Whether you “do-it-yourself” by occasional visits to your agency and meetings with media representatives or subcontract the creation and maintenance of your entire presence, being there on a regular basis at multiple levels ensures maximum return on all of your marketing tools. When digital tools are integrated in moderation with traditional tools, you will achieve marketing success.