



3rd Edition

DIGITAL BRANDING

A complete step-by-step
guide to strategy, tactics,
tools and measurement

DANIEL ROWLES



Digital Branding

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Third Edition

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A complete step-by-step guide
to strategy, tactics, tools
and measurement

Daniel Rowles



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*To my amazing children, Teresa and Charlie.
I could not be prouder to be your dad.*

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FOREWORD

The business environment is rapidly changing and the fast-paced world of digital media is a real challenge for organizations of all types. What we need to think about when building and measuring brands is increasingly complex. At the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) we see time and time again that practitioners and those studying business of any type (whether they consider themselves marketers or not) need a better understanding of the digital landscape. That landscape is changing incredibly quickly and our idea of branding needs to adapt accordingly. Knowledge of both the strategic impact and the tactical issues around digital branding will become increasingly important, particularly as social media and mobile technologies have more and more of an impact.

Daniel has worked extensively with CIM, helping our members and customers to navigate their way through this exciting and fast-moving environment. He is a respected authority on all things digital and, as such, is the ideal guide for your digital journey.

*Chris Daly
Chief Executive
The Chartered Institute of Marketing*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I write this with slight astonishment. This is the third edition of this book, and it's been translated into a dozen languages. There are a lot of people this wouldn't have been possible without.

First, to the teams at Target Internet and the Digital Leadership Programme. I learn from you every day and I can't believe what we've built in recent years.

Thanks to everyone at the CIM for your ongoing support and partnership, with particular thanks to Chris Daly for his generous Foreword and Gemma Butler for her ongoing support.

Many thanks to our generous and talented contributors: Gemma Butler, Tim Ruthven, Will McInnes, Bethan Jinkinson, Alistair Welham and Ciaran Rogers. I really appreciate your time and input.

And, finally, a massive thank you to all of you who have read this book, visited Target Internet, listened to the digital marketing podcast, followed me on social media and very kindly given me an audience to share my ideas and engage with.

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Introduction

‘Brand awareness’ is an excuse used by marketers when they don’t know the value of what they are doing. If they are asked the question ‘how does that social media campaign impact the business?’ and the answer is ‘it’s good for brand awareness’, then it generally means they haven’t got a clue.

Most of us don’t sell things online with a credit card payment facility. Most businesses have sales transactions in which the sale takes place somewhere other than our own website. It is therefore very hard to work out what the return on investment (ROI) is for the digital activity we carry out (particularly when we involve social media). ‘Brand building’ or ‘brand awareness’ are terms that are often used as the objective for work where the true objectives are not clear.

This book aims to demystify what brand actually is in a digital world, to show what it is doing for the bottom line, how it can be achieved and, most importantly, how it can be measured and improved.

This book will help you to build a robust framework for planning, implementing and measuring the effectiveness of your digital campaigns. This will mean that you are able to develop a measurable digital strategy based on clear objectives.

How to get the most out of this book

The book is split into three key sections:

- **Part One: Digital branding in perspective**

This part explores what we really mean by branding, and how this has completely changed because of digital marketing channels and technology. We explore what we really need to understand in order to be able to measure the effectiveness of our digital campaigns.

- **Part Two: The digital toolkit**

This part looks at the practicalities of using all of the digital channels and tools available to us. We explore topics such as social media, mobile marketing and search optimization, while connecting them all up to the user journey.

- **Part Three: Digital brand strategy and measurement**

In the final part we build a process for developing a digital strategy that can be implemented, measured and improved. We look at a robust framework for measuring all elements of our digital activity, including how to calculate the ROI of social media. Most importantly it will be made clear how the strategies we develop are related to our business objectives.

To accompany this book there is an online resource of related materials, including podcasts, templates and tools. You can also get all the latest on digital branding by visiting <http://www.targetinternet.com/digitalbranding>.

PART ONE

Digital branding in perspective

Introduction

Let's start by saying what digital branding isn't. It isn't about logos or visual identity and it certainly isn't about celebrity endorsements and big sports team sponsorships. What digital branding is really about is the sum of our online experiences. These online experiences may be influenced and impacted by logos and sponsorship, but we need to understand branding to be something much more than visual identity.

Branding has fundamentally changed because of digital media. Digital has led to two-way communications between brands and consumers – social media means that we can now talk directly with the brands that we use every day. In fact, most communications via digital media don't even involve the brand anymore and are now directly between consumers. We only need to look at review websites such as TripAdvisor to realize that what consumers are saying about us is more important than what we are saying about ourselves.

A traditional view of branding

When I say that branding isn't about visual identity or logos many people will be shocked. I'm not saying that these things are not important, but what I am saying is that they are an increasingly small part of a much more complicated picture. Your logo and the visual aspects of your website design will certainly impact on a consumer's perceptions of your organization, and they mustn't be overlooked, but the reality is that we now experience things in our connected world in a much more complicated way than previously.

The number of different online touchpoints (points at which we are interacting with a topic, product or organization either directly via something such as a website or app, or indirectly via a search engine results page or a social media discussion) we make before making a purchase are increasing. We are seeking more sources of information and are assigning trust differently. Gone are the days when marketing consisted of putting your product into the hand of a celebrity in a shiny 30-second TV commercial and thinking your efforts were complete.

This shift to dialogue rather than broadcast means that the traditional approach to branding is no longer sufficient. We need to understand how search, social media and mobile are impacting our target audience's perceptions of us and how it is impacting their likelihood of buying our products. We also need to do this in a measurable way.

It's all digital

Although this book is about digital branding, it is not only digital that creates your brand. It is every experience that your target audience has of you. From your call centre employees' tone of voice through to the type of paper you print your business cards on. The fundamental shift, however, is that all of these things are tied together by an online experience.

What do you do while you are watching TV? Well, according to Nielsen more than 85 per cent of us will be second-screening on our mobile devices (Nielsen, 2021).

The reality is that our mobile devices are bridging the gap between our online and offline experiences, so that even broadcast media needs to carefully consider the online interaction it will cause.

Brand awareness as an excuse

I started this book by saying that brand awareness is a phrase that is often used as an excuse to justify digital activity that doesn't have clear objectives.

Let's take an example. Many organizations have Facebook pages. Yet most organizations have no idea as to why they have a Facebook page.

There is a body of research called the Social Media Benchmark, a series of studies carried out by the Chartered Institute of Marketing looking at how organizations of all types are using and being impacted by social media. What is abundantly clear from each stage of this research, however, is that the majority of organizations are not using social media effectively, but they are doing more of it!

We will look at this in more detail in Part Two, Chapter 5. In this part we will explore what digital branding really is and how it means that branding has fundamentally changed.

Business to business

When we talk about brands and consumers it is easy to assume we are talking about a business to consumer (B2C) situation. In fact, all of the principles we are discussing equally apply in a business to business (B2B) environment as well. As the potential customer in a B2B scenario, we are still an individual going through a decision-making process. Although the buying cycle may be different and the decision-making process motivated by different factors, we can still map out and understand how digital branding is having an impact.

In reality, the process of mapping the impact and value of what we do online in B2B is even more apparent because the majority of B2B purchases are actually made offline and we need to understand what role digital is playing in making that sale.

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What digital branding really means

01

A traditional view of branding says that a brand is: ‘Name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers’ (AMA, 2017). In fact, the word *brand* is derived from the Old Norse word *brandr*, meaning ‘to burn’, and was used in reference to marking cattle by burning the owner’s brand onto them.

This idea of branding has been developed over the years to factor in a far more extensive set of considerations. As well as this idea of visual identity we may also consider the thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences, beliefs, attitudes and so on that are associated with a brand. This set of considerations builds up our *brand image*, and we may also talk about our experience of a brand as our *brand experience*. The best way of thinking about it, in my opinion, is that brand is the *personality* of something.

How digital has changed branding

If you could only get a feel for someone’s personality by them telling you things about themselves, we may end up with a very shallow understanding of them. We may also have difficulty believing in the personality that has been constructed – and we may start to question the motivations behind what they are telling us about themselves. That is exactly the situation of commercial branding that uses broadcast channels such as TV. A personality is sculpted and then we are told what the personality is. We don’t get to discuss, engage with and really understand the true personality.

Digital media now means, however, that the conversation is no longer one way. I can challenge, ask questions and develop a truer picture of the brand.

I can see through a sculpted brand and start to see it for what it truly is. This can be a scary thing for many traditional brands. It can also be a huge opportunity.

Brand democracy

I was originally switched on to the idea of brand democracy by a good friend of mine and renowned inspirational speaker, Jonathan MacDonald. Brand democracy is the idea that your brand isn't what you say it is, but rather the sum of what everyone else says it is. This has huge implications for not only how we manage our brands, but also on how we need to change the very nature of our organizations.

You can read Jonathan's original, and often challenging thinking at www.jonathanmacdonald.com.

Global soapbox

If brand is essentially the personality of something, digital media gives us the ability and opportunity to understand the *true* personality of something. We can then use that understanding to help guide us in our decision-making processes.

This is a great opportunity from a customer point of view. For example, it means that instead of being put on hold for an hour when phoning a call centre and having little choice but to tolerate it, I can now go straight to one of many social media channels and make my frustrations very clear and very visible. I now have a global soapbox with access to all of the other potential customers out there, and I can impact a global organization's brand in a way that was not possible before (or, at least, was incredibly difficult). That highly visible complaint then becomes part of other people's brand perception (fairly or not) and suddenly the years of building a brand can be tumbled very quickly. This is a very much changed environment for businesses to operate in – if they ignore this change then it can lead to problems.

This ability to engage with and research into a brand can also be looked at from an even simpler point of view. Perhaps I am researching buying a car or a B2B service. I can now do a lot of research and inform my decision before I speak to the car dealership or service vendor. When I do make this final step I am far more informed and have developed a fairly in-depth

perception of the brand before I engage directly with them. In fact, from information I glean online I may have opted out from even considering certain brands. That information may have been on a third-party website in the form of a review or comment from someone I have never met, but I may trust it over the voice of the brand itself.

Brand perception

If I search for you or your brand in Google or YouTube, what will I see? These search results, governed by the algorithms of these respective websites, represent what your potential customers will see when they search for you. Is it great branded content and satisfied customer reviews, or bad news stories on third-party websites and negative reviews? Essentially you have control over what shows up, and a combination of creating great content, building advocacy, creating the right environment for gaining positive reviews and understanding and working with the platform algorithms is key to seeing the results that you want.

Social media fail

This fast-changing environment and the slow pace of businesses to adapt to it is leading the social media disaster stories that we see on a daily basis on the internet. Some of those stories will be highlighted later in the book in order to see what we can learn from them, but they generally have a number of things in common. Most social media disasters demonstrate a lack of knowledge of how to practically use a particular social media channel, or show a belief that the brand can manipulate the channel in some way and get away from this need for authenticity and transparency. The other common theme is that of failing to understand the changed role of the brand in this two-way conversation. All of these themes will be explored in Part Two when we look at social media.

Traditional brand metrics

Traditionally, brand has been measured by asking questions and trying to judge what someone thinks of a brand, and trying to work out what this means in regard to potential sales.

There is a wide range of different ways of looking at this, but generally we would take some sort of sample survey of our audience and see what their attitudes were before and after exposure to some form of marketing. This survey would ask a range of questions, and there are lots of different approaches, but fundamentally we would look to answer the following questions:

- Are you aware of the brand?
- Do you like the brand?
- Do you intend to buy the brand?
- If you have purchased, do you intend to do it again?

Essentially, we are assuming that if we can get more people to answer positively to each of these questions, we are likely to get more sales. This can still be an extremely valid process, but only when effectively integrated into an overall approach, and we will explore this in more depth in Chapters 15 and 16.

Sum of all experiences

Essentially, digital branding is the personality of our organization, service or product created by the sum of all experiences that an individual has with that brand. This still includes things such as visual identity, but now also includes much more important and influential touchpoints such as social media interactions and online reviews. Your logo may make you recognizable, but it is your overall brand that decides what I remember you for.

Clarifying touchpoints

If we are defining digital branding as the sum of all experiences that an individual has with a brand, it seems straightforward to use the term ‘touchpoint’ to refer to one of these experiences (as we already have done). We do need to be careful, however, of the definition of a touchpoint. A touchpoint is often interpreted as some sort of engagement or experience with a marketing channel created by the brand. This idea of a marketing channel can be expanded to include everything from packaging to telephone calls. Clarification is needed, though, when we go beyond these brand-controlled experiences to things like word of mouth and social media engagement. Very often these

types of touchpoints will have no involvement with the brand at all, for example when a consumer reads an online review. Yet this is still a touchpoint and probably one of the most important of all touchpoints.

The role of digital transformation

Some of the changes we suggest in how you approach your digital branding simply require changes in how we use digital channels, but some go much deeper. You may need new systems and processes, or you may fundamentally need to drive culture change in your organization. This process of saying ‘where are we now as an organization and where do we need to be to operate in this fast-changing environment?’ is essentially at the heart of digital transformation. This is not a book that focuses on digital transformation but some of the key principles are great tools to assist you on your journey to improve your digital branding. As such I thought a few words from someone I respect and trust on the topic could give you some guiding principles when approaching any programme of great change.

VIEWPOINTS Alistair Welham, Marketing Director

Alistair has over 25 years’ experience in marketing and digital communications having specialized in financial services, real estate and car retailing. He teaches on the Imperial College Business School Digital Transformation programme, in addition to holding various senior marketing, trustee and consultative roles.

Tips for the digital transformer – views from my ‘digital’ chair

Sitting here in July 2021 having spent the last year and a half almost permanently physically disconnected from the world, I find myself amazed at how well society has digitally transformed.

It’s not perfect but there is not much I cannot do from my chair in the beautiful market town of Olney and over this period I have bought a flat, sold and bought cars, transitioned children in and out of education and talked to people across the globe. The constant stream of consumables delivered to my door is measured by the accumulation of packaging, much assisted, or enabled by the power of digital transformation.

Many people talk about how fast digital has moved during the pandemic, advancing decades in only matters of months, and reinforces the sentiment of a statement by Karel Dörner and David Edelman from McKinsey (2015) 'digital should be seen less as a thing and more a way of doing things' and I wholeheartedly agree: we had to find new ways of doing things!

In my course 'Off on a Digital Journey', I talk about the art and science of digital transformation outlining five key steps for the digital marketer looking to drive and implement change. These five steps still hold true, but it is worth running a pandemic lens across them to see how they have fared through the biggest societal change for decades.

1. Defining the problem

It's such a simple starting point, but how many of us have found ourselves halfway through a project or programme only for someone to say, 'I'm not sure what we are building.' The time invested in clearly articulating who the target customer is, what their pain points are and how our solution is going to make the world a better place is fundamental to our ability to drive good digital change. I recommend you embrace the power of the 'value proposition canvas' in helping to shape an understanding of your customers and where to focus precious business resources and this is a vital step for any group looking to transform.

2. Describe success

Wrapped up in the proposition discussion the next critical step is to be able to define what 'good' looks like, not only having a clear articulation of the future state but the basis on which this success will be measured. You will naturally create some hard financial measures and for the hard-nosed salespeople expect a well-conceived sales funnel and plan. But often the most powerful measures are the softer ones and with increasing focus on the environment, sustainability and wellbeing, I'd encourage every business to include measures that focus on people and our planet.

3. Start small and plan to grow

Looking back, I would say most of my successes have grown out of small breakthroughs or initiatives; no-one has ever rolled up with a multi-million-pound budget and said go build me one of those. But evidencing success through pilots, trials or concepts has captured the imaginations of even the toughest accountant and if you can demonstrate success your gatekeepers

will make the resources available. One of the more positive outcomes of the pandemic is availability and how easily it is to get a group of people together to kick around ideas and make plans. I am not deriding the value of a physical workshop or offsite, but a lot can be done in very little time using your preferred video channel and collaboration software.

4. Planning and measurement

The first role on my dream team is a competent planner, someone who can help shape our direction and co-ordinate the various people, agencies and functions to set out the plan. And what is a plan without some great KPIs and how will we create these without access to the right data? It has been interesting to see how data has played such a vital part in the pandemic and the way people now naturally converse in percentages, ratios and forecasts as part of everyday language. If you can find a common language for your next project and a simple set of measures you will be in a great place to set out a roadmap to your future transformation.

5. Create a movement

The past year has seen no shortage of movements, each with a powerful rallying cry that empowers the campaign 'Black Lives Matter', 'Hands, Face, Space', 'Build back better' and there are some simple take-outs for anybody trying to effect change. Any movement starts with one person (makes me think of 'dancing guy' in the first follower YouTube clip), a small group of people who share a common vision or interest in making things better. The challenging part in organizations is getting enough of the right type of support, particularly given that often the most experienced digital natives are not those with the greatest authority or power. The good news is as human beings we are drawn to storytelling, and if you can find a way to create an attractive vision, a pathway to get there and a clear benefit for every stakeholder, you will be amazed how change can happen.

Take-outs

As much as I love digital, like many I am looking forward to regaining our freedoms and the face-to-face collaboration that really aids change. For the moment though, let us celebrate what the pandemic has done to accelerate digital transformation and hold on to as many of the improvements as possible when we transition into the new 'hybrid' way of being; the perfect environment for the digital transformer.

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Focusing on value

02

With all this talk of brand perception, social media engagement and changing business environments, it's easy to get distracted from the business and marketing fundamentals that are essential to our organization's success. This is especially true when the environment we are working in is changing so quickly, and it is easy to be distracted by what is new and 'shiny' rather than what is effective.

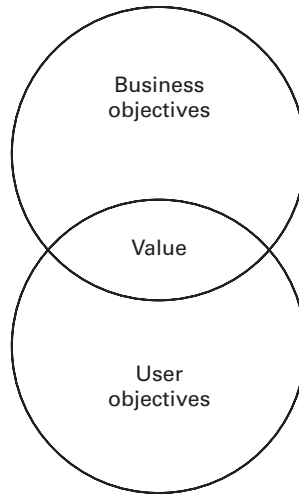
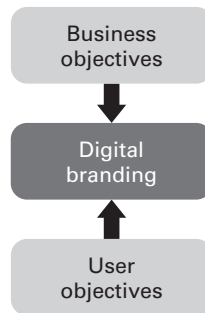
Fundamentally we need to be clear on two key things: first, we need to always have clear sight of what our business objectives are and to focus on how any marketing activity we are carrying out is connected to this. Second, we need to understand our target audiences' objectives so that we can align what they want with what we are offering. We need to understand their motivation. Everything else is really secondary to these two key points – and it is always good to get back to these fundamentals from time to time.

Bridging the gap

Traditionally, when we consider business objectives and target audience objectives, when these two things overlap we can see value. Value for both the business and the target audience (see Figure 2.1).

However, the reality of this in a digital environment is that this potential value is not enough. If I want you to engage with me online it is not enough for my product or service to just provide value. I have to give you a reason to want to engage, to leave feedback about my product or service, and to generally create dialogue.

This is where digital branding comes into play. Digital branding can bridge the gap between our business objectives and what my target audience actually wants to engage with (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.1 Aligned business and user objectives create value**Figure 2.2** Digital branding bridges the gap between business objectives and target audience objectives

Value proposition

Value proposition is defined in a number of different ways by different people, but fundamentally it is a promise of value that should be appealing to our target audience – and that they believe will be delivered. It may be a promise of value in a single product or an entire organization. Your digital branding allows you to communicate this value proposition.

Let's take a look at a few examples from different markets to make things clear as to how all of this fits together.

Business to business service

If I want you to buy a complicated B2B service from me, I need to do a number of things, but most of all I need to give you the content you need to help you make a decision. This means I need to map out all of the stages of the buying cycle that you will go through and make sure that all of the different questions you need answered are covered. In most B2B situations the potential customer won't engage directly with a potential supplier until they have decided exactly what they want.

This may mean educating the audience on some topics even before they fully understand what I am offering. If this is an item that has a long buying cycle, or is a very occasional purchase, I will also need to engage with the audience when they are not actually in the process of buying yet. This means I must provide value beyond just talking about my solutions.

A standard digital branding approach here is for us to position ourselves as a useful resource on an industry topic and provide value through content. This could be anything from industry news, leadership articles through to in-depth reports, but the key thing is that I am providing value outside of just talking about what I do.

We need to measure the effectiveness of this content and what impact it is having in driving sales.

Consumer packaged goods

Many consumer packaged goods (CPG) are things like groceries and toiletries and are generally not highly differentiated. That is, many CPG aren't all that different from their competitor's products, so branding is very much what helps differentiate them. In fact, this is the market in which a traditional approach to branding was really developed. The problem in a digital world is why would I speak and engage online about detergent or confectionery?

This is where digital branding can bridge the gap between what a consumer wants to engage with and what an organization wants to talk about. By broadening the conversation and understanding our value proposition, we can find topics that a user will engage with. As examples: M&M's engage users with fun and quirky humour via Facebook – this creates repeat exposure and affinity with the brand; Dove use the theme of 'real beauty' to engage the audience and stimulate conversation – this creates exposure to the brand along with aligning the brand with positive topics. We need to

measure the effectiveness of this social media engagement and understand what impact it is having in driving sales.

Complex consumer products

When we are buying a more complex consumer product, such as a car or a technology product, the process is actually very similar to the B2B process, even though that product may be purchased online.

A potential customer needs to understand the market and options available to them. We need to understand where they are in the buying cycle in order to provide the right content, and we may need to try to engage with them before they are even considering purchase, in order to build awareness and likelihood of purchase.

Charity funding

When a charity is seeking donations and potentially a long-term commitment to monthly donations, engagement is essential. It is essential so that I feel motivated to donate initially, but also so that I don't decide to stop donating and cancel my payment at some point.

Understanding motivations for donating becomes essential, and working out the value exchange that is going on can be very powerful. Social media allows for powerful personal connections, and by allowing individuals to portray themselves to their peers as they would like to be perceived, a charity can use their digital branding to provide great value for their audience, ie the charity can provide the mechanism via social media that makes the person donating look generous, caring or any other characteristic they would like to be associated with.

Luxury brands

With all this talk of value proposition and online touchpoints, you may be thinking of examples where this doesn't apply. The first and most obvious one is that of luxury brands. I have heard the argument many times that a luxury brand cannot be defined by a simple marketing process. Yet I would argue that exactly the same principles apply.

Your perception of a luxury brand is simply made up of all of the online and offline touchpoints that you have with that brand and its products. We have already said that digital branding is the set of digital touchpoints that shapes our opinions, and this is essentially no different.

Quite often, brands are developed over a number of years and this involves spending millions on advertising and placement in order to achieve the set of touchpoints to make you feel a certain way about that particular brand. You may see a celebrity using a product, see a brand in a certain high-profile event, or see a series of print ads that associate the brand with a luxurious lifestyle. These are simply touchpoints that are crafted to appeal to all sorts of human emotions and shape how you feel towards a brand.

It all comes down to content

All of the above examples show how we can use various digital channels to provide value, as long as we fully understand our target audience and their user journey. Digital branding is the sum of experiences that we have online and it relies on the provision of value. The provision of that value will generally rely on some form of content, which may be something that educates us around a topic and builds our trust, or content that we can share with our peers to make ourselves perceived in the way we would like to be perceived. Even when we are dealing with products that would generally generate little engagement, we can drive engagement through appropriate content and smart digital branding.

Digital branding is the sum of experiences we have online and relies on the provision of value.

To do this well, however, we really need to focus on the user journey and see how we can provide value in order to influence the decision-making processes involved in purchasing anything. Understanding that user journey is exactly what we will look at in the following case study.

VIEWPOINTS Tim Ruthven, Imperial College London

Content is easy when brand and corporate strategy are one and the same thing

Impactful content is often elusive to HE marketers as they are rarely afforded the opportunity to collaborate with senior executives to define or calibrate the organization's value proposition. As a result marketers' brand- and product-level content marketing efforts are often at odds with

customer needs as marketers work with ever-changeable value propositions that resonate poorly with an imagined consumer. Even worse, budgets are suboptimally allocated across tactical activity such as PR, PPC (pay per click) and social media, often amplifying vagaries that fail to build brand or generate leads.

When Imperial College London welcomed a new dean to lead its Business School, the dean immediately led a consultative process with the college and school community to define a target corporate brand identity and a strategy that would enable the school to compete on the global stage with the world's best.

This was the first successful attempt in the school's history to define itself and this provided the perfect opportunity for the marketing function to engage fully in the consultative process to ensure the school's vision, mission and strategic direction was one that would resonate with our key stakeholders, positioning the school with a distinct value proposition in the highly competitive global business school market.

Responsible for raising the profile of the school, I was acutely aware that with a supportive and decisive leader marketing could play a key role in defining the brand and potentially overcome the criticism we often faced as a function. Poor marketing was often seen as the cause for our low levels of brand awareness, undifferentiated messaging and fragmented visual elements when what was missing was a clear and distinct brand and organizational strategy.

I led the brand project for the dean, bringing in Max Du Bois, a recognized brand consultant, to help integrate what we needed in terms of brand within the dean's school level strategy. After two years of stakeholder engagement the school felt it had developed a vision, a mission, a suite of key messages for our audiences and a new visual brand that would help to position us distinctly over time among the best schools in the world.

I believe that without this foundation piece of work a content-led marketing approach would not have provided a satisfactory ROI for our organization. The strategy piece was challenging and time consuming but ultimately provided us with the framework to communicate and build our brand in a distinctive and consistent way in what is a noisy marketplace. Our approach:

- 1 A bite-sized approach.
- 2 Upskilling the team.
- 3 Securing the support of leadership.

- 4 Aligning brand building with the strategic planning processes of our organization.
- 5 Seeking expert help.
- 6 Building content that provided 'points of proof' for our desired brand position.

1 *A bite-sized approach*

We broke the project into manageable parts that the organization could digest.

- I Measure brand awareness – this is irresistible insight that drives senior managers to act.
- II Align with leadership to define (or recalibrate) the brand – stakeholder expectations and current perceptions are also irresistible insight to senior managers.
- III Work with internal and external stakeholders to test and refine your messaging and target position – calibrate it to achieve the desired stakeholder response.
- IV Start communicating the messaging – why wait for the pretty visuals to communicate to customers in a way that drives value?
- V Develop the visual brand to reflect the target brand position – it's time to look the part.
- VI Continually scope for opportunities to build additional points of proof – when brand and organizational strategy are aligned, marketing is simply supporting new initiatives.

2 *Upskilling the team*

We invested heavily in our people. We brought in digital consultant, educator and coach Daniel Rowles to work with us as a team to refine our brand strategy, identify our skills gaps as individuals and as a team and guide us towards courses of study to build the necessary capability. We also recruited external experts to coach individual team members on projects over a six-month period to bed in the learning.

- I Bring in an expert to challenge your strategy.
- II Don't be afraid to discover the skill gaps in your team.
- III Fill your skill gaps.
- IV Utilize coaching to ensure new skills and expertise impact current projects.

3 Securing the support of leadership

With the support of leadership we were able to run parallel projects to identify and engage with key stakeholders such as prospective students, research academics and the senior blue-chip executives. By understanding their needs, wants and demands we could better position the organization to meet them.

- I Secure the support of your leadership with irresistible insight.
- II Educate your senior executives with support from experts with distinguished track records.

Note: do not proceed till you have achieved this point. It may be necessary to wait for supportive leadership to arrive or to leave and find an organization with a leadership that has set a clear strategy.

4 Aligning brand building with the strategic planning processes of our organization

We realized that to enhance marketing ROI we had to support senior executives to develop the strategic direction. We presented insight that built a picture of how key customer stakeholders perceived the organization, what they needed, wanted and demanded and how they felt our organization could deliver value they'd pay for. This insight dramatically impacted how the senior leadership wished to build and position the school. For example it became obvious that the school lacked some academic disciplines that would be required to deliver distinctive research and teaching programmes needed by industry and society.

5 Seeking expert help

It is not often that a marketer gets to work with leadership to define a brand so bringing in experienced hands with such a critical project really paid dividends for us. Consultants must be experts in their field, match your organizational culture and have a strong track record of internalizing the expertise to manage the brand, eg willing to coach. Most importantly they must be willing to collaborate with other experts. We called on experts in brand strategy, visual brand, digital marketing, SEO (search engine optimization), PR and PPC. These are emerging fields where skill currency is critical.

6 Building content that provided 'points of proof' for our desired brand position

With clear profiles of our target stakeholders and where we could reach them we worked to build a 'thought leadership' content hub to amplify the school's expertise. This conveniently translated in relevant keywords for PPC with excellent content reserved for amplification through PR and digital display brand campaigns. To achieve this integration we recognized the need to:

- I Partner with a PR agency who understood SEO and had the network to pitch our content.
- II Partner with a media agency capable of tracking and optimizing our PPC and display campaigns.
- III Develop a freelance team of journalistic professionals to write content aligned to our key messaging/words and attractive to media (the audience).
- IV Partner with a videographer who understood social media.
- V Create an internal team capable of working with internal and external colleagues to plan, create, and curate brand-building content and schedules for its timely amplification.

By providing support to senior leadership, our marketing function has been able to develop clear, distinctive and appealing communications which has seen a marked increase in the performance of our marketing and communications effort. The process was so successful that we feared a reduction in budget but the performance of our marketing activity has actually achieved the opposite.

VIEWPOINTS Bethan Jinkinson, Executive Editor, BBC Ideas

Why Content and Narrative are So Important

I first got hooked on podcasts when someone recommended *Serial* series one to me. It blew my mind – it was a fascinating true-life tale, cleverly told and hugely addictive. After that, my podcast journey took me in all sorts of directions. From comedian Romesh Ranganathan's *Hip-hop Saved My Life* to the sublime *This American Life* (listen to the episode called 'Abdi and the

Golden Ticket’ – it’s life-changing). My most recent addiction has been to Radio 4’s *Sideways*, presented by Matthew Syed, which is brilliant at challenging preconceptions and giving me genuinely new perspectives on the world.

In my role as executive editor of BBC Ideas (short films for curious minds – bbc.com/ideas, check it out) I get a lot of inspiration from podcasts; they expose me to all sorts of ideas and corners of history. I always learn something from Malcolm Gladwell’s *Revisionist History* (probably one of the best podcasters on the planet).

Podcasts have also exposed me to creative thinking in terms of my role as a leader. My favourite of that genre is Bruce Daisley’s *Eat Sleep Work Repeat*, a fascinating podcast on workplace culture. Podcasts have also taught me more than I thought I wanted to know about economics (the BBC’s *50 Things That Made the Modern Economy*) and food (the delightful *Table Manners* with Jessie Ware and her mum).

The best advice I can give an aspiring podcaster is to listen to tons by other people. What do you like about them? What grates on you? What made you click on one podcast and not another? Who has recommended podcasts to you, and what would you recommend? Develop your critical thinking and take inspiration from the ever-growing podcast world around you.

Something else to bear in mind is sound quality. I was a former digital editor at BBC World Service, the BBC’s international radio network with a huge podcast footprint (including the seriously brilliant *Global News* podcast). Coming from a radio background you become really aware of the well-mixed, well-balanced and well-edited content. It really stands out.

Finally, remember that for the listener, podcasting is an intimate medium. You make an active choice to listen. You can stop at any time, skip to another podcast. It’s not like radio, which kind of washes over you and you’re never quite sure what’s coming next. So make every second count, keep the narrative driving forward, and keep surprising your listener. You want to give them insights and inspiration that they’ll be talking about on social media, or down the pub. In my experience, word of mouth is a huge driver for discovery, so make sure your podcast is being talked about online and in real life.

Considering the user journey

03

So far we have discussed the idea of digital branding being the sum of all of your online experiences. We have also mentioned several times that managing this effectively requires understanding the user journey, so let's map this out in more detail and look at some of the tools that can help us along the way.

Multichannel marketing

The reality of all marketing is that it generally isn't just one thing that makes you buy a product or choose a supplier. Generally it is a huge range of factors that make you prefer one brand over another, choose a particular supplier or buy a particular product. Digital branding is all about understanding this process and making it measurable.

As marketers we can model, measure and use all sorts of tools to try to understand this buying process – and this is where digital marketing has its greatest strengths. We have access to more data and more ability to measure the user journey than ever before.

However, the missing piece in this measurement puzzle can be the interaction between online and offline marketing. Quite often mobile can act as the bridge between the two, yet we still face some challenges with this. The journey is very likely not to be a linear one: many channels and types of content may be revisited several times and we may not have any visibility on some of the steps in the journey. However, we still have a better view than we have ever had before, and with a little planning we can fill in the gaps.

User journey examples

Let's take a look at two real-world user journeys – B2B and B2C – all the way through to purchase and consider how different channels are working together.

Business to business example

I need a new hosting company for my business website. I'm responsible for the website's reliability and I have had some bad experiences previously, ending in my website being offline, which left me feeling both frustrated and embarrassed. This buying decision is primarily motivated by risk mitigation, but I also need to make sure that my website will be fast and that any provider will give me the opportunity to expand and improve my web offering, so I need flexibility and performance. This is not a decision I will make without being well informed, and the user journey is made up of multiple steps, including but not limited to:

- doing numerous searches for suppliers;
- reading online reviews of these suppliers;
- signing up for newsletters from each of these suppliers;
- asking opinions on LinkedIn and Twitter from my social network of their experiences;
- completing several diagnostic tools to understand what kind of hosting I actually need;
- reading websites that talk about the technology behind hosting in order to educate myself about it;
- signing up for newsletters from the sites that helped me educate myself;
- talking to colleagues and trusted partners at unrelated events and meetings, getting recommendations for suppliers I had never heard of and making a note on my phone.

So let's map out what is important to note in this user journey. First, it is important that my decision is based on risk mitigation and finding the right fit to my needs. I also need to educate myself on the topic (which is very common in B2B buying decisions).

We also need to note the practicalities of this journey. It was done almost entirely online, except where face-to-face word of mouth was involved. However, I only knew that I should search for several of the suppliers because I was already aware of them due to some other offline interaction at previous trade shows. Also, much of the time I was reading and educating myself I was actually offline as I had no internet access (I was either on a plane or on a train with poor connectivity).

So what does this tell us about our digital branding? Well, our value proposition needs to align closely with the ideas of risk mitigation, trust and

education. So a clear value proposition aligned to user needs at the heart of any strategy would be essential for any potential supplier. The suppliers need to provide more content than just telling me how great their solution is, and I need education in order to build trust. Together these elements convey a classic example of the need for content marketing, which we'll discuss shortly.

I had relied heavily on my social network and online reviews to influence my decision, so an effective social media approach was also clearly going to be essential for any potential supplier.

As well as needing these different types of content, I needed to be able to consume them in ways that suited me; and what suited me varied by time and place. I need content that will work on all of my devices.

Business to consumer example

I'm looking at what I can do with my airline loyalty points, how the process works and where I might like to go. This process is as much about enjoying the process of looking at the destinations I could visit as it is about making any sort of practical plan.

As I work through this process I will make a number of steps that may include but are not limited to:

- trying to log into my account online to see how many points I have;
- understanding the process of using the points to book flights;
- seeing how far the flights can take me – and obtaining a list of available destinations without having a particular destination in mind;
- understanding when flights are available;
- looking at the destinations, exploring holiday options and looking at the suitability for different types of travel (romantic, family, etc);
- working out the most cost-effective way of using my points, considering airport taxes and other charges.

Bear in mind that I said this was as much about fun as it was about practical planning, and 90 per cent of smartphone users have used their phones to progress towards a long-term goal while out and about (Think with Google, 2016). Therefore, a lot – if not all – of this research would be done on a mobile device.

I cite this example because not only is it real, but with my particular airline of choice it turned out to be nearly impossible. The key point here is that

it was essential to understand the motivation of my user journey, and that was to explore, to learn and to ‘mock plan’. Let’s take a look at some of the issues that got in the way of this process meeting my requirements:

- main website redirecting to mobile website with limited functionality;
- no ability to go back to main website easily;
- main website not designed to work on multiple devices;
- search options not suited to my user journey of being unsure of my final destination;
- no easy way to browse availability without browsing through page after page of dates;
- no further information or recommended sites on potential destinations;
- unclear guidance on travel options when travelling with family (I will not be popular if I’m sitting in business class sipping cocktails and waving to my family who are seated in economy).

These are not just technology issues. After all, the airline had an app. They just hadn’t thought through the different user journeys, and the process had been mapped to work with their booking system.

If these journeys were embraced, any airline or holiday company I was looking up would have the opportunity to engage me, reinforce their brand and give me inspiration for future travel. Even if it didn’t lead to me booking there and then, by making the process easier they could improve my brand loyalty and potential word-of-mouth recommendations.

This point of it not leading to an immediate booking is an important one and is at the heart of mobile branding. I may go through the whole flight-booking process only to drop out at the final step. This may not be because something went wrong, but rather that I was using the tools available in order to *plan* rather than make a booking. I may then go through the same process a month later and actually make a booking. I need to be able to understand this journey and attribute value to the original visit that didn’t end in a sale. This is something we’ll explore more and, in fact, we can solve this initially complicated-looking scenario simply by using some free web analytics software (I’m referring to something called ‘multichannel funnels’ in Google Analytics).

Content marketing

Content marketing is often talked about when looking at user experience and search optimization (two things we’ll look at in Part Two), but it is also very much part of your approach to digital branding. Fundamentally, content marketing is about providing useful and engaging content that is suited to the user’s journey. Generally, content marketing is about providing value beyond your direct product offering. If we go back to my example of selecting a hosting provider, a useful focus for content marketing would have been educating the user about web technologies. A few more examples are set out in Table 3.1.

Content marketing, value proposition and brand

Content marketing allows us to bolster our value proposition through digital-delivered content or services. More importantly, we have the opportunity to use digital technologies creatively to deliver this value proposition via interaction.

Table 3.2 takes our ideas for content-marketing themes and looks at how they could be applied in an interactive way.

All of these very simple ideas could be developed into something far more robust that would interactively reinforce a brand value proposition. It is important to understand how this can be applied to organizations with completely different products or service offerings. A B2B service is generally a high-involvement purchase. That is, you think carefully and do some

Table 3.1 Ideas for content-marketing themes

Type of company	Focus of content marketing
SEO agency	Digital marketing advice
White-water rafting (aimed at teams)	Team building and human resources
Alcoholic drink brand	Cocktail-making and recipes
Detergent	Family money-saving tips
Sportswear	Training and fitness tips
Business service	Thought leadership articles

Table 3.2 Content-marketing themes and interactivity ideas

Focus of content marketing	Interactive idea
Digital marketing advice	Campaign reporting tool
Human resources	Interactive HR guide with scenario planning
Cocktail-making and recipes	Interactive portable recipe book
Family money-saving tips	Coupons and location-based savings
Training tips	Training-objective progress tracker
Thought leadership articles	Interactive audio/video tutorials

research before buying. Buying confectionery, on the other hand, is generally a very low-involvement purchase – you’re unlikely to go online and compare chocolate bars before buying them! However, using digital-delivered services and content marketing can help bolster value proposition and brand positioning in both cases.

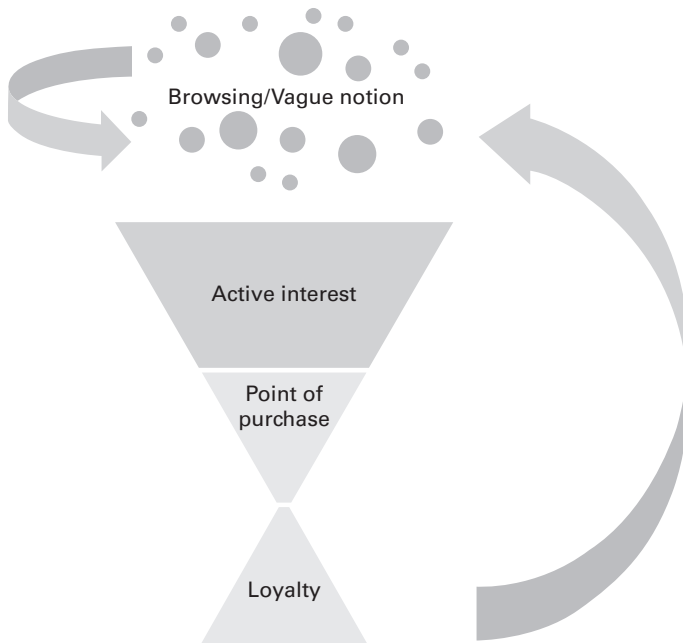
The stages of the user journey

Any online journey goes through a number of different stages, starting with a lack of awareness about a topic all the way though to direct commercial intent and post-purchase loyalty (or lack of!). There is a wide range of different models that can help us visualize this, but I think considering a traditional sales funnel is a great place to start.

Traditional sales funnel

A traditional sales funnel (Figure 3.1) sees our target audience move from no commercial intent and general browsing or having a vague notion on a topic, through to having an active interest, on to the actual point of purchase and finally into the potential loyalty stage.

What the diagram also shows is that this journey is not necessarily a linear one. I may spend an extended period of time browsing and revisiting content before I ever move on to the active interest phase. Also, the duration of the active interest phase will vary according to product/service offering

Figure 3.1 The sales funnel

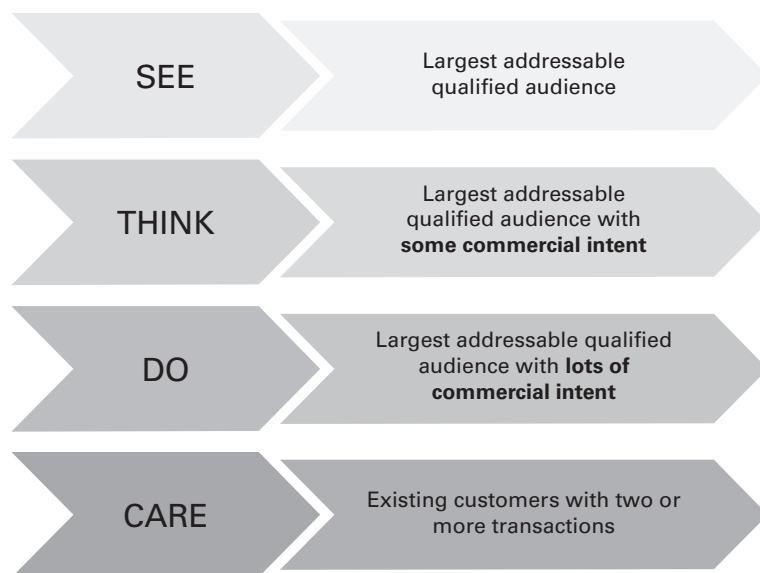
and target audience. Once into the loyalty stage I may also find content intended for the browsing stage useful again.

With each stage of the journey I need to understand my target audience's objectives and motivations and work out what content and interactions will drive them to the next stage. We'll look at how we can map content against this funnel in a moment.

See, Think, Do, Care

Avinash Kaushik is a best-selling author, renowned analytics expert and a Digital Marketing Evangelist for Google. Through his excellent blog, Occam's Razor, he has described his very useful See, Think, Do, Care framework (Figure 3.2). You can read more about it at <http://www.kaushik.net/avinash/>, but it is a simple to understand yet very flexible and effective model for planning content.

In reality, our funnel model and the See, Think, Do, Care framework are actually telling us the same thing. We need different content in different contexts for each stage of the user journey.

Figure 3.2 Avinash Kaushik's See, Think, Do, Care framework

Content mapping

So let's take a couple of examples and look at how we can map content against each of the stages of both user journey models. We'll take two very different organizations: **TargetInternet.com**, a business to business organization that sells access to online digital marketing courses, and **Tesco.com**, a global online grocery retailer. Table 3.3 shows the four stages of the user journey (from both user journey models) and then shows examples of content at each stage for a particular audience.

The see/browse content is of broad general interest to our target audience. The think/active interest content is actively related to what the organizations sell. The do/point of purchase is their key product offering. You'll notice the content at the see/browse stage can also be used at the care/loyalty stage.

Value proposition and user journey

Once we map out and understand our different target audiences, their different motivations and the user journeys they could potentially take, we start to have the basis of a digital plan. Once we align this to our business

Table 3.3 User journey models and content mapping

Stage	TargetInternet.com	Tesco.com
See (Browse)	7 top Facebook tips for social success	25 things to do with your children on a rainy day
Think (Active Interest)	Complete guide to bridging the digital marketing skills gap	20 healthy ideas for children's lunch boxes
Do (Point of Purchase)	Online digital marketing courses	Online grocery shopping
Care (Loyalty)	7 top Facebook tips for social success	25 things to do with your children on a rainy day

objectives and can measure for success and improvement, we have the makings of a digital strategy.

The third and final section of this book will give you a measurement framework to bring all of these things together.

Mapping the user journey

Now we can start to understand how we can consider each step of the user journey. What we also need to start thinking about is how we can use the different digital channels appropriately in order to achieve our goals.

In Part Two we will look at the practicalities of each of the digital channels, and in Part Three we will build a step-by-step process for developing our digital branding and looking at how we can measure it. However, before we get there let's take a quick look at the practicalities of each stage of the user journey and how different channels can be used effectively.

Let's consider an example, and think about the role of social media in the user journey. If we take any user journey model, such as Google's See, Think, Do, Care or the Attention, Interest, Desire, Action framework, we can factor in social media at any of these stages. However, how we apply social media at each of these stages should be different. Let's work through each of the stages of the See, Think, Do, Care model and consider how social media fits in.

At the See stage, we are just doing what we do every day and have no particular interest in a particular product or service. I am likely to browse through social media for personal or general business interest, listening to my favourite podcasts and watching video channels that I regularly watch. The opportunity here is to provide me with something useful or entertaining

that may get my attention or drive a visit to a social media post, web page or other content.

At the Think stage, I have taken an interest in the topic area, but not necessarily been actively interested in your product or service. Here I could share content that grows your interest and develops a relationship between the potential customer and my brand.

At the Do stage, you actively want what I am offering and I can use targeted social media to try to drive an action. I should only do this if I am already aware that you are interested in my product/service or other offering so I don't bombard other people with irrelevant sales messages.

At the Care stage, I have already transacted with you and I have the opportunity to build loyalty, encourage you to post feedback (which in turn may be relevant in somebody else's journey at the Think and Do stages) and to continue building a relationship to encourage repeat custom and/or advocacy.

We can see from these different stages that if I try to put the wrong content in front of you at the wrong time, it will be irrelevant at best and could quite possibly be irritating and damage my brand.

Goals and conversions

At this stage, it is worth defining some terminology that will be important throughout this book: a *goal* is something we want our target audience to do, generally on our website. This could be buying something, but it could also be the filling in of a form, downloading something or just visiting a particular page; a *conversion* is the completion of a goal.

By tying these activities back to our social media and other digital channel activity, we can start to understand how they are contributing towards our online objectives.

CASE STUDY

Company

TargetInternet.com (disclosure – this is one of my businesses).

Industry

Online learning

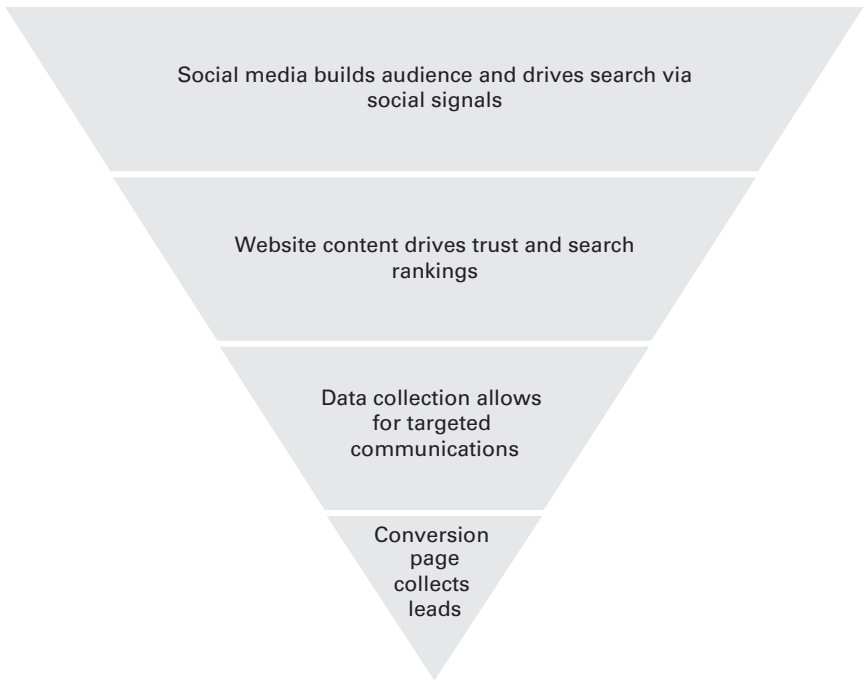
Location

UK & Jersey (Channel Islands) with global customer base.

Marketing objectives

To drive highly qualified enquiries for an online digital marketing training solution, aimed at organizations with large teams to train. Lean business approach, so any approach must not require additional staff.

Figure 3.3 The sales funnel of TargetInternet.com



Their challenge

It was identified early on that the majority of TargetInternet.com's potential customers had no idea what digital marketing e-learning was, or if they needed it. It was also clear that the potential customer base was so broad in terms of different industries that an industry-by-industry approach would have been highly time-consuming and resource intensive.

TargetInternet.com grew as a 'bootstrapped' business, meaning all investment in growth was taken from operating profit, which leads to a lean approach.

Their solution

Give away free educational content on digital marketing and then filter the traffic that this generates into useful business leads.

TargetInternet.com position themselves as providers of practical, up-to-date and easy to understand digital marketing training. This is achieved by using a content-based strategy to engage and build trust with an audience who may not be aware that the service even exists.

The website acts as a content 'hub' where a wide range of free digital marketing educational content is held. A single section of the website focuses on the commercial service offered, with the majority of the website offering free content. The free content includes blogs, videos, in-depth reports and a regular podcast. On each free content page there is a call to action to drive the visitor through to the conversion page (see Figure 3.3).

Content delivers the key value proposition of credible and easy to understand content, and a series of different digital marketing channels are used to manage the sales funnel.

Social media drives awareness and sends traffic to the website via Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest. Social media activity also helps to drive search rankings by creating social signals that indicate the website's credibility.

The library of free content helps to achieve search rankings and drives search-engine traffic. It also builds trust with the target audience by demonstrating expertise.

Visitors are then offered a free skills benchmark in order to find out where their skills gaps lie. By doing this, Target Internet is able to collect data that allows for highly personalized communications to drive leads and sales. The entire website is fully integrated into the Hubspot tool, which is used for personalized email, personalized site content and customized social advertising.

Their results

Monthly visitors: 45,000.

Conversion rate to leads: 0.24 per cent.

Monthly leads: 108.

Conversion rate of leads to sales: 60 per cent.

What's good about it?

Each digital channel has a clear role in the sales funnel, and the complete focus on content-based marketing means that the value proposition and digital branding are very closely aligned.

Although the conversion rate of visitors to leads seems low, this is an expected consequence of driving a broad digital-marketing-interested audience. Content is then used to deliver the value proposition, and sales are driven organically from an engaged audience.

The very high conversion rate from lead to sale indicates the self-qualifying nature of the conversion page. This process minimizes the need for an extensive sales team and keeps costs to a minimum.

Being able to track each stage of the sales cycle like this means that each step gives the opportunity for improvement through optimization of each channel and stage of the process.

What they said

TargetInternet.com is a lean business, meaning we focus on scalability and quality. Focusing on our digital branding means we can deliver maximum impact without needing to scale up costs, particularly around sales staff.

The focus on high-quality content means that our core team spends its time focusing on what they are good at: producing educational digital marketing content. This ties in directly with what we sell, and means that our value proposition and the digital branding we use to deliver it are completely aligned with who we are as an organization. (Susana Mascarenhas, Commercial Director)

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