

## **Best Practices: My Digital Marketing is off the Rails!**

### **How to organize your marketing department for the digital age.**

A lot of attention gets focused on planning and building digital marketing programs, but often the real challenge shows up *after* the initial build. It's all too easy for a digital marketing effort to come off the rails, and this happens for a variety of reasons. Digital marketing programs can be difficult to integrate with other marketing efforts, difficult to direct, difficult to maintain, and perhaps somewhat shockingly (due to the perception of digital media as easily measurable), difficult to assess in terms of ROI.

These issues revolve not so much around the “what” of digital marketing, but rather the “who”. It's a challenge *to organize a marketing team* to deliver consistent performance in and through the digital realm. Problems occur in several key areas.

**Content:** Often a company's online content just doesn't evolve fast enough. It isn't for a lack of writers and subject matter expertise; rather, it's that no one takes real ownership for the renewal of high level content. This could be the result of content owned by stakeholders external to digital marketing who don't automatically create online versions of their content. They might say, “That's the Web people's job.”

**Competitive Response:** Worse still, the competition can easily get a leg up – without the immediate awareness and response needed from the internal team. The competition gathers a Facebook following while you're having a hard time just sending out emails. The internal department seems to be too busy fixing bugs instead of setting course on new approaches and leveraging new digital channels. It could be overwhelmed with the accumulation of daily maintenance and support responsibilities, especially if the digital department is either an offshoot of IT or is understaffed.

**Evolving Strategies:** If the aforementioned are not problems, a clear sense of general direction may still be missing. The organization might have good digital competencies across the different business functions, but if the direction is not clear, digital performance suffers. This may show up as a lack of leadership and focus, in which case digital efforts lack cohesiveness and don't seem to all work toward a common brand goal.

**Metrics Disarray:** If digital marketing efforts are disjointed, then integrated and unified metrics dashboards are typically missing. While there are scads of data points available, real performance management does not come into focus. The digital age was supposed to eliminate the age old uncertainty of which 50% of the company's advertising did not work – but it doesn't help much if the organization can't find its way through a mish-mash of data. As such, the kind of accountability needed for reliable performance is not present.

From an organizational point of view, resources may include an online marketing director, SEO expertise, online promotions managers, content managers, and even social media expertise, yet digital marketing efforts may still lack punch. While there are lots of specialists, they don't seem to be able to produce.

What can be done?

**Organization:** Organize your marketing department with digital functions at every level and with a structure mirroring the marketing-to-sales funnel. If your company has a promotions sub-department, ensure it also has a digital producer within the group. If the company has loyalty programs, ensure someone who knows how to integrate these programs to digital channels is part of that team. The list goes on. The idea is to create accountability for digital efforts by treating digital as a component of every business function instead of depending on a centralized digital marketing office or a shared services model.

**Structure for Learning:** Digital media channels are evolving at an accelerated pace every day -- you need plenty of room for learning. A learning-friendly organization makes room for just that. Structure learning in everybody's calendar and schedule times to share findings and brainstorm new ideas. This is a brave new "ideas-centered" marketing world, and new ideas spring from new learning.

**Digital as a Hub:** The root cause of issues is often times a regard for digital as a separate channel. Digital is not just a new growth channel. It's much more than that. It has become the central hub through which every other form of marketing is delivered. Even a promotional direct mail piece is more effective – and more measurable – when tied to a personalized URL.

**Integrate Digital Strategies:** Marketing teams need strategists as well as producers (creative technologists, online media general managers, digital strategists) who are fluent in the digital space. Strategic leaders must be seeded within all levels of the organization and must understand the importance of the issues and circumstances of digital marketing. Clear – but perhaps more importantly, executable – direction will come as a result.

**Metrics as an Accountability Lever:** Professionals like these create across-the-board accountability for integrated business performance while minimizing functional divides. To further clarify accountabilities, use integrated dashboards incorporating both online and offline business metrics to drive clear focus and accountability across the organization. For example, create metrics accountability within a campaign team by employing a dashboard tracking online and offline communications exposure as well online and offline response metrics.

By combining the right organizational structures, integrating marketing roles, and creating integrated accountabilities, performance is more solidly assured. This clearly has hiring implications. Focus on seeding your team with proven experts in digital marketing. Also set clear expectations with all new and existing staff that digital learning is part of the job requirement.

Outsourcing more specialized functions should be a consideration. A company is sometimes better off with just a few digitally sharp strategists and producers at the top who operate across all marketing business functions and who hire outside help on an as-needed basis. As implied in the various points above, divided, enterprise-style marketing organizations are quickly becoming dinosaurs.

As a final thought, it's important to bear in mind that sometime soon, no distinction between digital and "traditional" marketing will exist. It will *all* be marketing. The ubiquity of digital will make it so no one will think of digital as a distinct medium. Now is the time to think about what this means for your marketing organization.

– *David Moskovic*