



TOP
BLOG
POSTS
OF

MARKETHINK:

THE BLOG FOR THINKING MARKETERS



DIGITAL AND SOCIAL BEST PRACTICES FOR 2019
WHEN MARKETING IN MENA



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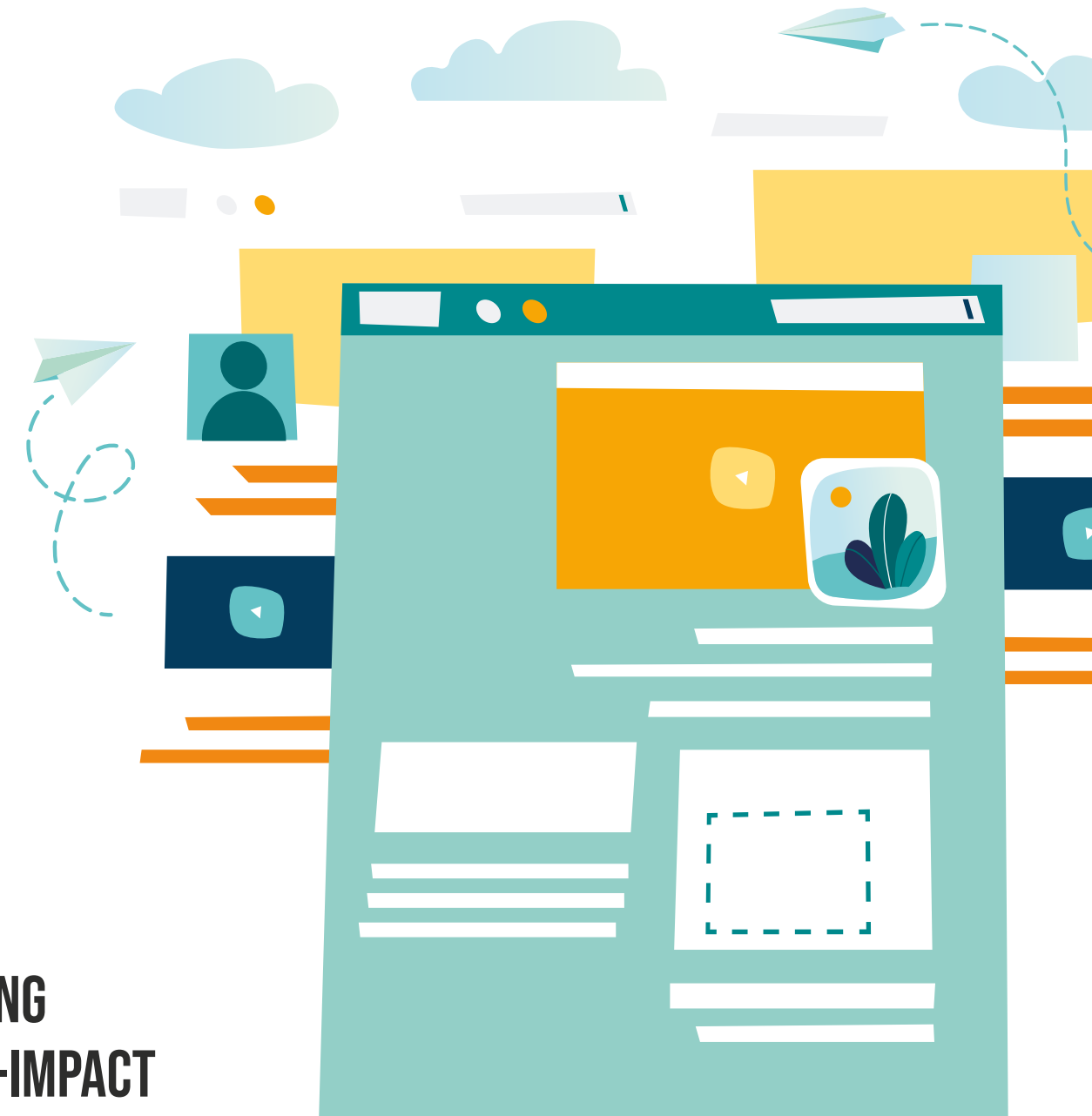
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INTRODUCTION

At the start of 2018 we launched MarkeThink, our blog for thinking marketers like you, so that UAE brands, like the one you represent, perform at the top of their marketing game. Over the past year, we showed you how to do social media strategically and we shared with you best practices across the digital landscape – from Instagram to inbound. Probably most significantly, we revealed to you ‘return on investment’ formulas and other tips and tactics so that you could better ensure that digital was giving you the return you seek.

In short, we showed you how marketing can be as measurable, and therefore as impactful, as sales. And all these golden nuggets of knowledge were customised to our common landscape – the Middle East and GCC. In this e-book, we share with you our most shared and consumed posts so far. Because our content has been unique, we’ve won thousands of views for our content and have been growing a loyal fan base. And now we’re glad to welcome you, too, on board.

In 2019, we’re going to continue to help you market better, keep abreast of digital developments, and teach you how to master the customer journey so that your customers become your advocates. And where relevant, the posts that have been published in 2018 will have updated links and templates so you have the most current digital marketing information you need in 2019!

Our last piece of advice in this short preface – read, take notes, and execute. Your digital transformation will only be as real as the steps you take in exercising them.





Seriously, there's a better way to plan and schedule your social content

**HOW TO CREATE
A SOCIAL MEDIA
CONTENT
CALENDAR FOR
YOUR UAE-BASED
BRAND: WITH FREE
2018 TEMPLATE
FOR DOWNLOAD!**

You've set your alarm for 6am. You hit the snooze button at 6:01. You're brushing your teeth at 6:15. Then it's cereal, coffee, preparing your kids' school snack, more coffee and you're running out the door by 7:03. Like almost everyone you know, you have a routine. It may not always leave you room for spontaneity, but it's predictable. And towards the end-goal of being functional and efficient, predictability is a good thing.

Well, social thinks so, too.

If you don't use a content calendar to manage your social media, it's time to worry. But fret not. We're going to take you by the hand and walk you through how you go about building a content calendar – for all of 2018! You'd be surprised how many brands aren't doing it. **Social media, like your daily routine, needs to be strategic, not ad-hoc.**

When social media is planned and scheduled with a content calendar, the result is quality content that has had time to be built, and therefore is easy to digest for your followers and fans. A content calendar helps you determine your content, how you will source it and its different formats, as well as the specific dates and times you intend to publish on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

So, let's begin!

3 questions to start you off:

1. What are your social media objectives (are they to raise awareness, to drive traffic to your website, to generate leads, to educate, or to close customers)?
2. Who are your buyer/customer/target personas? Think specifically about what their 'pain points' may be and how you would like them to feel as a result of engaging with your brand.
3. What are the current events/trends (seasons, hashtags) that you can effectively leverage for traction?

Once you've set the frame for your social media content calendar by answering these questions, you'll be ready to get more specific.

Subsequent questions to ask:

1. What types of content do you intend to post and promote on social media?
There are a few formulas to determine content. First, establish a content matrix that defines what share of your profile is allocated to different types of posts. For example:
 - a. The 80-20 rule says that 80% of your content is about providing solutions, advice, tips. 20% will be enterprise goals – so lead generation, securing customers, and the like.

- b. The Rule of Thirds is an equitable division of the content pie, where 1/3 is for self-promotion, 1/3 is about providing solutions, advice and tips relevant to your brand/industry, and the final third is engaging your online community.

2. What are the different content formats you will post?
These could be snippets from blog posts, videos, live streams, webinars, polls, photos, podcasts, templates, offers, contests, e-books, infographics. Remember to repurpose content to conserve resources and to redeploy content that has proven to work.

3. How often will you post content? Three times a week? Daily? Several times a day?
The answer to this question will depend on the platform and your audience. Always remember: 'Quality trumps Quantity'.

Finally, keep these best practices in mind:

- a. Schedule in advance. Bulk-schedule if possible.
 - b. When it comes to content, your safest bet is Planned > Spontaneous (though, like with life, you do need to leave room for the latter. Preach!)
 - c. Know the best times to post on each network – the general rule is 2pm for Facebook, 3pm for Twitter, around 10am on LinkedIn and 9pm on Instagram. But is that the same for your UAE-based brand? To determine that, you'll need to check 'Insights' and analytics to determine when most of your fans are online.
 - d. Run like a unicorn. Unicorn marketing means cloning a post that has performed exceptionally well in comparison to your other content.

A unicorn post has had higher click through rates, more engagement and greater conversions. Use your smarts and reuse content that has proven itself successful.



**DOWNLOAD YOUR
2018 CONTENT
CALENDAR
TEMPLATE**



THE ESSENTIAL MENA LIST OF TO-DOS FOR YOUR 2018 SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

PART ONE.



IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS.

What do you want to do? Raise awareness for your brand? Collect Leads? Sell more kofta burgers? When you know where you're going, you'll know what to carry for the journey.

MAP YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA GOALS TO YOUR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES.

If your business objective is to expand in Morocco next year, then make sure your content works towards that goal.

CREATE A SOCIAL MEDIA CALENDAR.

Sketch out a yearly calendar tied to the above goals and then a more detailed monthly or quarterly calendar. Always plan ahead. **We hacked Hubspot's Social Media Content Calendar and optimized it for UAE brands – download it here!** (See above post in this e-book).

SET SMART GOALS –

Make your Goals in Step 1 be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound. Don't "increase social media following" or "grow it 400%", rather "grow your social media following by 25% by the end of the year". **Use our Template to set SMART Marketing and Social Media Goals!**

DECIDE WHAT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS MAKE MOST SENSE TO YOUR BUSINESS.

If you're design-heavy, you'll want to pay attention to Instagram. If you're B2B, you won't want to miss out on opportunities on LinkedIn. Survey your customers and/or target demographic to know what social media platform they're on, and then engage them where they're most likely to be found.



**DOWNLOAD THE FULL
20-POINT GUIDE**



PART TWO.

PART 2/4



9 Measure traction

Use analytics to measure traction. And then optimise. What message is bringing the most engagement or converting the most leads? Look at those messages' word count, calls to action, content, and whether the tone is humorous, valuable, surprising or something else. Does it have video, some other visual, an infographic or a download? At what time of the day was it posted? Identify what's working, then repeat.

FIGURE OUT THE SPECIFIC TACTICS THAT WILL WORK FOR THE SPECIFIC SOCIAL PLATFORM.

Facebook to show the human-side of your business and to share more lengthy content. For Twitter, you'll want to create a hashtag repository. For LinkedIn, authentic participation in an industry group is key to building presence.

STAY LOCAL.

Your content needs to resonate with your local audience. This means everything from using local cultural codes, the local language (Arabic and English in the UAE), to discussing local developments and local trends. Stay local and you'll go far. **Subscribe to our blog in the left-hand column to stay local and up to date!**

DATA IS KING.

"Data reveals impact, and with data, you can bring more science to your decisions," says Matt Trifiro, former CMO at Heroku. Native sources for analytics data are Twitter and LinkedIn Analytics and Facebook and Instagram Insights. But pay attention to qualitative as much as quantitative. Create a monthly analytics report that your team will want to read.

ANALYSE

Use analytics to set your Key Performance Indicators to ensure you're on track to achieving your SMART goals.

USE ANALYTICS TO MEASURE TRACTION

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PART THREE.

PART 3/4

11 What's your ROI?

What's giving you the most bang for your buck? There are quite a few Return on Investment formulas out there, but those that will matter to you will be very specific to your business. Source the numbers for your ROI calculations from Analytics. [Download Kissmetrics' guide to calculate lifetime value of your customer and thereby to determine your ROI.](#)

14 Be social

This one's a no-brainer, but nevertheless important to remember – social media is not mainly a self-advertising platform. To win at social, you need to engage with the community by responding to follower queries, providing advice (and listening to advice) and having authentic conversations with community members and other Pages you follow. Put together a plan for 'social listening' to know what people are talking about and jump into conversations that are relevant to your brand.

WHAT'S YOUR ROI?

What's giving you the most bang for your buck? There are quite a few Return on Investment formulas out there, but those that will matter to you will be very specific to your business. Source the numbers for your ROI calculations from Analytics. [Download Kissmetrics' guide to calculate lifetime value of your customer and thereby to determine your ROI.](#)

FOLLOW THE LEADERS.

See what others in your industry and/or in your region – Dubai / UAE / Gulf / MENA – are doing on social media and follow the good examples. To monitor competitors, you can use third-party apps like [Spredfast](#) and [Hootsuite](#) or Facebook's 'Pages to Watch' and Twitter's '[TweetDeck](#)'.

BE SOCIAL.

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PLAN FOR FIRES.

Determine the severity of a PR crisis (a negative product/guest review is not the same as a major accident on your property) to determine the right response. Remember to respond quickly, pause social media automation, stay on brand-voice and be clear and consistent in your messaging across all channels.

MAKE NEW FRIENDS.

LinkedIn has a few features to add new followers, such as importing email contacts and finding alumni of your alma mater. For Twitter, you can retweet and use mentions. With Facebook, run a page promotion, have admins personally invite friends, and launch sweepstakes contests to get more followers on board.



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20-POINT GUIDE



PART FOUR.

PART 4/4

16 Influencer Marketing
a.k.a. Working That Wasta

The sway of influencer marketing has not waned (**34% trust influencers in the ME**) and in 2018 you'll want to continue engaging with influencers relevant to your industry. **Buzzsumo**, **Spredfast** and **Followerwonk** all have influencer monitoring tools to help you identify and engage with those that can amplify your brand's message.

19 Advertise

Unless you're an outlier social media miracle-worker, a winning social media strategy will need to be supported with some money behind it. On January 11, Facebook officially announced the algorithm change to their News Feed, meaning even less organic coverage for brands and Pages and more for individuals. As with your everyday social media strategy - advertise, evaluate and amend.

TEST, EVALUATE AND AMEND.

Have a plan in place to regularly evaluate your posts, your following, engagement rates, lead conversions and ads. Share with the relevant stakeholders and then make the necessary amendments for the following period.

INFLUENCER MARKETING A.K.A. WORKING THAT 'WASTA'.

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CREATE A GROUP RELEVANT TO YOUR INDUSTRY OR ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO ONE.

In **Hootsuite's Social Media Trends for 2018**, they report that Groups are a big priority for Facebook this year. Setup a group to boost organic engagement, study customers and build advocacy.

VIDEO, VIDEO, VIDEO.

Once more, video has killed the radio star. Invest in video production, video ads, and think of how your brand can become its own mini-broadcaster. Video will be big in 2018, meaning that this year you'll want to be where MTV was in the early eighties.

ADVERTISE.

Unless you're an outlier social media miracle-worker, a winning social media strategy will need to be supported with some money behind it. On January 11, Facebook officially announced the algorithm change to their News Feed, meaning even less organic coverage for brands and Pages and more for individuals. As with your everyday social media strategy - advertise, evaluate and amend. Check out our easy-to-implement, step-by-step guides to **advertising on social media - Facebook** and on **the biggest search engine out there - Google!**



**DOWNLOAD THE FULL
20-POINT GUIDE**



Hospitality: How to Run a Google AdWords Campaign for a 5-Star Hotel (Part 2)

Digital Advertising Fundamentals 101



**HOW TO RUN
A 5-STAR
CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUR LUXURY
HOTEL ON
GOOGLE ADS
(ADWORDS)**

In this post, we're going to show you how to run a Google AdWords PPC campaign if you're in the tourism industry.

PPC, short for 'Pay-per-click' is a form of online advertising that leads people to your website. PPC ads can run in search engines (Google, Bing), banners (display) (Network Partners of Google) or on social media (Facebook, Instagram). It's called pay-per-click because when someone clicks on your ad, you, as the advertiser, pay. **For step-by-step instructions on how to run a Google AdWords campaign, no matter your industry, check out this simple guide.**

I'm a marketing manager that works in the hospitality industry – I am responsible for ad buys on search and display networks for a five-star property located in Dubai. Can you give me an example of an effective, yet easy-to-execute campaign I can run on Google AdWords?

It is possible to run an AdWords campaign for a hotel using 'Google Hotel Ads'. However, in order to launch your Hotel Ads campaign, you'll need to work with an authorized Integration Partner. They provide your hotel's rates and availability to Google. Alternatively, you can run a search campaign without an Integration Partner and in this post we'll use a live-example of a Google AdWords campaign you can run yourself as a (digital) marketing manager for any of the big, Dubai-based five-star hotels, whether you're Jumeirah or the Movenpick.
All the information provided herein is also relevant if you decide to use Google Hotel Ads as the format for ad groups, keywords, targeting and bidding strategies are essentially the same.

Check out this 12-minute video guide if you're not too keen on reading!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuDvrlmFFgQ>

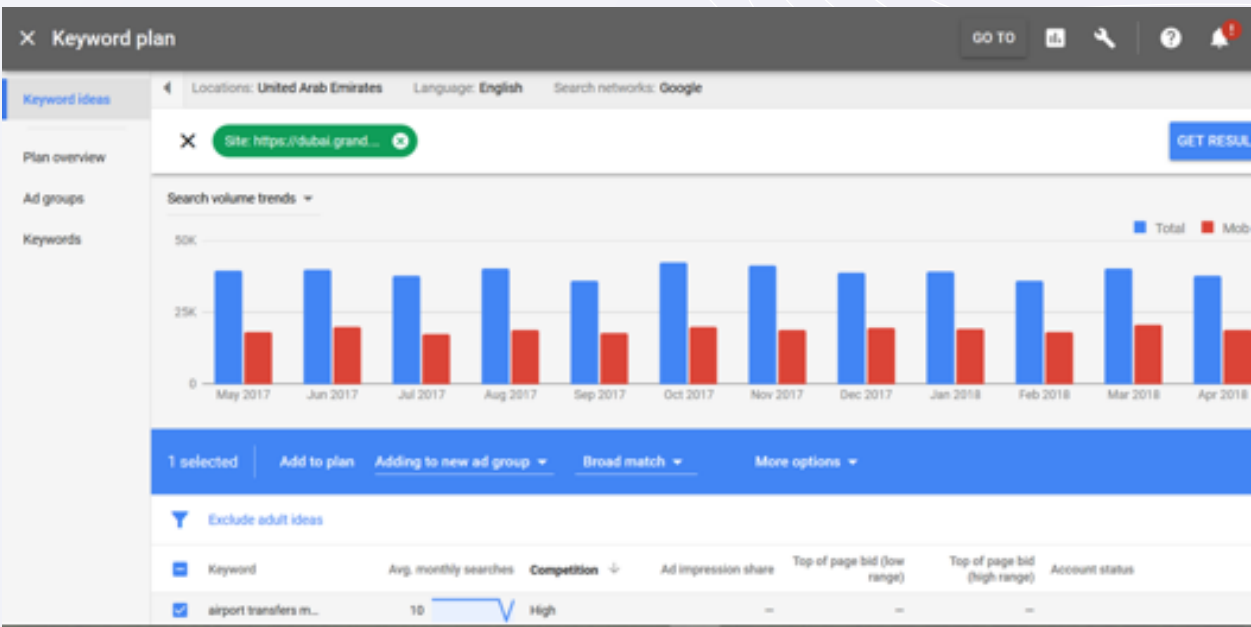
1. Pre-Launch Preparation:
We won't repeat what we've already written about the pre-launch preparation, you can find it here – basically, you'll need to setup an AdWords account, determine the 'type' of campaign you want, and determine your goal

Goal: For our purposes, we are assuming that you are an advertiser for a 5-star hotel chain that seeks to promote a 'Dubai Luxury Hotel Stay'.

2. Define your audience.
Audience = The intersection of Buyer || Persona + Buyer Journey

You've determined your buyer personas to be business people, newlywed couples and families. You're seeking to target them in the decision stage of the buyer journey, meaning that these buyer personas are ready to make a booking and so your ads will show for purchase-ready individuals in search.

3. Get to know the competition. Who are the other players in your industry? What keywords are they using? Use **SEMRush** or the Google Adwords by going to the Keyword Planner and typing in your competitor's website. This is what we got when we searched for the Grand Hyatt, Dubai.



4. When you target your audience, aim well. Specify the location of your audience, the devices they are on, and the time you want your ads to reach them.

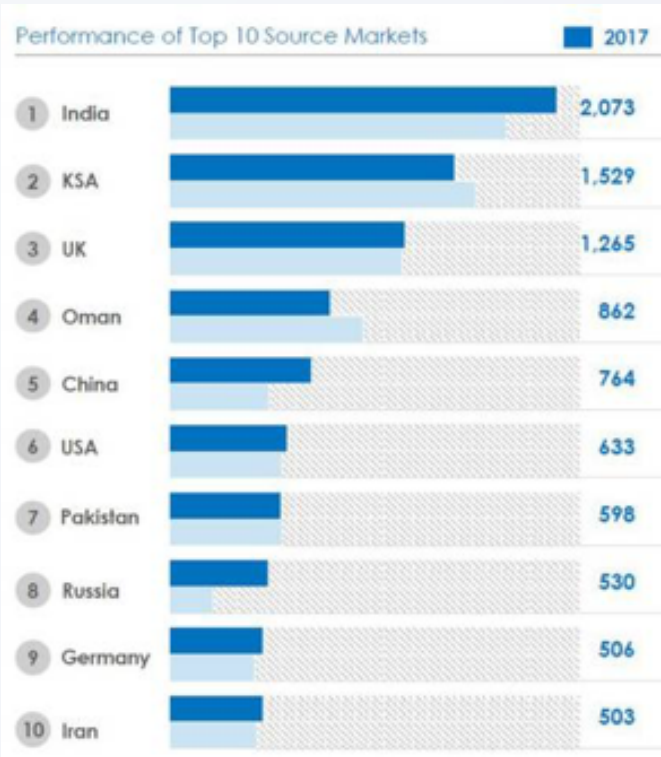
The screenshot shows the 'Locations' and 'Languages' targeting settings in Google AdWords. Under 'Locations', there are three radio buttons: 'All countries and territories', 'United Arab Emirates' (which is selected), and 'Enter another location'. Below these is a search bar with the text 'Enter a location to target or exclude' and a link to 'Advanced search'. Under 'Languages', there are two radio buttons: 'English' (which is selected) and 'Start typing or select a language'. To the right of these settings, there's a section titled 'Based on your targeted locations, you may want to add these languages:' with a button for 'Arabic' and a link to 'ADD ALL'.

As many hotels are now targeting local UAE residents for staycations, you could target families in the UAE. As the top three source markets for tourism in the UAE are India (metropolitan and emerging cities), KSA and the UK, we suggest specifying these geographic locations when targeting all three buyer personas.

5. Keywords. Probably the most important word in this entire guide is this word, 'keyword'. Make sure your keyword analysis is both studied and thorough. Again, use Google's Keyword Planner or a tool like SEMRush. The following are best practices for keyword selection:

- a. Your keywords should be a combination of long-tail (Best price Honeymoon Package Dubai) + short-tail (Dubai Honeymoon) keywords.
- b. Balance low-volume and high-volume keywords. High-volume keywords mean, for example, there are 100,000 searches for that keyword every month (Dubai 5-star Hotel). But this means you will have to bid high and spend a lot if you only use high-volume keywords. Balance this with low-volume keywords which don't cost as much but better guarantee that people's searches correspond to your offerings (Weekend Honeymoon Suite Package Dubai Marina with Spa), meaning a higher click-through-rate.
- c. Bid in line with your bottom line. Here's the simple math you need to do:
 - *What is my cost per click for the keyword? (\$4.50)
 - * What is my conversion rate?
(4.68% is the industry average for travel/hospitality on Google Search)
 - * What is the revenue from a sale? (\$180)Therefore, the Cost of a Conversion = $CPC/Conversion\ Rate * 100 = 100/4.68 * 4.50 = \96

Therefore, the Return on Investment = $Sale\ Revenue / Cost\ of\ Conversion = 2:1$
This is a decent enough ROI, but you need to make sure it matches your bottom line.



6. Ad Groups. Following the ad structure of 'Campaign – Ad Group – Ads', within the campaign of 'Dubai Luxury Hotel Stay', you can create the following ad groups, showcasing the different kinds of suites relevant to your three buyer personas:

- Honeymoon Suite
- Business Suite
- Family Suite

Each of these ad groups will contain specific ads (creatives + copy) that you choose to run on the search network and that will show when someone searches by specific keywords.

7. Keyword Variations

- a. Use the Keyword Planner to determine the keywords/ad group that would work best – use a general phrase to describe your business or enter your website for each ad group. Therefore, the 'Honeymoon Suite' ad group could have the following keyword variations:
 - Romantic Honeymoon Package Dubai
 - Dubai Honeymoon Suite
 - Dubai Hotels Honeymoon Suite
 - Honeymoon Package All Inclusive
 - Book Honeymoon Package Now
 - Best price Honeymoon Package Dubai
 - Spa Package Dubai
- b. Determine the 'Match Type' for the Keyword
 - Exact – Query must be typed in exactly ('Close Variant' for the same means Query must be typed in exactly, but can include misspellings or other variants)
 - Phrase – Query must be typed in correct order, even if additional terms before or after the query
 - Broad – Query can be typed in any order and will potentially show ads for similar searches
- c. Define the applicable 'negative keywords'.
In our case, since we are a luxury hotel stay, the negative keywords we can include will be 'cheap', 'bargain' or 'discount'.



12 STEPS
TO A 5-STAR
CAMPAIGN!

d. Pay attention to the following metrics in the Keyword Planner:

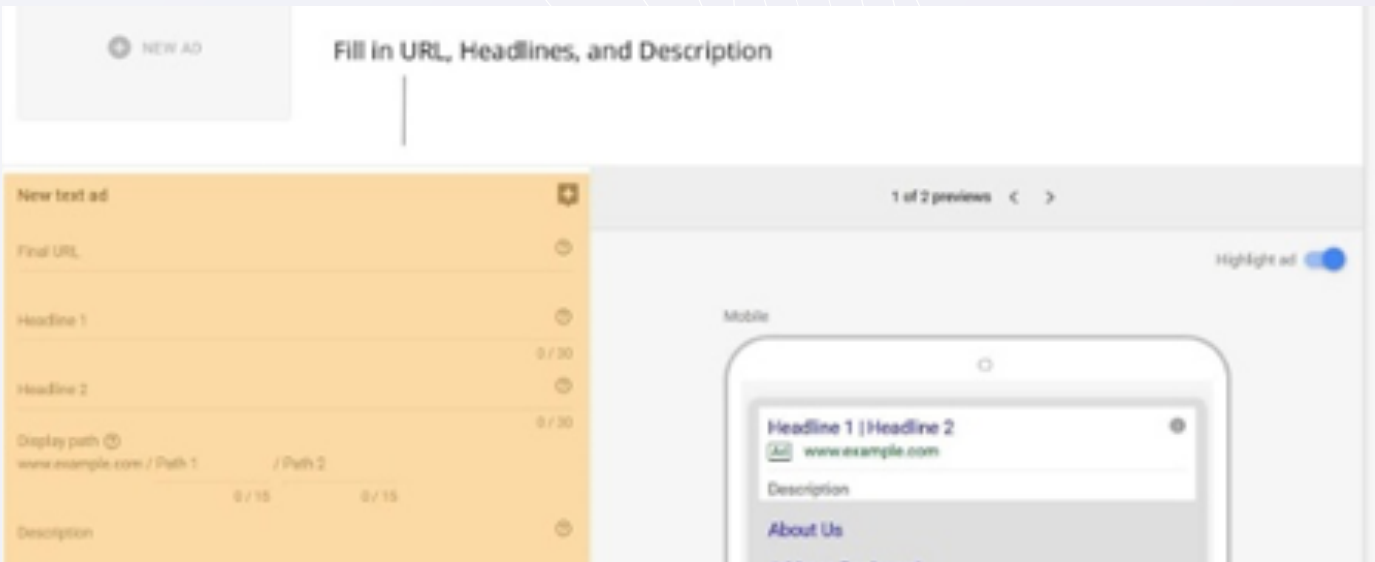
- Average monthly searches
- Competition. This shows you how many other advertisers are using this term
- Top of page bid metrics, showing you exact bid amounts to rank high or low on the first page of that term. By clicking 'Add to Plan' you can easily add them to a new ad group.

Keyword plan							
GO TO							
Keyword ideas							
Plan overview							
Ad groups							
Keywords							
Exclude adult ideas							
Keyword							
Avg. monthly searches							
Competition							
Ad impression share							
Top of page bid (low range)							
Top of page bid (high range)							
Account status							
dubai marina hotel							
5 star hotels in dubai							
dubai resorts							
dubai palm hotel							
hotels in deira dubai							
hotels in downtown dubai							
best hotels in dubai							
7 star hotel dubai							
york hotel dubai							
jumeirah hotel dubai							
address hotel dubai							

8. Ad Extensions. Add them, always. Telephone no., sitelinks, location etc. so Google will show it where relevant.



9. Create the Ads. It's obvious that you want to make your Call-To-Action compelling, and relevant to what people are searching for.



Check out this ad from the Four Seasons when googling for “Dubai Honeymoon Suite Package”:



You'll note that they've included all the relevant ad extensions as well.

10. Track Conversions using 'AdWords Conversion Pixel' and analyze in Google Analytics (simply click on 'Admin' in Google Analytics and then Select 'AdWords Linking').
11. Launch!
12. Analyze & Optimize
 - a. Check Budgets and adjust Bids
 - b. Keywords - Drop old, poor-performing ones, add new ones.
 - c. Recycle ads that worked well. And drop those that didn't perform.
 - d. Don't forget your Landing Pages. If some ads showed high click through rates, but low conversions – then maybe you need to work on optimizing your landing page towards increasing conversions.
 - e. Adjust Parameters – keywords, audience, location, device settings.

DELIVERING MASSIVE-IMPACT MARKETING IN DUBAI & THE MIDDLE EAST



A prescription that turns heads and churns ROI

There's bucket-loads of 'dominate the Middle East + North Africa market' advice out there (particularly from self-appointed marketing gurus hawking their one-size-fits-all technicolour dreamcoats). But what really deserves your time and attention as a marketer on a mission to make a ding in the MENA universe?

Marketing is about common sense, knowing who your customer is beyond stats and demographics, and most importantly, being authentic in your message to the masses – or a niche as the case may be.

For the common sense bit, Middle East businesses would do well to add a generous helping of digital and social to their marketing mix, considering, for instance, that 91% of online consumers in the UAE have taken action after seeing a message (an online ad, video, or website content) from a brand that is relevant to them.

As this Google infographic shows, UAE consumers don't merely go online – they live there! The wider Middle East landscape shares much of the same peculiarities, albeit with a few minor differences.

Of course, there are many other variables to consider to make your Middle East marketing memorable, but authenticity trumps just about everything else. And while much of what is relayed here is universally applicable, marketers in the region ought to pay more attention to the evolution of the scene worldwide, and should seek to set benchmarks rather than play catch-up. To reference a recent Audemars Piguet campaign,

"To break the rules, you must first master them."

Today's consumer is more intelligent, more digital savvy and more research oriented than ever before, and cannot be brainwashed into thinking your product or service is the greatest thing since pita bread. So, considerably more important than extolling the virtues of said product or service is ensuring that it is indeed something of value, credibility and significance. The next step, then, is to tell the world all about it, because they deserve to know.

So, here, in no particular order, are the five Is to brandish as a potent toolkit when developing communication – offline or digital – for your MENA audience.

1. Integrity : Speak clearly and honestly, and use superlatives sparingly. Dubai-based marketers' obsession with over-the-top claims of the finest, greatest, best, most splendid this or that evokes more cynicism these days than awe and wonder, particularly if you're not promoting the Rolls Royce Dawn

or that truly magnificent seven-star feat of engineering and hospitality in Jumeirah. Simply put, the latest Uber-like taxi service is not going to change your life, it'll just make getting around a tiny bit easier. So tell it like it is.

2. Information: Tell people what they need, and want, to know, but don't overwhelm them with pointless ramblings. Their time is precious, and they're prone to thinking you don't respect their time if you go on, ad nauseam. For example, tell them about the Michelin-star chef who now heads your restaurant's kitchen, or the super-convenient valet parking service you provide. Don't bore them with details about how the valet attendant's uniform was designed by the restaurant owner's fashion-designer daughter.

3. Intelligence: Consumers today are smarter than ever before. And many make their purchasing decisions after consulting with their social circle: **up to 70% under the age of 40 in the UAE rely on their circle of influencers before buying.** So don't talk down to them; they know what's up. For instance, buyers of designer fashion know the difference between ready-to-wear, made-to-measure and bespoke, so speak to them in a language they understand and appreciate.

Explain what makes your embroidered kaftans or vertigo-inducing stilettos so desirable and unique, and appeal to their need for status and exclusivity. Furnishing relevant, evocative details endears your customers to your brand, and gets them talking to their friends about you. If you're on their Instagram, you know you did something right.

4. Ingenuity: Do things differently and memorably. Remember how Emirates, arguably the world's best loved airline, turned the recent laptop and tablet ban **into something endearingly funny and memorable?**

They acted double-quick after the ban was announced, and posted a short video promoting their legendary in-flight entertainment as the antidote. And they didn't even have to do a special shoot! They simply edited existing footage from their recent campaign starring Jennifer Aniston to create something relevant and reassuring, and put smiles on faces while they were at it.

In essence, they took a negative situation and turned it into something wholly positive, while making it work for their brand at the same time, by:

- a. Reassuring customers that it wasn't all doom and gloom;
- b. Grabbing the opportunity to promote their in-flight entertainment service;
- c. Using existing resources, i.e. archived advertising footage, to produce something cheaply, quickly and effectively;
- d. Endearing their existing audience, and perhaps others as well, to their brand
- e. Earning tremendous media coverage from some of the most influential international media outlets

See what they did there? Now, that's clever!

5. Inclusion: Listen to your customers. Then show them how you've actually been paying attention. Closely monitor what they have to say on Twitter, forums, and comments on your blog posts. For instance if they have expressed displeasure about your product or service, don't have an existential meltdown or liken them as Voldemort. Even the most heated comment usually has a bit – or a lot – of truth to it. The trick is to respond, not react (that's great life advice as well, in case you're taking notes).

Also, avoid like the plague those cookie-cutter responses like, "Your comment has been duly noted. We will take up the matter internally," but instead be authentic in your tone and intent.

Find the problem, address it, and then let your customers know they've been heard. Customers who feel a powerful connection to your brand will adore, advocate and defend it.

So that, in a rather large nutshell, are the five Is to consider adopting, to make your Middle East marketing and communication more customer-centric and effective. And while this list is by no means exhaustive, it is a prescription that's bound to work positively for your brand.



**DELIVERING MASSIVE-
IMPACT MARKETING IN
DUBAI & THE MIDDLE EAST** #



**THE NEW 2018
UAE INFLUENCER
LAW AND WHY
INFLUENCER
MARKETING IS
STILL IMPORTANT**

We strategically capitalised on the influencer marketing trend and helped grow our favourite hospitality client's Instagram following from 5,000 to 17,000 over the span of three months! Influencer marketing, when done right, can mean exponential growth for your brand.

The Power of Influencer Marketing

According to marketing communication group, BPG, about 94 percent of UAE-based brands believe that **a significant way to promote their product or service is via a social media influencer**. The incredible reach of influencers generally results in a high return on investment (ROI) for your brand, provided influencer marketing is done right.

However, with the **negative criticism** that has accompanied influencers, such as influencers shoring up their profiles with fake followers, the inflated pricing and an overall lack of accountability, the UAE National Media Council (NMC) **recently announced** that all brand-influencer collaborations will be regulated. As a result, influencers now need to secure a special media licence to continue to work their 'wasta' as influencers.

The UAE Influencer Law

The stated reasons for the new licence are that it helps the UAE media sector remain on top of technological developments in electronic media, it protects the social values of the UAE and it ensures that all earnings stay above the table.

But what is the impact of needing to obtain an influencer licence on collaborations between brands and influencers?

While in conversation with food blogger, **Naomi D'Souza**, one of the **UAE's Top 100 most influential influencers**, she expressed her thoughts regarding the licence when it was first announced, "There was



confusion initially about the fine details of the license. I had to stop all my collaborations and reviews for a while. Not being able to do anything, while still having to maintain my blog with great content was stressful. But once all the details were sorted out, and I could continue with reviews and collaborations again, it was all good." According to the NMC, all influencers in the UAE would be conformant with the new influencer law if they fulfilled one of the following three conditions:

- 1. Obtained an Individual licence (AED 15,000 plus a Trade licence)
- 2. Obtained a Partnership licence (AED 15,000 plus a Trade licence)
- 3. Registered under an official NMC-approved influencer agency

While licensing is a move in the right direction towards regulating influencer work within the country, we asked Naomi whether she thought the licence would hamper the growth of influencers in the region. Or would it help? "It depends, actually. If an already established blogger makes good money from their blog, the licence may help them grow. But if a new blogger is trying to make it and blogging is their only source of income, the licence could hamper their growth since 15,000 dirhams is a considerable investment!"

She added, "If bloggers do not have the resources for it, they may be forced to do a lot of free collaborations at the start until they build their reputation. Once they did that, they could then try investing in a licence to run authorised campaigns... to be honest, that's how I started off, too".

What the New Influencer Law means for Brands: Some Best-Practices and Advice

With registrations underway since last month, here are a few things that you, as a brand, need to keep in mind before signing up your next influencer for a UAE-based marketing campaign.

- 1. **First off, make sure you choose the right influencer for your brand or campaign.** Numbers aren't everything. Besides having a big following, it is important to choose influencers who are connected to your industry and have a following of like-minded people as well. Their following constitutes prospective customers for your brand. In the case of our hospitality client, the influencers we leveraged are YouTube and Instagram personalities famous for their globetrotting adventures, and so it made sense to have them endorse the hotel.
- 2. **Ensure that the influencer you are working with is registered and has a valid influencer licence.** If the influencer you are working with does not have a valid licence, they could **run into problems** with the NMC, and indirectly, your brand might end up in a tough spot as well.

3. With the new licence in place, influencers will likely pass the cost on to brands.

This ought to be a no-brainer. If influencers have to pay the hefty amount of AED 15,000 to obtain a licence, it only makes sense that they would charge a larger amount for their services. Fair play, and something to consider when planning your influencer strategy and return on investment for the same in 2018.

4. Relay your expectations to the influencer.

It's easy not to keep track of campaign numbers. So, when the agreement is drawn up, make sure to let the influencer know that you expect them to share their statistics – impressions, click-through-rates, views, conversions – with you. It is a data-driven world, after all. Also, ask for their insights and feedback on the collaboration to help you fine-tune your next campaign.

Are you thinking of using influencers in your next campaign? Do you currently use them? How has the new influencer law impacted on your influencer tactics and strategy? Share your thoughts with us in the comments.

For other ways to step up your game on the gram and on Facebook, check out our [Top 5 Instagram Hacks for 2018](#) and the [Top 5 Facebook Hacks and Tactics](#).

Visit Naomi D'Souza's [Instagram](#) to get a taste of the exciting work she's doing. And make sure to come back next week for the full interview!



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