

4 Ways Digital Marketing Is Like Traditional Marketing And 4 Ways It's Not

Do you remember where you were when you realized that marketing communications would never be the same? For me it was seven years ago.

I attended a seminar on content strategy with [Jeremiah Owyang](#), who was then a co-founder at [Altimeter Group](#) and now leads [Crowd Companies](#). Jeremiah presented a hub-and-spoke model for content creation, distribution and marketing in which communicators, marketers, designers and even legal professionals would collaborate around a content centre of excellence. It was the first time I really understood how organizations could break down traditional silos and leverage the full power of the digital marketing revolution.

Since then, I've learned a thing or two about content marketing, as well as all the other content hyphenates – content strategy, content amplification, content optimization. But guess what? This stuff works best when it's reinforced with the tools of traditional marketing. In fact, your old-school marketing skills are more transferable than you might think. But you'll still need to skill up.

Read on . . .

1. A well-defined audience

Pre-internet, it was technically possible (but not strategically advisable) to reach a large chunk of your potential customers by buying or earning space in a major media outlet. But campaigns always performed better when you knew your audience and that's even more important today.

Success in the digital realm requires sophisticated audience personas that go beyond household income, family makeup and hobbies to answer questions like: What are their core values and life goals, what's the toughest part of their day, what do they worry about?

If you haven't fully fleshed out your audience, you're not setting yourself up for content marketing success.

2. Measurable objectives

– Oh, the years we spent struggling to determine the dollar value of a magazine article. Everyone agreed that editorial coverage of a product, service or spokesperson was worth more than a paid advertisement. The question was, how much more? Two times more? Three times? 10 times? Different companies used different multipliers and there was no definitive way to know if someone who subscribed to a magazine actually read that month's issue.

Metrics are just as important in digital campaigns but they're easier to gather and more granular. For example, you can measure not only how many people watched your video but also how

many watched it more than once and how many watched it all the way through.

If they didn't make it to the end, when did they bail and do other viewers hit the pause button at the same time? This kind of in-your-face success (or failure) can be scary but I think it's metrics gold.

3. Managed expectations

Did you ever have a client who wanted to see their lacklustre story on the front page of a major daily newspaper? Nowadays they might ask why it takes so long to reach a million Twitter followers or why Facebook likes don't immediately convert to sales.

Clients with inflated expectations will always be with us but overnight success stories are even tougher to come by today and you'll often find yourself in the role of educator, explaining to senior executives how social media campaigns work and the time involved to build an online relationship with a customer.

4. Compelling materials

In the pre-digital days, we didn't call news releases, advertorials, videos and fact sheets "content". We called them news releases, advertorials, videos and fact sheets. Or, sometimes we collectively called them "collateral".

Content is not the same as collateral; it is visual, clickable, interactive, scalable across multiple platforms and screen types and digestible for short attention spans.

When you write digital copy, you need to consider how users navigate screens, what search terms bring them to your website and their intent for searching in the first place. But it still needs to be good and not everyone can do it.

It requires a creative turn of phrase, a firm handle of language, an understanding of how words work and how to string them together in a way that makes people sit up and take notice.

4 Ways it's Really Different

1. The audience talks back

The best communications campaigns have always included a feedback mechanism but

now the feedback is built-in and instant. When we reach out to our audience now, we're not just talking at them; we're having a conversation. You may not like what you hear when your customers respond but it's a valuable opportunity to build trust and even turn them into brand advocates who will help tell your story. And, if enough of your customers are complaining about the same thing, it might be time to retool your offering or your marketing techniques. This is not annoying. It's free market research and you should cherish it.

2. The need for conversion

Even before the digital revolution, marketing campaigns were designed to increase sales, change behaviour or incite action. But, in a multi-disciplined campaign, it was difficult to pinpoint which touch-point compelled someone to buy a particular bottle of shampoo or change their mind about a piece of legislation. Was it the magazine editor's seal of approval, the bus shelter ad or the in-store shelf-talker? Online, we can both influence and trace the path purchasers take before they click the "learn more" link and where they linger before they finally press the "submit" button. This is great news for brands but it also means today's marketers and communicators need to significantly expand their knowledge so they can demonstrate how their efforts contribute to the bottom line.

3. Never stop learning

While previous generations of marketers might have used the same skills throughout most of their careers, we don't have that luxury. To thrive in marketing communications today, you need to constantly upgrade your skills and knowledge. Social channels change their algorithms regularly and new digital platforms are launched almost weekly. Every marketer needs at least a perfunctory understanding of video production and you'd better be able to hold your own in an SEO discussion. Even if you aren't personally responsible for coding, uploading or programming content, you'll likely work with, or supervise, those who are. Whether we embrace this with enthusiasm or reluctance, there are still only 24 hours in the day and we have to fit it in between all of our other responsibilities.

4. Practice radical authenticity

I love that today's consumers demand transparency and call out brands that don't practice it but "authenticity" has become one

of those overused buzzwords that has been co-opted in all the wrong ways. Case in point: Donald Trump supporters claim they love his authenticity.

I'm also uncomfortable with the idea that authenticity is a new concept and traditional marketing communications campaigns weren't honest or authentic. To me, authenticity means letting go of the notion that you can fully own your brand or control your message. Your audience decides what they think of your brand and they increasingly base their decisions on how you treat them, how you treat your employees and suppliers, how you give back to your community and how you handle your mistakes. These things have always been important but in an online 24-hour news cycle, your missteps can travel to screens around the world in a matter of hours. If you stonewall, divert or hide, you're doomed.

So, the good news is, if you've been toiling away in communications, public relations or marketing for a couple of decades, you likely have many of the skills and knowledge you need to succeed in digital marketing. The downside? (I refuse to call it bad news) You might have to spend a few Saturdays learning SEO or HTML.



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[Find out more about Louise and read her insightful articles!](#)