



MARKETING RESOURCES

Advertising In The Digital Age



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Advertising has been around as long as there have been people who wanted to sell things, and it's been evolving and changing just as long. In the last 15 years or so, advertising has undergone one of the most seismic shifts since the invention of the printing press. But why?

In short, the internet changed everything. [In 2000, only about half the country said that they used the internet "at least occasionally."](#) Now, that number is closer to 90%. What this means is that people aren't getting all their information from one place – their daily paper – anymore.

Instead, they're using smartphones. Smartphone usage has ballooned even faster – the smartphone was effectively "invented" in 2007 with the release of the original iPhone. As recently as 2010, there were roughly 60 million smartphones in use in the United States. [Today, that number is approaching 300 million.](#)

Even the last bastion of big advertising – the ubiquitous television – is faltering. The invention of DVR and devices like Tivo were game-changers – if you started your show 10 minutes late, or even days later, you could skip all the advertising that brands paid so much to put in front of you.

At the same time, platforms like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime have moved television programming to the internet. No longer is it safe to assume that everyone's watching the same show at the same time, and some of them aren't seeing ads at all. Netflix is living proof that the advertising model isn't unassailable anymore – almost 60 million people in the US would rather pay a subscription price than watch ads during their programming.

Consumers have more power than ever. If they don't like the content they're seeing, chances are there's an alternative that's just as good – or another way of consuming it that's more to their liking. If they don't like ads on TV, they can skip them or watch online. If they don't like ads online, they can use VPNs or ad blockers.

Furthermore, customers don't like the impression that they're being controlled or manipulated. With the amount of information online, not to mention the

ease with which it can be accessed, customers can easily find out if the claims made in advertisements are misleading. If they're spending any meaningful amount of money, consumers will do their own research — they don't like being told outright which product is best.

What this all means is that the old ways don't work anymore. You can't just plaster ads on every available surface and hope the right customers see them. Whether it's social media, video content, banner ads, promotional materials, partnerships, sponsorships, or whatever form your advertising takes, you need to be agile and modern. If marketers want to stay relevant, they need to adjust. Here's how.

Chapter One: Advertising On Social Media

Social media advertising used to be a cost-effective niche for smaller business with very specific audiences — now it's mandatory. [The number of Americans with a social media account is over 200 million](#), and the number of users worldwide is more than ten times that. No matter the size or nature of your business, you simply can't afford to ignore social media anymore.

Last year, [advertisers spent \\$40 billion on Facebook](#) — the king of the social media advertising world, and the second-largest digital ad platform on the entire web (behind Google). Marketers are increasing their social ad spend every quarter.

The popularity of Facebook and other social media platforms as advertising channels is a double-edged sword — on the one hand, it means that if you want to compete in your space, you have to hang with the rest and advertise on social media. On the other hand, the more people who participate, the harder it is to stand out of the crowd.

How Do You Stand Out?

First, don't just repost your existing content in the hopes that it'll get attention. Create original content just for ads, tailored for your specific audiences. And don't post the same exact images and videos on every channel — the

audiences and formats are very different, and the same things won't work everywhere.

Second, make sure your social accounts are up to date and well-maintained. Profile pictures should be high-resolution, the right aspect ratio, and consistent across platforms. Cover photos should be laid out intentionally, making sure not to cover up important information and checking for compatibility with both desktop and mobile sites.

If your profiles contain other info like links to your website, phone numbers, street addresses, or anything else that might be relevant to your social media visitors, make sure that information is current and up-to-date as well.

Don't sleep on video content! You can make quick-hitting videos with a few hundred dollars worth of equipment, and your engagement metrics will thank you. Social video advertising jumped 130% in 2017, and Instagram reported an 80% increase in the time that its users spent on video between 2016 and 2017.

If you do venture into the video world, focus on quality and relevance over length. You can get a DSLR camera and several lenses that will shoot high-quality video for under a thousand dollars, or you can use digital graphics and screenshots to make slideshows into video content. As long as the video is relevant to your followers' interests, it's worth pursuing.

Just a couple of things to keep in mind: lots of people watch video on the go or in contexts where they can't hear them, so subtitles or clear graphics are important. It's also a good idea to upload videos directly to the platform you're using, like Facebook or Twitter — natively hosted videos have 62% better engagement than YouTube links.

A Few Guidelines For Social Ads

If your content does well, boost it! It's a common misconception that you should be boosting your underperforming posts to help them catch up — in fact, the opposite is true. The posts that perform well are the ones that

resonate with people. Putting them in front of a bigger audience by boosting them is the way to make them resonate with even more people.

You should also boost events coming up. When it comes to events, whether physical gatherings, sales, promotions, or online events, it's in your best interest to tell people as early as possible. Don't wait for word of the event to get around organically — make the noise yourself.

When you create new content, promote it! A lot — Hubspot recommends spending ten times as much promoting the content you create as you did creating it. That means posting to your website, social accounts, emails, and so on.

Don't forget to test everything you do. A/B testing is the practice of sending two different versions of a social post or email with small differences to see which one performs better. You can test wording, graphics, links, topics, or anything else you're curious about, then use the results to refine your techniques.

Your content should be visually striking, catchy, informative, helpful, useful, and relevant. These are your most important goals for every piece of content you produce. Relevance is paramount — there is so much content on the web that it's harder and harder to get in front of the right people.

Relevant promotes engagement, and the algorithms on Facebook and other social networks love engagement. The more relevant your content is, the more organic engagement you'll get and the more authority your page will have.

Chapter Two: Digital Advertising Outside Of Social Media

Social media is a huge opportunity for digital advertising, and your social media audiences are too big to ignore. But as with all aspects of marketing, a robust, multi-channel, comprehensive strategy is what will give you a step up on the competition.

Another great place to direct your ad dollars is Google AdWords. Consider the fact that [75% of users won't click past the first page of Google search results](#) — you need help to target, promote, and grow your rankings in order to show up as high on search results as possible.

Sponsored posts are also important. The [majority of screen real estate above the fold is dedicated to sponsored posts](#), and whether you click on ads or not, lots of users do. If you rank well among those sponsored posts and “high commercial intent” keywords, you’ll see much higher clicks and conversions.

Keep in mind that semantic search — search queries phrased conversationally, in a way that people would speak in casual life — is on the rise. Ten years ago, it was vital to phrase your search queries exactly, using Boolean operators to specify exactly what you’re looking for. In the last few years, Google has been pouring its resources into making search more intuitive. Your content should be attempting to answer questions that your customers are asking.

Location matters, too — Google Local will gain even more traction, so take the time to make sure that you’re appearing in searches from local customers. Keeping your info up to date will be a crucial step in maintaining those rankings.

Digital advertising on other platforms — local websites, event listings, news sites, news aggregators, and so on — are a good way to grow your presence and impact. Unfortunately, they’re more expensive and the bang for your buck simply isn’t there. Your money is better spent on social platforms and AdWords.

A notable exception is a guest post on a related blog. Getting your content on the website of someone who’s an authority in your field — or hosting content from someone with that same level of authority — can be a great move to drive traffic who you know will be interested in what you’re talking about.

Chapter Three: Unique And Non-Traditional Avenues

Considering the massive amount of media consumed by everyone in the digital age, marketers have had to get creative with their paid initiatives. There are a lot of ways your marketing department can spend outside the box.

Sponsoring an event is a great way to call attention to your company, but take the time to make sure your company is relevant to the people participating in the event. If you have a well-built buyer persona – and you should – you should know what your ideal customer does in their spare time as well as their professional relationship with your product.

For example, the overlap between mountain bikers and craft beer drinkers is substantial. If you make mountain bike gear, in addition to sponsoring bike-related activities, sponsor events at local brewpubs. The opposite is true, too – most outdoor and adventure-style races have a beer sponsor for exactly that reason.

It's also a good idea to green your business – and then make some noise about it. Today's consumers are increasingly concerned with environmental consciousness, and [they're much more likely to buy from a company that reflects their own values](#). Announcing that you're getting rid of single-use plastics or sourcing all your energy from renewable sources – and actually doing it, of course – is a great way to attract positive attention.

If your business is mostly local, rather than online, you want people in your area to think well of you. Engage with the community. Host events for locals. Give to local charities. The success of your business isn't just reliant on the quality of the product you offer – your reputation and the way people talk about you is a bigger and bigger factor.

This may be a little out of your comfort zone. If you've been in business for a long time, you may remember the days when all you had to do was make a good product and get some ads in local papers and on local TV networks. That's not the case anymore. Your advertising presence needs to be fresh,

relevant, dynamic, and useful. You need to seek out your consumers where they are, not where you're used to being.

Keep in mind that this is all changing very quickly. Digital advertising is only about 20 years old. Facebook started showing ads in 2007, and now they bring in \$40 billion a year. To stay relevant, you'll need to stay on top of the trends. More than that, you'll need to get creative.