



Chapter 1

Strategy

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Introduction

If you've downloaded this, you're probably going to notice a few things. First of all, this is a pretty hefty read. But that's a good thing! There's a lot of information here, and it can definitely be taken one step at a time. In fact, we're releasing this eBook a chapter at a time to save you the trouble!

A second thing you might notice is that we're going to focus on digital marketing. Think of this as a guidebook. Our purpose here is to inform you of the digital options that can help your business. We're not trying to tout traditional marketing tactics as useless; instead, we're reporting on the trends and results we've seen (the biggest one being that all signs for success point to digital!).

If you want to start marketing your business in a new way, or you want to firmly secure your place on the cutting-edge, or even if you aren't sure where to begin, you've hit the mother lode with this series.

Thanks again for downloading. Now let's get started!

Chapter 1: Web Strategy

When it comes to digital marketing (or any business decision you'll ever make), having a solid strategy is crucial. And while it's one thing to say you've got something temporarily in place or that "something's in the works," it's another thing to take a step back, buckle down, and take some real action.

That's what this first chapter is all about: getting your entire strategic process started. An effective digital marketing strategy affords countless benefits, and while not exactly the same as a digital marketing plan (which we'll explore on Page 14), a dedicated strategy is well worth the initial time and effort you put into it.

But before we get into the process itself, there are some preliminary questions that need answering.



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So, what exactly is a digital marketing strategy?

“Any strategy is best defined by the results one desires to gain from it.” Okay, no famous person ever really said those words, but they really are profoundly true in terms of this (or any) strategic decision.

Your digital marketing strategy, above all else, will be unique to your company’s needs and goals. These goals will be based on your past performance, your industry, the budget you have to devote to marketing campaigns, as well as other factors. Many common examples of digital marketing goals are improved brand awareness, a high return on investment (ROI), or increased relevant website traffic from search engines. These goals are quantifiable and are able to clearly show whether the strategy is successful over time. Yours should be too.

Want to perform better than your direct competitors? How about turning your brand into a household name? These high-level goals are a great place to start, as they can be easily broken down into a series of specific, measureable objectives like the ones we listed above. A digital marketing strategy really is just the means to an end, and it makes a lot of sense to have an idea of what that end is before developing the best means to get there.

...And why does my business need one?

Think about this—if your latest and greatest pay per click campaign (the one you’ve invested the most of your time and money in) completely tanked next month, would you know what to do? If you didn’t have a strategy in place, chances are you wouldn’t (and you’d just have to cut your losses and put yourself even further behind the competition). The great thing about a digital marketing strategy is that it is meant to be adaptive and flexible.



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It's no surprise that the market changes every day. Something that's hailed as "the best thing since sliced bread" today might be stale and unappealing tomorrow. That's just how it is in today's world. Your strategy must be able to account for these kinds of shifts, and it will by its very nature. You'll have specific goals set up and you'll know the exact analytical benchmarks to use to monitor progress. If things take a nosedive at any point, you'll be able to nip it in the bud and allocate time elsewhere to stay on track.

If your business is just starting out, you might think that you're already at a disadvantage here. But don't fret, because taking the time to hammer out a strategy now will not only save you a hassle down the line, but it'll also help you gain some momentum and develop a more goal-oriented, market-driven perspective. Once in place, this strategy will force you to think of your business as one in a sea of many, and that fact will motivate you to set yourself apart.

For the up-and-comer, there's also branding to think about. What distinct "look and feel" will go with your unique (and undoubtedly awesome) company? Thinking about this early and handling growth with a continuous sense of direction starts here and now, when your strategy is just waiting to be developed.

Aren't there some guidelines for this? What if I'm missing something?

As we've said, your strategy will be uniquely catered to your business. However, there are some aspects that are necessary to forming one that's well-rounded and comprehensive. So if you haven't been taking notes, now's the time to start!

The first thing that your digital marketing strategy should have is what's called a SWOT Analysis. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats and is part of a process created by Albert Humphrey and the Stanford Research Institute back in the '70s. Basically, this step is an evaluation of your business or a look at where you currently stand. Each area breaks down like this:



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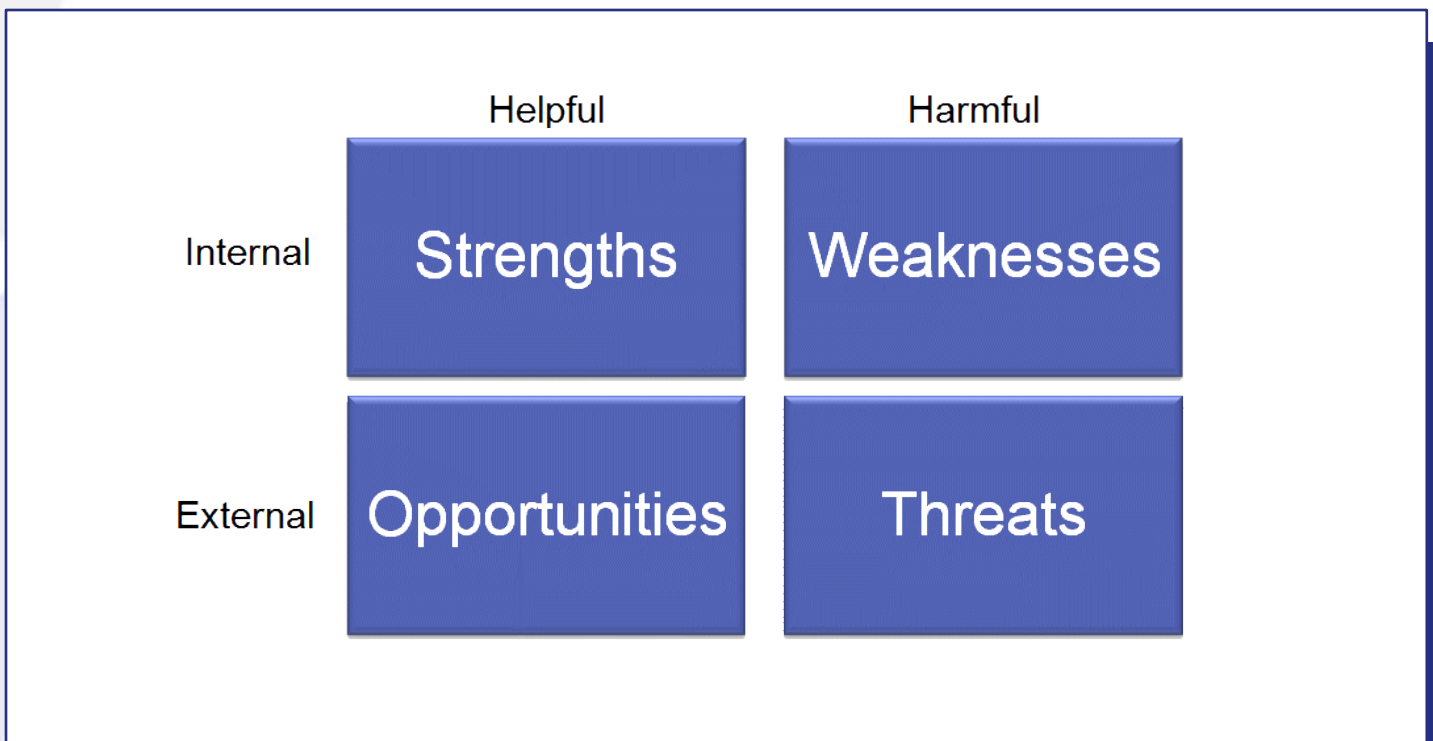
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Internal

- Strengths – Your business’s advantageous characteristics over the competition
- Weaknesses – Limiting characteristics that may put you at a disadvantage

External

- Opportunities – The available options to improve your standing in your industry
- Threats – Forces that might get in the way of you furthering your business’s goals





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So you've got a healthy list for each of these 4 categories—now what? Well, this information will serve as the framework for how you position your strategy and prioritize its parts. Your SWOT Analysis will provide guidance in every strategic decision because it can help generate objectives to shoot for, as well as determine whether or not the ones you already had in mind are attainable. You wanted some guidelines, and your SWOT is where they're at!

Once you've brainstormed your SWOT, compared it to your business's marketing goals, and prioritized everything, you're basically ready to get started! But before we do, let's take a look at some other fundamental things to keep in mind when developing your strategy. This may seem like a lot of preparation, but remember what we said; working at this stuff now will make for a much smoother ride later!

Clearly Defined Timelines & Courses of Action

Granted, these may seem a bit obvious, but that doesn't diminish how important they are. Once your marketing processes, tactics, and/or campaigns are identified, you'll need to make sure that there's a general timeframe set up around them. A big part of this will be identifying your priorities (with the insight from your SWOT, of course) and generating a calendar of deadlines from there.

To that point, remember that you'll (hopefully) be referring back to your digital marketing strategy many times as you put all your campaigns into effect. In light of that, make sure that each process or campaign is clearly defined with detailed subtasks (if applicable) and an assignment to specific team members or departments. Nothing will throw a wrench into your strategy more than having to decipher series of vague tasks that aren't assigned to anyone. In this scenario, what's left is a loss of productivity, which means internal inefficiency, which means wasted dollars. That's like nails on a chalkboard for any business owner.



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A Plan for Measurement

Remember that forward-thinking perspective we talked about? This is where it comes into play. While your shiny, new marketing initiatives are in effect, how do you know if they're working? The simple *answer* is a Measurement Plan. The not-so-simple *process* is identifying a suitable analytics solution, getting it configured to fit your business's goals and objectives, and setting up regular evaluations of the data that correspond to your definitions of marketing success. I know what you're thinking, that was a little too much too fast, but we'll talk more in-depth about digital analytics a little later, we promise! (Stay tuned for chapter 3 when we really dive into the benefits of analytics).

Did We Mention Specificity?

We didn't? Well in any case, it bears repeating. Completeness, Organization, Practicality, and Simplicity are the biggest aspects to strive for when it comes to documenting your digital marketing strategy. At every step of the process, COPS should always be kept in mind (Look at that, we're making our own acronyms here!). Think about it this way—if your strategy isn't simple and organized, then it will be a hassle to implement, and if it's impractical and vague, then you'll be wasting your time when you have to go back and figure out what you originally meant, or worse, when you fail to meet your overly-lofty goals.

With all of this in mind, we're finally ready to get this strategy off the ground!



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Getting Started

Ahh, the time has come. Gather your materials, dig in, and let's get to strategizing!

First things first; gather as much of your team as you can. Even if an individual or a department only has a slight possibility of being involved in your upcoming marketing processes, they should still be here for the sake of gaining visibility and awareness into the direction the company will be moving.

This meeting will consist of a great deal of company introspection, so having a SWOT Analysis already prepared and distributed among your employees is a great starting point. Using your SWOT, and with input from your whole team, open up the discussion by addressing the following questions:

What is our current position in the market?

If you haven't, think about incorporating some competitive research here.

- *How does your company stack up to the "industry leaders"?*
- *Is your position desirable?*
- *Where do you want to be by this time next year?*

Identifying as much of this information as possible will form a great foundation for the direction your future marketing tactics will take. Nothing is worth doing without sufficient justification, and that's what will need to happen first. With your entire team, discuss the points above, documenting any issues you currently face or may face in the coming months.



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Example : “Based on our target audience and past clients, it’s easy to see we’ve got a great regional presence. But we’re still falling behind with competitors on a national level. We’ve got to figure out a way to expand our reach and visibility and diversify our book of business!”

What are we doing right now from a marketing standpoint?

Next, assess your current marketing campaigns, both digital and traditional.

- Have you gotten the results you expected?*
- If so, why? If not, why not?*

Before you strategize about what’s to come, it’s a good idea to evaluate what you’ve already implemented. After all, those who don’t learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Discussing your most recent marketing initiatives can give you a good historical perspective about what has worked, as well as the potential kinds of campaigns that may be beneficial going forward.

Example: “It looks as though our traditional marketing has taken quite a nosedive in the last six months. Our billboard and radio ads aren’t bringing in nearly as much revenue as they once did. Maybe now’s the time to allocate our budget to more digital advertising!”

Do we have a value proposition?

If you do: ensure that this essential aspect of your business is clear and up-to-date.

- What does your value proposition currently entail?*
- Does your value proposition contain all the necessary elements?*



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If you don't: generally speaking, a complete value proposition clearly identifies your target market, its values, your business's offerings, the benefits of those products/services, differentiation from the competition, and evidence that validates the proposition as a whole. If you're missing this vital piece of the strategic puzzle, you'll likely have to head back to the drawing board. Do not pass go, and do not collect \$200.

Are we actively marketing our brand?

Branding is an essential part of this entire process, especially for smaller businesses and start-ups. Think about your marketing materials, your building or office, your documents, your website, and your social media assets.

- Is your company's look consistent and widespread?*
- Do you reinforce your brand in every form possible?*

Just like before, if you seem to be coming up short answering any of these questions, it's probably a good idea to take a big step back and evaluate your business overall. We're detailing the talking points for this meeting assuming you already have some of these important elements established.

Example: "We've got our logo on every document we distribute. Client presentations? I guess we hadn't thought of branding those. And our social media pages are only utilizing default design templates."

How is our company (or industry) changing?

Take a look at your business's operating environment.

- How has your industry changed in the past?*
- Can you draw any predictions for the future?*



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It's important to take your industry's unique ebb and flow into consideration when forming your next strategic marketing move. Keep up with current events and developments in your market as well as your individual operations. Why? Because this information will help you delegate tasks and secure reasonable timelines for your desired outcomes.

Example: "In the last year, we've expanded our team and taken on 10 new employees. It also looks like that recent telemarketing scam in the news is having a big impact on consumer behaviors in our target market."

Write This Down

This next point warrants all-caps: Record EVERYTHING. All of your internal discussions, findings, ideas, analyses, resources, etc. Take everything down in the easiest form for everyone to access and understand, whether that's an audio recording, digital documentation, or physical notepads. We're shooting for efficiency here, and losing data due to disorganization is the all-time worst offense!

Now that you've got all the data that you'll ever need prepared and documented, it's time to pick and choose the marketing campaigns you plan on pursuing. Along with the timelines and assignments we discussed earlier, record everything that's feasible up to one year out from now. The important thing to remember here is that you've researched and gathered all of your data for a reason. Put it to use when you're deciding how to market, to whom, and most importantly—why.

As we've said, being clear about the tasks that need to be completed, when, and by whom are very important steps to take when strategizing. It's always a good idea to use technology to your advantage whenever possible, and at this stage, it's almost a requirement. A project management solution, calendar, or tasking platform can be an invaluable resource when it comes to meeting your deadlines and staying on track.



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Global Tasks				
	All	Incomplete	Complete	
!	Starts	Ends ^	Task	Responsibility
	Jan 9, 2013	Jan 31, 2013	Switch Hosting Provider	3 People
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jan 9, 2013	Feb 1, 2013	▶ Project Definition	4 People
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jan 21, 2013	Feb 1, 2013	▶ Site Structure	3 People
<input type="checkbox"/>	Feb 4, 2013	Feb 13, 2013	▶ Visual Design	4 People
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jan 14, 2013	Feb 14, 2013	▶ Landing Page & Email Blast Development- Email	4 People
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jan 1, 2013	Feb 14, 2013	▶ Monthly Newsletter	2 People
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jan 25, 2013	Feb 15, 2013	Implement Analytics & Optimization Content Section	3 People
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jan 14, 2013	Feb 15, 2013	▶ Launch-Email	4 People
<input type="checkbox"/>	Jan 25, 2013	Feb 15, 2013	Review Analytics & Optimization Content Section	2 People

The entire process of discussing, formulating, and approving your finished Digital Marketing strategy probably won't be done in one, two, or even three of these meetings. Getting things right will take a decent slice of your time, which isn't exactly at a premium for today's business owner. But understanding the long-term value of this strategy is the first step toward efficiency and future marketing success.



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What's Next

So where do we go from here? To put it frankly, the rest really is up to you. As a business owner or marketing professional, how you implement and manage your new Digital Marketing Strategy is your call to make. But since you've kept up with us this far, we'll provide a few guidelines for some next steps. You can thank us later.

First, plan on revisiting your strategy on a regular basis, such as annually, quarterly, or even monthly. Why? Remember what we said before about the business world being like stale bread? As you begin to implement your new marketing campaigns over time, things are going to change. New technologies, studies of consumer behaviors, industry news—these are just some of the factors that will certainly affect your industry and (hopefully) alter your perspective about your own business. Thankfully, throughout this guide, we've stressed how important planning ahead is, so your strategy should be in a format that makes it easy to tweak and alter on the fly.

In a similar vein, as your new campaigns begin to take effect, make sure you stay up-to-date on your industry. Read or subscribe to credible websites and blogs, set up news feeds—do whatever it takes to stay current. Marketing effectiveness, for the most part, is driven by trends and consumer behavior. By taking a look at what's going on outside your business, you'll have even more to bring to the table when it comes time to re-evaluate your strategy and its performance.



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BONUS: Marketing Plan vs. Marketing Strategy

All the way back on page one, we noted that a marketing plan and a marketing strategy were not interchangeable terms. As the cherry on top of this informational marketing strategic development sundae (yum!), let's take a quick look at the key differences between these two. As you can see from our handy visual below, a marketing strategy really is an overarching term that includes your marketing plan. Both, in turn, are vital tools used to achieve your marketing goals and objectives. The main difference between a plan and strategy is that they answer different questions when it comes to meeting your objectives.





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As you can see, a marketing strategy answers the “what” when it comes to reaching your goals. This includes the tactics you’ve uncovered and carefully chosen based on your research as well as the internal evaluations we’ve discussed (SWOT, competitive analysis, and initial strategic development meetings). The marketing plan, on the other hand, is a more elusive term, because aspects of the plan (the “why” in a traditional sense) constantly merge with and contribute to the strategic side of things. In light of that, it’s really hard to nail down which step of the process is contributing to your digital marketing strategy, plan, or both.

What’s the takeaway from this? Don’t get so caught up in the finer details of placing the correct term on what you’re doing. Just do the research, gather the data that matters, and use it to make the decisions that benefit your business the most.

What You Should Do Now

Our next chapters will focus on specific kinds of digital marketing tactics, and we’re starting with Website Design. So stay tuned for Chapter 2, and in the mean time, here are some action items you can take right now!

Evaluate your market position and set up goals – Make a list based on your past performance and the outcomes you hope to achieve through your new strategy.

Begin the preliminaries – Start formulating your business’s value proposition and create a SWOT analysis.

Gather a list of discussion points – What information is needed to move forward? What is unclear or missing from your research?

Schedule the meetings – Gather your materials and take action. Set up meetings with your employees and the departments that will have the most impact.



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Define future tactics & next steps – Set up the tasks and projected timelines (and a schedule to revisit everything).

Stay up-to-date in your industry – Read and subscribe to blogs, articles, and other news sources. Being informed will guide your decision-making in the right direction.

It will take a lot of time to finish all 6 of these steps, but remember, setting things into motion now is what's most important! If you'd like to tell us how this eBook is already changing your life (or at least your perspective on marketing), feel free to [drop us a line](#).

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