



Digital Marketing → Do or Die?

Tim Barnes-Clay

Is your business completely embracing the digital age? For many operators, failure to adjust to new technology means getting left at the back of the queue and losing trade. Your customers and prospects are increasingly researching and buying services online, so why aren't you concentrating on marketing to them through digital channels?

Quiz any millennial about Kodak and they will find it hard to tell you anything about the brand. For many of us oldies, we know that Kodak was a household name and a former leading light in the analog film industry.

Alas, Kodak didn't get on board with digital and misunderstood the ways buyers wanted to interact with their photographs and the technologies concerned. Consequently, the company had to file for bankruptcy five years ago.

What has a film company got to do with the pri-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42



The art of 'Autonomics'

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40

ivate hire, taxi or executive chauffeuring sector, though? Well, not a lot—but it's a shocking example of what can happen if you don't keep up with the times.

Simon Sanders is a digital marketing specialist, having worked at PR, advertising and marketing agencies in sectors including automotive and financial services.

He explains that digital marketing is part of marketing—and for some businesses pretty much all their marketing will be focused on digital media. He says there are such a variety of disciplines within this catch-all term, and all are about getting people's attention.

"A useful way of thinking about this is to consider different ways you might get your customers or prospects' attention," says Simon. "You can use a

paid-for approach, using search engine advertising (such as Google AdWords) or re-targeting techniques so that people see your messages on other websites they visit.

He continues: "You can try and get attention through publicity and media relations; you can use your own channels, such as your website, which is why search engine optimisation (SEO) can be vital, and you can benefit from shared media, such as the social media channels you're active in."

Simon adds: "These areas overlap with each other. Say you came up with the idea of creating a free guide called '10 things to check before you award your chauffeur contract'. You could house this on your own website, pay to promote it on social media, and hope others might share it. You could capture the email addresses of those who download it, or offer them more content from you in the form of newsletters or other articles, and begin to market to them. In this way, you can attract customers."

But how do you get the most out of social media? Well, according to Simon Sanders, you need to work out what you can provide for your audience first. "If you're a taxi company, this could be promo offers. Sounds dull in terms of content, but it could be great at boosting bookings or new customers to some extent," he reasons.

"But there are lots of possibilities," adds Simon. "If you pride yourself on having friendly drivers, then maybe begin to profile them—and, for example, develop their character and personality so that people can become 'fans' of 'Bob', 'Dave' or 'Jane'. Maybe they will be drivers that people actively want to book."

"Or perhaps deep-dive into what's going in your community, and share other people's news. Think about how you can reduce the 'distance' between you and your audience. It's probably not by just focusing on what you are selling, but being aware of your audience's world and relating to that."

Simon points out, though, that digital marketing and social media are not alternative names for precisely the same thing. "It's beyond 'standard' for every business to have social media accounts, say Twitter and Facebook."

He says to work out whether it's going to work for you, you need to be clear about what you want from using it. "It's fine to simply use it as a 'broadcast' channel, to tell the world your news, but recognise

this is not necessarily going to be transformative for you," he adds.

He clarifies: "A taxi company may find that an app that customers can put on their home screen is the best piece of digital marketing they can do, making it easy for committed customers to book. Or for new casual cus-

tomers, it might be more appropriate to simply redesign your website so customers can book quickly from the home page, no matter what device they are using.

"Another may find that paying for high placement on search engines is the most cost-effective way to go, or optimising their presence using search engine optimisation techniques, perhaps highlighting their location, or types of work they specialise in."

Simon concludes: "Social media doesn't need to be a part of the solution, but you should be looking at it, and working out what role it can have for you."

David Meadows is the marketing director at Perys Motor Sales—a franchised automobile dealer in the UK. David's team is responsible for building awareness and considering its brand in a way that drives transaction and enquiries into the business, whilst increasing customer retention.

David says that marketing using digital channels is vital because people live their lives digitally these

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David Meadows



Simon Sanders

days. As a man in his mid-40s, he remembers how people used to read the newspaper in the morning. But now people will absorb multiple news channels throughout the day.

"This is largely down to smartphones and the way they allow us to check news all the time, says David. "Most dictionaries say digital marketing is about promoting products and services using digital channels, but the way to look at this is that digital has massively impacted our everyday lives. It's now all about marketing to people to who are digitally savvy."

David claims most people are transaction-ready. In other words, nearly 80% of consumers across all age groups have gone online before they buy a vehicle. How does that translate to the private hire, taxi and executive chauffeuring business?

Well, it means if browsing for a car to buy is done online, it means searching for a service, like a cab ride, is done online.

"I mean, who'd have thought you could one day tap an app on your smartphone for a cab and set up a pick-up location? You don't even need to call them back to ask where they are anymore, as you can track them on your device," David adds.

Of course, all of this might seem daunting if you're running a business without being 'digitally savvy'. But David Meadows says smaller businesses who are without marketing departments can make the digital world work for them. "Take social media—it's another way to talk to people. But it isn't just that, successful engagement with customers is about building your brand and making people aware you exist."

When asked if he had any advice for businesses wanting to grow a digital marketing strategy, David enthused: "Any business should have a marketing strategy to help work out where customers are. It doesn't have to be big or scary—keep it simple."

David adds: "Eighty per cent of people looking for something go online, so just ask yourself what your business basics are. Even a small chauffeuring business should have a simple website. There's nothing worse than customers searching for you online and then discovering you're not there. Just remember, we don't go online, we live online. So, even if you don't know how to get a basic website together using free tools, get a friend to help."

He concludes: "Try not to do it all. It takes an enormous amount of energy, and just remember that when you do use Facebook, or Twitter, or any other social media channel, you've opened a door. That means you need to be aware that you have people engaging back with you—and you must be prepared for the negatives as well as the positives. But, whatever you do, don't be scared—get your business online, or go under. That's the harsh truth."