Four ways digital media has changed the marketing landscape

By Chemory Gunko

The introduction of digital media into our marketing portfolios over the past few years has dramatically altered the way we approach our marketing strategies, and the kinds of things we do with our brands.

If you're new to the digital bandwagon, or even an old hat at print, just what are the differentiators that set digital apart from traditional marketing media?

Publishing

With multiple social media platforms, your own dedicated website(s) and databases of all your prospects, clients and suppliers, never before has it been so easy to distribute the message you want to get across.

With so many platforms available to you, you're also no longer dependent on the whims of an editor - or tied to having to part with the equivalent of a small country's GDP for quarter page black and white ad.

This, though, also has its downside, not least of which is that there aren't as many checks and balances in place to ensure that your marketing is the quality it's meant to be.

This can have dire consequences in some cases, largely because once it's out there, it's out there, and you can't take it back.

Privacy

Hand in hand with publishing goes privacy, and privacy is a big deal for a lot of people nowadays.

As a result we have elements like the Do Not Contact Me List, and legislation that demands an unsubscribe option - even if people have already subscribed to your database!

With digital - and especially email, you just never know who is going to take what as a personal affront - people will go off pop because you've sent them rugby-based piece of marketing and they happen to hate the sport.

With so many diverse tastes and interests nowadays, you just never know what people will consider spam.

The key thing you need to know about privacy is honouring unsubscribes. If someone wants to leave your database - let them. And if you're sending emails within the borders of South Africa your database needs to be compared against the Do Not Contact Me List, and you must remove anyone registered that appears on your list.

Participation

Advertising is no longer a one-way monologue: now, by putting your brand out there in the digital space, you are inviting people to engage with you. This is both a good and bad thing.

On the one hand, people will share out your collateral and do half the marketing work for you - on the flipside, you have to deal with public commentary. A short trip around a few companies' pages will show you just how nasty things can actually get here.

When someone gets to your page and sees a comment about how no one ever returns phone calls, or how you gave a customer bad service, or worse, they leave - and go to your competitor's page where they perceive they at least have a chance of being treated correctly.

If you're putting yourself out there you have to be prepared to deal with the comments, and you should ideally have moderation options in place to deal with negative remarks too.

Personalisation

Personalisation speaks to two things: how you address people and the 'personality' of your brand.

With digital consumers becoming more tech-savvy by the minute, there is an expectation that what you see coming from one brand, you'll also see in use by another - which makes your generic *Dear Valued Customer* email salutation very dated indeed.

In addition, even with the disdain that is shown towards databases and lists, customers still expect you to greet them by their first names and know what they like - which also translates into only sending them stuff they're interested in.

The second element that personalisation speaks to is the actual personality of your brand.

So much more than just a brand identity, in the social media space your brand develops a personality of its own - it has likes and dislikes, shares a certain style of imagery and post and speaks in a tone that becomes familiar to the client, like an old cherished friend.

Nurture this personality and the friends it makes, and you have a powerful ally that you can call on in times of need - whether it be to boost sales or drive public interest in a project or undertaking.

Ignore this element - and there's nothing to stop your viewer from flipping onto your competitor's page.

A key thing to remember about the digital space is that your marketing is not happening in isolation anymore.

Previously you had the captive attention of anyone who picks up your brochure and reads it. Now, the viewing takes place on their device, and is according to their rules.

This means that your competitor is no more than a page away, and it's easy for people to compare what you offer to what your competition has to say.

The thing about this is that we are highly visual creatures - something like 85 percent of all the information we take in is visual - and hands down, every single time, people will stick around on the better looking page - the one that is visually and

aesthetically pleasing, with informative, easy-to-read content.

A key reason for this is that the Internet is as much a platform for entertainment as it is a business tool.

This blurring of the lines means that not only do your site and pages have to be informative, they have to keep people entertained too - otherwise they will leave as quickly as they arrived.

ABOUT CHEMORY GUNKO

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