

DigiChat with Andrea: Digital marketing skills, talent and training



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Just less than a year ago, I closed my own digital marketing agency and went freelance. A large contributing factor behind the closure was my inability to attract and retain the required calibre of staff to help maintain the standards required in a very fast-paced and constantly changing industry. Having recognised this lack of skills, my focus has shifted largely towards training and mentoring. What I have learned, is that the skills challenge at my company was not mine alone but the entire industry's, and not just locally.

A recent US <u>survey</u> released by the Online Marketing Institute says that "ad agency executives were not satisfied with the skill levels of digital talent, and there are significant gaps between the skills talent should possess, and the skills they currently have. Only 8% of executives surveyed believe their employees are strong in all areas of digital marketing and advertising." In addition, "over 80% of companies surveyed face significant challenges in consistently locating, hiring and retaining top talent."

The most alarming takeout? **30% of large companies and 24% of agencies are unable to adequately distinguish between individuals with the right skills, and those without.** Read that again. It means that even those hiring can't tell the difference between those that actually know what is going on, and those that just talk a good game!

South Africa faces similar challenges. Digital marketing skills are in high demand, but short supply. One of the biggest challenges for any company investing in (or providing) digital marketing services is skilled resources. Is this shortage of skills due to a lack of training, or simply a market that's growing at such a phenomenal rate that demand outpaces supply?

I went in search of answers.

Do you think that we have a shortage of digital marketing skills and talent in South Africa?

Rob Stokes, Founder and Group CEO, Quirk



Absolutely we do, and whilst it would be easy to point fingers at a broken education system, that's not entirely to blame. Whilst our society could do a dramatically better job of educating our people, the truth is that the growth in the digital industry has been so rapid that even globally it's been impossible for skills development to keep up. When a completely new industry grows at 30-50% a year, there is no way that the supply of skills can keep pace. South Africa is unfortunately worse off than most due to our education system, but we are certainly not alone in the digital skills shortage.

Jarred Cinman, Chairman, IAB South Africa



Yes, without doubt. It's fairly broad: I don't think we have enough of any digital marketing skills and those we have are not at a sufficient level. In particular, I would say we are missing skills in the early part of the value digital chain: strategy, UX (User Experience), conceptual creative and related roles. And then there are some specific technical skills, like ORM (Online Reputation Management) and Search Marketing that are in very short supply.

Alex Martin, Founder and Managing Director, Recruit Digital

Yes, absolutely. There are a few attributing factors to consider here. Firstly, we must consider the rapid growth of digital

and all sindustry touch points. Digital marketing agencies for example have experienced exponential growth and demand for their skilled services has become more evident.

On the other side of the fence, traditional agencies and client-side marketing teams are investing in, and growing, their in-house digital competency. On other fronts, digital has impacted virtually all industries from banking to education, whilst giving birth to new emerging online businesses. Big

retailers are moving online, alongside stand-alone e-commerce entities.

Traditional media houses and publishers are moving online with apps and digital publications, social media now has prevalence both in marketing channels and as a platform for consumer interaction. Smartphone and feature phone technology has boomed, increasing internet penetration/access giving rise to mobi sites, apps and mobile marketing techniques. Let's also consider the start-up circuit, with high investment and accelerated growth sprouting innovative online companies. Each and every one of these examples has plundered the pool of talent available within digital.

Let's then consider how relatively new the sector is - meaning there are simply not enough digital resources to go around.

Furthermore, take into account how rapidly the sector is changing, how quickly the skills, technologies and practises are evolving too. An accumulation of these factors has led to a heavily contested space for top talent, and the imbalance of supply vs demand.

Fred Roed, CEO and Co-Founder, World Wide Creative



In the past, World Wide Creative has struggled to find people in certain areas whereas in others we get a deluge of CV's every time we advertise. If I called for social media practitioners, for example, I'd receive a bucket-load of candidates. This is because it is easier to understand platforms that you are naturally engaged with in your day-to-day life. In more specialised areas like paid and organic search, media sales and media implementation, it becomes harder. Also, finding good front- and back-end programmers can be like finding hen's teeth.

South Africa is still, to a large extent, predominantly traditionally minded. With a few exceptions, agencies here look at TV, print, radio and outdoor before digital. I believe we are far behind our peers in South America, Asia and Australasia with regard to online marketing.

In Australia last year, digital overtook TV as the biggest component of media spend. Currently South Africa sits as an estimated 8% of overall media spend. South Africa is still on a massive, but nonetheless exhilarating, digital growth curve. As a result, our primary education institutions are catching up with adding essential digital skills to their offering.

Mia Scholtz, Managing Director, Neo@Ogilvy



My short answer would be no, and yes. The internet celebrated its 25th birthday this year, so the industry is still very young - unlike medicine, law or engineering. We therefore don't have access to the volume and array of educational resources and learnings that time provides. Couple this with the mainstay that our world is continually changing and evolving. New disruptive technologies risk negatively impacting your field of focus, an example being how responsive design is disrupting the .mobi space.

The ability to gather what we need from the past and prepare best for the future through planning is a key area of focus for any capable digital business. Innovation, or [finding] better solutions that meet existing and future market needs, is a driving force behind improvement.

Planning, implementation, coordination, and quality control can be taught to any candidate with the right attitude, aptitude and a hunger to work hard and improve. I feel that currently South Africa has a large enough pool of candidates with digital

marketing skills. Finding talented candidates who can research, strategise and innovate is difficult. I feel that currently we're not attracting enough top talent to the industry. So, the shortage is in accessing individuals who'll improve your business and that of your clients. In this regard, you're not competing against your industry peers for these types of candidates; you're competing against the top employers - the Dimension Data's, Accenture's and KPMG's of the world. Or, you're needing to dip into the engineering, maths, computer science, business management graduate pools.

Dave Duarte, Founding Partner, Ogilvy Digital Marketing Academy and Treeshake



Yes, we definitely have a shortage of digital marketing skills and talent in South Africa. This is why so many agencies are investing in staff training in digital, even launching their own inhouse academies. The reasons for this may come down to the fact that digital marketing has yet to mature into a well-defined, stable, and well-paid career option for school-leavers. This is partly due to the fact that it is a relatively new field that requires specialist skills. Matriculants who are looking for stable careers with which they will be able to pay off student loans and

support families have gone for safer alternatives like accounting, law, medicine, or general marketing management as there aren't enough success stories and role models appearing at schools and career days. The industry has been slow to agree on a standard for qualification or expertise in the field. Also, pay hasn't been as high as other professional fields, largely due to the fact that digital marketing has been taking such a small slice of the overall marketing budget for years - thankfully, this is changing. At more senior levels, there is also a lack of skills in digital, and it hasn't been easy or convenient for marketing practitioners to re-skill themselves in digital marketing.

Bryan Khumalo, Managing Director, New Media Talent



Looking closely at digital marketing vacancies from both an agency and brand perspective, it is clear that that there is a huge shortage of digital marketing skills in South Africa. There are fewer people in South Africa that have taken an interest in digital marketing and, unfortunately, there is also a shortage of digital education. In addition, there is a large requirement for high schools to motivate students to take digital marketing courses. The majority of the candidates that we have placed tend to be self-taught, motivated by an interest in the industry as much as

the pay-cheque.

Di Charton, Managing Director, Red & Yellow



Skills...yes. Talent? Now that's a trickier one to answer. It's doubtful that there's a lack of talent - what there is, is a lack of understanding around how to apply that talent to integrated strategy. I believe that there is still a massive shortage in the understanding of digital and all its various facets. There are lots of reasons for that.

I think it's taken a LONG time for marketers and agencies to actually take digital seriously, and while they were ignoring it, consumers have forged ahead and seamlessly integrated it into their lives. Part of this might be fear related. Whilst the same basic principles apply, it is a fluid, rapidly evolving industry where things don't stay the same for long. This is intimidating. Part of it is because it has been seen as the playground of mavericks and start-ups, and for a long time, wasn't really seen as the "sexy" career choice. Until recently, marketing stalwarts and graduates alike viewed it as an option: marketers are either "traditional" or "digital" - a completely false dichotomy if you consider the way in which technology is integrated into the lives of consumers. It's likely that a lot of people were waiting for the fads to die or the hype to fade away. This has meant that the people who should be driving the industry (the agencies and their clients) have not invested enough, or the right resources into up-skilling and training their staff. And those who have started to invest in training also haven't necessarily realised that it is a continuous process rather than a once-off.



of one is not the input of the other. I feel like education institutions, school level and above, aren't offering the kind of courses that encourage the thinking we need or want. I don't blame the education side of this equation exclusively. I am not sure that we, as the advertising industry, are doing much to tell the education system what we need either though.

Another factor is that we as business people sometime fail to see what the skills are that we will need in the coming years and decades, so by the time a specific technology is important enough for us to require those skills, we can't wait for the education system to produce them. We need to work more quickly.

André Steenkamp, CEO, 25AM



We most definitely have a skills shortage in digital marketing across all the disciplines. This is primarily due to the fact that digital is the fastest growing area within the marketing industry. Not only is there an increasing number of digital agencies but the traditional agencies are also up-skilling to keep pace with their customers' requirements. To further complicate matters, as digital itself is expanding (to channels within a channel) and a digital generalist can no longer "cut it" as we need specialists for each of the emerging channels, i.e. search, social media,

email, etc.

Sam Paddock, CEO, GetSmarter



Yes. I think the shortage of these skills stems from a lack of a formal digital marketing curriculum at university level. I also feel that short digital marketing programmes should be introduced at a secondary level in the same way computer science is currently offered at this level. It is arguable that there is an equal (if not greater) demand for digital marketing skills than computer science skills.

In what specific areas (eg email marketing, social media, search marketing, SEO, analytics, mobile, paid media/advertising etc) is there most room for skills expansion?

Rob Stokes: I think it's pretty much across the board, but we do see most of the shortage coming in the data science space, as these skills are probably the hardest to manufacture. Furthermore, we live with an education system that prefers to short-cut students through a proper maths and science learning experience so this situation is likely to get worse before it gets better.

Jarred Cinman: Digital, globally, is growing. Everything about it is growing so, as a corollary, there is opportunity to grow all skills. Because certain parts of the industry have been more stable (programming, for example), over the years there has been time for colleges and universities to catch up. In other areas (media, for example, and digital strategy), institutions are lagging and are teaching students within a framework that is dated. Honestly, though it's difficult to choose, I think digital expertise is needed across the board.

Alex Martin: In short, across the board, probably with the exception of social media. Each channel/specialism within digital is becoming increasingly desirable, as many forward-thinking companies want specialists within these niche areas. Over time, we're seeing digital roles fragmented and individually departmentalised. It does differ though, dependent on a company's individual needs - where some need digital generalists/all-rounders, others require a stand-alone channel specific digital roles, such as SEO strat, PPC campaign manager, social media manager etc. In particular, on the tech/development side of things the demand has never been greater. It's pretty much become the Wild West, and has led to some abnormal and often inconsistent salary findings. The diversity on the salary front is a common topic for debate, and it's largely due to the characteristics of the digital sector as a whole, hence salary benchmarks are virtually non-existent.

Fred Roed: A challenging area is the creative department. I believe South Africa's lack of world-class digital creatives is because it takes a number of years in the industry to truly "think digital". In other words, connecting the dots and understanding the customer's journey when engaging with digital media.

Strong digital media planners are also tough to find. Digital media is currently a fairly confusing segment, with so many publishers and devices to sift through. Both planning and implementation of a successful digital strategy is challenging in today's environment, so finding candidates who have spent time immersing themselves in the myriad of metrics can be tough.

Strangely, for a country with such an engaged mobile community, there are not many mobile marketing specialists. This will change over the next five years. We expect smartphone prices to drop radically, data costs to come down, and clients to start demanding more focus being paid to this area. Of course, this will increase the level of skills in mobile.

Mia Scholtz: Analytics is the foundation upon which all marketing efforts should be built.

Digital channel specialisation is good and bad, and you need to be conscious that today's user accesses the web through numerous digital touch points each day. Each of these touch point creates data and the ability to find and communicate meaningful patterns in data is valued in today's environment.

There is a need to find and harness analytical thinking, complex problem solving abilities and solution application, as reiterated by our Digital Media Director, Brad Page: "Complexity is forthcoming, the ability to analyse and connect the dots is pertinent to remaining relevant as a business, marketing in today and tomorrow's digital space."

Expansion of this core skill set (analytics) has the strength to improve any digital media industry holistically.

Dave Duarte: We need both generalists and specialists. At every level, you have skills gaps. For example, social media managers are often hired based on a general marketing qualification plus enthusiasm for tools like Twitter, but they often don't have a broader awareness of issues like SEO, paid online media, and analytics.

This leads to poor execution and a low-level of strategic involvement. On the technical side, anyone working in the field in South Africa knows about the challenges we face in finding top-notch coders and developers, but this is being addressed by the proliferation of great online coding schools, as well [as the] growing attractiveness of computer science degrees. Lastly, the generally poor quality of creative in online banner advertising we see locally is due to misunderstanding and misinformation about how paid advertising should be combined with owned and earned media online.

Bryan Khumalo: There is room for skills expansion in the following areas: email marketing, search marketing, analytics, mobile and campaign management.

Di Charton: I think one of our biggest problems is understanding how to effectively integrate digital and "traditional" thinking. This speaks largely to the issues I raised above - marketers think of digital as being a channel in the marketing arsenal. We've seen consumers move seamlessly across mediums, but marketers are still struggling to make that journey with them. For me, there has to be a basic understanding of ALL of the various aspects of digital, the role it plays, what it means for your consumer and how they would integrate it into their lives. This basic understanding is generally lacking, and without it, the power of digital cannot be sufficiently unlocked.

I feel there will always be room for specialists within the digital space due to its highly dynamic and changing nature. I think we'll continue to see the need for "niche" specialists, and the people with these skills will continue to be in high demand as we play catch-up.

Vanessa Gibb: There's a real skills shortage in areas like user experience and online reputation management. These exciting areas where humans and technology collide are prime targets for people making career decisions now. Search is also an area with few qualified and experienced people.

André Steenkamp: The short answer is "all of the above". Some people predict the death of email marketing with spam laws (like POPI) constricting the channel but in reality we need to move from broadcast (spam) to one-to-one communication. This will require specialist skills with a deep understanding of communication strategy and human behaviour to deliver targeted messages to willing consumers. In the same vein, each of the above-mentioned skill sets has a role to play but the relatively new channels like social media listening and social marketing have the most potential for growth purely because we are at the early stages of the channel development cycle.

Digital strategy is also a highly sought after skill - not only requiring a deep understanding of all the digital channels available and when and how to use them to suit the brief but also the inter-relation with the traditional (ATL) components of the over-arching communications strategy.

Sam Paddock: My experience of all of these areas is that demand outstrips supply of competent marketing professionals. I believe that the most highly demanded skill-set involves an integrated view of all of these functions in order to manage a digital marketing team.

Is there sufficient training (from peers or external training organisations) for digital marketing?

Rob Stokes: The options are certainly out there. At <u>Quirk</u> we have been running a graduate program for about 10 years and this is heavily reliant on peer training, which has proven very effective for us, even though it does come at a high cost. We are also seeing strong growth in our education business (<u>Red & Yellow</u>) which highlights the demand for such training. Whether this is sufficient or not is for the market to decide.

Jarred Cinman: Not by a long way. The <u>IAB_SA</u> has recently started a process of trying to build digital curricula and accreditation programs in South Africa to help bridge this gap. It is my view that educational institutions struggle to know what the job market is after and thus to teach the right vocational skills. Most people who are at senior levels in this industry are self-taught and have learned what they know from experience. That has positives but it's slow and cannot service the needs of an industry trying to grow as quickly as this one. I would say there are many improvements afoot - <u>AAA</u>, for example, is launching a digital training program in their degree this year - but we have a very long way to go.

Alex Martin: I think we're getting there, but there's certainly room for expansion in this area. For example, Quirk has pioneered digital training and education, much to the benefit of the country's overall digital skill level, in my opinion, especially with their work with Red & Yellow. There is also Brandschool and [[http://www.ogilvydma.com/The Ogilvy Digital Marketing Academy, and various other independent digital trainers. There is still room, however, for further development in this area. I think more of the larger players in digital could invest in creating their own digital training academies, thus ensuring a stable pipeline of talent to bring through their ranks.

Fred Roed: It depends on what area you're looking at. Digital marketing can be split into a myriad of career options. In some areas, the primary education institutions are adding important skills to their offering. However, I believe in areas such as SEO, PPC, digital media planning and digital project management we have a way to go. Our own training initiative, the Heavy Chef course, was created out of a need to up-skill not only our own people but our clients' teams as well.

Mia Scholtz: I don't believe that there is. Possible variables creating this shortfall could include standard industry characteristics: fierce competition, protection of IP, inability to spend time and effort, lack of expertise in the craft. Although we have seen some fantastic efforts by a few, hopefully the industry (with growth) will evolve into an open economy of educational resource sharing, much like the developed digital markets. With growth, we'll see

more hands going up from peers willing to give back.

Dave Duarte: There are plenty people offering training in digital, but standards are inconsistent. I'm a big believer in vocational training - you don't necessarily need to complete a university degree to get a job, but the challenge for the industry is now to create a set of standards that can tell us whether a person is qualified to do the job they are being hired for. These needn't be government standards, but something the industry can agree on, and endorsed by a recognised body such as the <u>IAB</u> in South Africa

Bryan Khumalo: Unfortunately few companies and agencies offer training in digital marketing and the few individuals that are skilled, are bound to be headhunted by other agencies and clients. Part of the problem is that the field is changing too rapidly for schools to keep up with ever changing technology.

Di Charton: More training, more knowledge transfer, more mentoring and more time invested in up-skilling can only benefit our industry as a whole. While there is a growing number of options on offer (and a growing market interested in training of this nature) there's not enough transfer of practical skills happening and people aren't necessarily being exposed to the stuff they can take away and apply in their jobs, to their brands or clients, immediately. As marketers, we need to make the space in our lives for this type of training, and open our minds to alternative learning methods and tools (another area in which we are behind), rather than seeking quick-fix solutions that may look good on our CVs but won't necessarily equip us with the confidence to speak and practice integrated marketing with skill and conviction. We invest time and effort at Red & Yellow ensuring our students are equipped for this exciting new space - be they fulltime learners looking to embark on their careers, or professionals looking to up-skill themselves. We have recognised a growing need for digital training in particular and offer practical based learning that ranges from generic and beginner courses, to specialisations and advanced training. It is through this knowledge transfer, with practical outcomes, that we hope to help shift the industry.

Vanessa Gibb: There are many skills that a person can be trained in, whether through a face-to-face course, through mentorship or online learning, but I think first prize is for people to learn in a real work environment with real work. Our internship program has helped yield some of our best young employees.

André Steenkamp: No. There is some good work being done by the traditional schools like Red & Yellow, Vega and AAA but I think more can be done by employers themselves. Academic training is one thing - what we need more of is on the job skills training and experience. Some agencies are willing to take on juniors and train them but others aren't. There's also a hell of a lot of headhunting going on in this industry and very little investment in skills development. This has led to a situation where often under-skilled employees command a much-inflated salary, holding employers to ransom. If we allow this continue unchecked we are headed for an implosion of sorts, where salaries push costs beyond what the market can sustain.

Sam Paddock: There are sufficient training programmes, but they aren't part of formal curriculums. This means people who wish to study them must take courses on top of the formal route of study they choose. At GetSmarter, we offer online short courses that are 10 weeks long, can be taken from anywhere there is an internet connection, and result in a certificate from the University of Cape Town. Subjects include social media, internet marketing, project management, financial management, human resource management, as well as 46 other short courses.

What advice would you give to those considering digital marketing as a career?

Rob Stokes: Do it. Learn to code. Read a lot. Ignore the hype. Don't spend your life on Twitter - digital is much, much bigger than social media.

Jarred Cinman: Do it! And I'm not just saying that because I'm biased. Digital marketing is one of the most challenging, exciting and fluid industries in the world. It is also highly transportable since many skills are common

in all countries. The work being done in many agencies has a chance to make a real difference to society, culture and people's livelihoods. In many ways, it is wrong to think of digital marketing as "advertising" in the old sense. We are communication pioneers and change agents, and we plug directly into the national and global zeitgeist.

Even if you believe none of that, I can say that the career opportunities for smart, self-motivated people are almost limitless. And digital will be around for as far as we can foresee so digital marketing is a career choice that will last for your lifetime and beyond.

Alex Martin: Naturally, I'd encourage them to pursue it. There is huge variety, a range of skills and personality types in the digital arena - ranging from technical, creative, leadership sales etc. The digital arena is ever changing, and developing in new avenues all the time. Digital is becoming increasingly interwoven with everyone's daily lives and virtually all business sectors. There are challenging and highly lucrative career paths available to those seeking to enter the digital marketing sector, the progression can be rapid and the excitement of working within a dynamic and forward thinking environment must also be large pull factors.

Fred Roed: Get stuck in! There is no substitute for experience. I like Rob Stokes' model of intern training at Quirk, where candidates are thrown in the deep end right after training. We have adopted something similar at World Wide Creative where interns spend six months shadowing experienced team members on real client work.

Mia Scholtz: The field is young, big, scary and 100 miles an hour. Basic sociological, economic, and mathematical principles apply. If you're comfortable with uncertainty, change, and data - it's for you.

Dave Duarte: In my opinion, the best proof of skills in this field is a portfolio of work, or personal projects. Whether you're currently employed or not, I would encourage people to start developing digital side-projects to test, develop, and showcase your skills. Rather than an impressive CV, I would prefer a job applicant who can show me work they've done online - whether alone or with peers - talk me through their project in detail, and tell me what they've learned through their success and failure in their digital experiments. My own companies, OgilvyDMA and Treeshake, offer vocational training opportunities where learners are encouraged to launch these kinds of projects online, and I believe there are a number of other schools doing the same. The key thing is: Learn, apply, and participate in the industry - we're all online, that's the advantage of networking in this field.

Bryan Khumalo: The ever-growing digital marketing industry is the space to be in. It is very easy to place an individual that has skills in digital marketing. The majority of clients we work with are always on the lookout for experienced digital marketing individuals.

Di Charton: Well, "digital marketing" is not a career. A marketer with only digital skills is as handicapped as a marketer who only knows the world of print and the TVC. Marketing is a career and it needs more digital specialists. Advice wise... well, you will never get bored in this space! It is dynamic and exciting. It will keep you on your toes and force you to continually evaluate what you think you know. It is extremely rewarding due to its high degree of measurability and you will very quickly be able to see the results of the effort you put in. And don't ever think you know it all. You really do need to have a commitment to life-long learning in order to keep up with the change. Understand how digital integrates, understand all the various aspects of digital, and then specialise further if you find something that excites you.

Vanessa Gibb: Choose a specific direction that interests you and learn about the current trends or hot topics within that field. Try to get an internship and learn as much as you can. Keep your skills current by attending seminars, webinars and taking some online courses. There are great opportunities to get into a sector where you can grow with the industry.

André Steenkamp: Jump in, feet first - there's plenty of room. The digital marketing industry is constantly growing and evolving and talented people with digital experience will always be in demand. Find your talent - are you analytical or creative by nature? Do you like to trawl through piles of research for hours on end searching for

insights or do you prefer standing in front of clients presenting the insights? Do the words "return on investment" excite you more than "user experience"? Find that thing inside you, your passion, and focus on that you can learn skills, you can't learn talent. If potential employers can see that talent or passion, they will, or should, invest in your skills development.

Sam Paddock: Digital marketers are most effective when they combine a comprehensive understanding of the marketing discipline together with skills in digital marketing technology. For those considering a career in digital marketing I would suggest enrolling in a formal marketing programme, experimenting deeply with different digital marketing tools, and finally exploring their own creativity in order to drive great strategic thinking in their role as a marketer.

Conclusion:

Clearly, there is much to do. This ticking digital marketing talent time bomb is very real, and it's not going away any time soon.

Given the wide and growing requirement for digital marketing skills, it makes sense for organisations from many different sectors to collaborate if we as an industry are to get any closer to resolving this - whether through internships, mentoring or training. From my perspective, I'm offering all of these and remain committed to finding ways to encourage skills growth through whatever means possible.

Make the time and budget available to invest in training and up-skilling. It will be time and money well spent.

Do you have any other ideas on how we can close the gap to encourage and attract more talent to digital marketing?

ABOUT ANDREA MITCHELL

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