

# THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

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**N**o matter which industry you work in, a good marketing strategy is the foundation to a comprehensive marketing plan and long-term sales growth. It is the overarching guide that can help you focus on your business goals and objectives, understand your market and select the right mix of tactics, platforms and messages to stimulate sales and produce optimal results.

With so many emerging platforms available to help you reach your target audience, it may be really easy to just move forward and incorporate the latest channel into your marketing program without researching or testing it to get a clear understanding of its capabilities and how it can impact your business. Chances are you have a limited amount of time and resources and, unfortunately, not all platforms will result in successful results for you and your agency. Taking a strategic and focused approach to your marketing can result in the selection of the right platforms, effective campaigns and valuable initiatives, even when faced with time and resource limitations.

Marketing is more than just advertising, public relations and promotions; it also helps you learn more about your target audience (current and prospective clients), their specific needs (products and/

or solutions) and key insights to what will resonate with them. With this understanding, the messages you communicate can become more impactful, and result in stronger relationships that can ultimately result in an increase in sales.

Marketing can even help to identify the relevant platforms and touch points that you need to use to ensure you're everywhere (or in most places) that your target audience tends to be. In today's marketplace, it is nearly impossible to control where your current clients and potential clients engage with your brand, but it is possible to create impactful opportunities for them to interact with you.

Currently, there is a high level of popularity with all things digital. A large portion of the workforce is technologically savvy and many technological advances have resulted in easier access to contacts and leads. So it is safe to say an online presence is a vital supplement to your continued success. This does not mean that you should walk away from the platforms that have resulted in proven success, but rather make sure that your marketing mix reflects your target audience's preferences.

## **IF IT ISN'T BROKEN, GIVE IT A TUNE-UP**

It is okay to stick with tried-and-true platforms. Depending on your target audience's communication preferences, the use of marketing

## COVER FEATURE

tactics such as direct mail, event sponsorships, presentations, print advertising and collateral materials—brochures, fliers, etc.—still remain a solid way to reach individuals and engage them with your individual or agency brand and messaging.

But ask yourself if you are taking the best approach to these tactics or if your approach to these tactics could use enhancements. Is there a more efficient way to get things done? Would your clients or potential clients appreciate online collateral materials instead of printed ones? Would a webinar or face-to-face meeting be a more convenient option for your existing or potential clients? A tweak here or there to your current marketing methods may be all you need to ensure that you are maximizing your sales efforts.

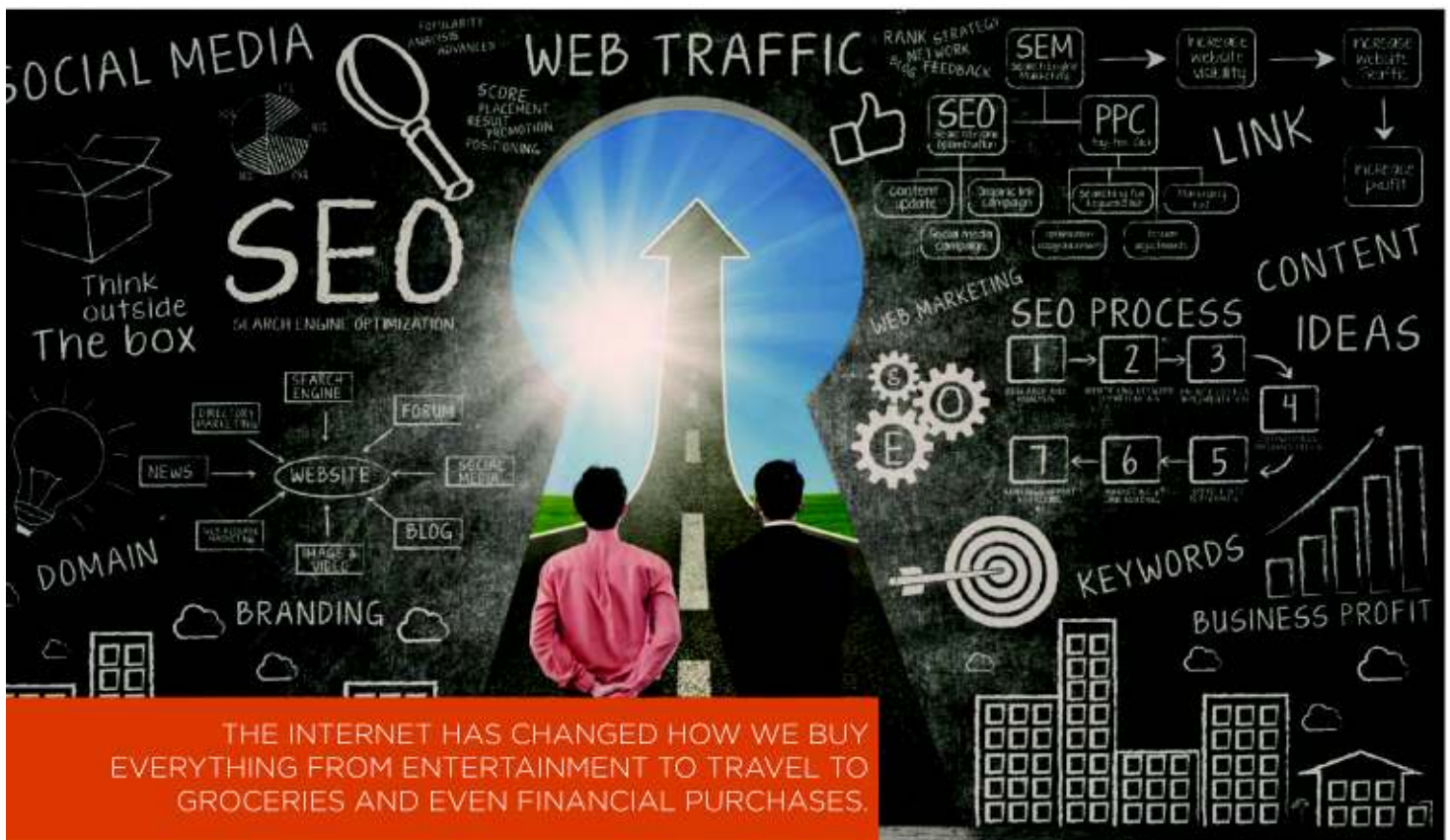
### FIND THE RIGHT MIX TO PRODUCE HIGH-OCTANE RESULTS

Online tactics can enable increased efficiencies; you can engage and interact with your clients and potential clients on a more frequent basis, and with less mileage. There are the tried-and-true digital platforms including websites, search engine optimization, banner ads, pay-per-click advertising and email marketing, as well

as newer platforms such as mobile advertising networks, social media and blogging. These tactics present you with more opportunities to expose your clients and potential clients to your brand and messaging, and reinforce your reputation or that of your team as industry experts.

Not all online platforms are created equally, and finding the right ones to help you achieve your marketing goals is not simple. With solid marketing goals and objectives, a defined target audience and clear insight into their online activity, choosing the right platforms will become a less daunting task. Here are a few questions to help you determine the right platforms for your marketing mix:

- What platforms are your clients and potential clients using? What are your clients' communication preferences?
- What platforms would you like to test?
- How can these platforms help achieve your current marketing and sales goals and objectives?
- How can these platforms help you explore current opportunities for growth?



THE INTERNET HAS CHANGED HOW WE BUY EVERYTHING FROM ENTERTAINMENT TO TRAVEL TO GROCERIES AND EVEN FINANCIAL PURCHASES.



Let's take a look at a few of the platforms that may be on your radar:

### Website

The Internet has changed how we buy everything from entertainment to travel to groceries and even financial purchases. Google even coined a phrase for the online decision-making moment: the "Zero Moment of Truth" or ZMOT.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to individual insurance purchases, no market or research activity is more important to consumers than searching online.<sup>2</sup> People still turn to friends and family for information about a company's reputation, but more people turn first to the Internet, looking for features and benefits, pricing or cost information, customer service information and even agent relationship information.

Benefits and business insurance buyers are no different. These days, almost any information your existing and potential clients are looking for about benefits or insurance products and services is right at their fingertips. The question is, when they are looking, will they find you or your agency as a solution?

A website is the easiest way for clients to find out more about the products you offer, the services you provide, your experience and your company. It should be a key element of your company's marketing strategy. It should be mobile-optimized, easy to navigate and contain content that site visitors will find useful, including—images, videos, slide shows and audio files—while serving as a reflection of the professionalism and expertise you provide.

### Search Engine Optimization

Organic search is responsible for 47% of all website visits, while paid search is only responsible for six percent.<sup>3</sup> The copy used on your website should include keywords and phrases your clients and potential clients would use as they search for the products and services that your company has to offer. Are they more likely to be searching while using terms such as "benefits," "employee benefits," "voluntary benefits" or something else? Your website designer or content manager should incorporate these keywords into the text on your webpage and URL links while also including the keywords in the titles, tags and descriptions of photos, videos and downloadable files posted on the site. Taking these steps will increase the likelihood that your clients and potential clients will find your company's website when searching for the products and services you provide.

### Social Media

There are plenty of social media channels available: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest and YouTube, just to name a few. Social media is a great way to strengthen relationships with existing clients and to create relationships with potential clients. You can exhibit your benefits expertise through discussions about current industry-related topics, share tips and insights, provide information about new products and answer questions—exhibiting your expertise in the insurance industry. When effectively used, you can

turn your fans and followers into your personal or agency "brand ambassadors"—people who will spread your message for you.

The number of social media channels is often overwhelming, however, using multiple channels simultaneously may not be as challenging as you may think. With an editorial calendar, you can plan to post eye-catching photos, graphics, slide shows, videos, simple text comments or questions to followers, to ensure you are providing helpful content and sparking conversations on a consistent basis.

### Email Marketing

With an estimated 4,300% ROI,<sup>4</sup> email marketing remains one of the strongest ways to obtain sales. According to the Direct Marketing Association, 66% of online consumers age 15 and up made a purchase as a result of an email marketing message.<sup>5</sup> You can alert your clients and potential clients to any new information you would like to share with an email campaign. Emails are a good way to tie together multiple tactics and lead your targets to valuable content you would like to share. They can include a link to relevant content—a video on your YouTube page, your website, a white paper, a webinar, a blog post or even a bylined article in a trade publication.

To increase efficiencies and to make these efforts a little more seamless and timely, many companies are using marketing automation software to automate workflows, qualify leads, learn more about their potential clients and obtain clear, measurable results via analytics on both their marketing and sales efforts. Marketing automation is also used frequently to distribute a series of emails to your audience to cultivate relationships.

### A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Employers partner with agents who understand their needs and offer solutions to resolve their issues using efficient and seamless processes. The combination of a strong offline and online marketing presence, through a variety of platforms, can provide you with a competitive selling advantage while showing your industry expertise even when you can't be there in person. By remaining strategic in your approach to platform and channel selection, you can engage and interact with both clients and prospects more frequently and even in real time. With a clear identification and understanding of your target audiences, marketing goals and objectives, your strategy will help drive sales where you want them to be. **HIU**

1 [www.thinkwithgoogle.com/collections/zero-moment-truth.html](http://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/collections/zero-moment-truth.html)

2 [www.thinkwithgoogle.com/research-studies/zmot-insurance-study.html](http://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/research-studies/zmot-insurance-study.html)

3 Safran, Nathan. (2013, June 25) 310 Million Visits: Nearly Half of All Website Traffic Comes from Natural Search

4 Direct Marketing Association, DMA 2013 Statistical Fact Book: The Definitive Source for Direct Marketing Benchmarks, 2013

5 Direct Marketing Association, Saturday Stat Series: The Influence of Email Marketing Messages, August 2013