

Digital Marketing Techniques and Tools in Covid-19 era

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Abstract: Internet is used today for many reasons, more than just exchanging information, but also for the development of businesses. The use of internet has become essential, providing countless benefits when used properly and applications that internet provides such as digital marketing are put to use.

In the past, the promotion and purchase of products and services was done only through the interaction of individuals and businesses and the vision of communicating through a “screen” with the aim of developing business readership seemed utopia. However, now through the development of technology, the concepts of e-commerce and digital marketing are growing more and more. This paper aims to investigate and present the use of digital marketing in businesses and how consumer’s habits toward shopping changed.

Keywords- Digital marketing, E-mail, Affiliate Marketing, Viral Marketing

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 15 years, digital media platforms have revolutionized marketing. Through the platforms they offer new ways for businesses to inform and interact with their potential customers, strengthen their relationships, provide their services and finally sell their product (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

Digital marketing follows many different strategies in order for every business to get the best results in the field of marketing and advertising. These strategies can be applied individually on a case-by-case basis, but an effective combination of them can bring the desired results to the business in the best possible way. The paper is an attempt to analyze these strategies and the ways in which businesses try to attract the customers.

The percentage of businesses using digital marketing is growing more and more and gaining allies along the way, especially during the pandemic. The reasons why this strategy is adopted by several businesses are twofold. First, the means used by this sector are technologically improving. Second, the creativity with which all these means are used by the marketing experts is constantly increasing.

Digital marketing began to flourish in the 1990s and 2000s and aimed to change the mindset and thinking of businesses and consumers in general. As digital platforms become more and more integrated into marketing plans and everyday life, digital marketing campaigns are becoming increasingly widespread and efficient (Nielsen, 2016; Damian, 2020). The development of digital marketing aims to strengthen the communication channels of traditional marketing.

Marketing experts are now using digital communication tools with customers as they notice that there are increased possibilities and advantages. The right mix of communication tools must include right strategies and determination to succeed. The goal should be the correct networking of communication, both traditional and digital, in terms of time and content.

II. TOOLS OF DIGITAL MARKETING

1) Marketing using Electronic Mail (E-mail Marketing)

E-mail marketing is a form of direct marketing in the digital world that uses e-mail to send mass marketing messages to the e-mail addresses. More specifically, it concerns the mass sending of informative e-mails intended to inform recipients or potential customers about the services or products of a business. In addition, e-mail can be used to send advertisements, make requests to businesses or promote sales, and is intended to build loyalty, trust or brand awareness. Emailing has become part of people's daily lives in workplaces and homes around the world (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011).

It is a highly competitive, effective and cost-effective digital marketing tool. Creating and implementing an email message is quite easy with zero cost. It is a direct way to attract a potential customer or reminder of already existing customers. The results are seen as recipients react immediately upon reading the message.

Apart from the positive aspects of this type of digital marketing, there are also disadvantages as well as risks. If the required restrictions are not met, some of the informational e-mails received by recipients may become annoying and persistent, as their content is not useful. This process and the persistence of some businesses, result in customers losing interest and credibility in the business and trying to avoid it.

2) Affiliate Marketing

The growing use of internet in marketing has led to the development of affiliate networks through which businesses and website owners collaborate (Taylor et al., 2020). This form of affiliate marketing is widespread as it is used by the largest businesses worldwide.

Affiliate marketing describes the relationship created between the advertiser (merchant) and his partner (affiliate). According to Lee (2016) affiliate marketing refers to an agreement between two parties, merchants and affiliates. Affiliates

promote the merchant's products and they are paid based on the size of the sales.

The online environment is a constantly changing space and businesses that want to stay in the game must keep up with the changes and adapt. This leads to the exploration of new opportunities and one of them is affiliate marketing.

The starting point is looking at how affiliate marketing can become a part of the business. Depending on the type of business, they will choose to be merchants or affiliates.

Affiliate marketing has its roots in the traditional type of marketing, i.e. door-to-door sales. This type of marketing has proven to be effective and still exists in the world of traditional marketing. Affiliate marketing is based on word of mouth approach. It has been proven that when people hear good things about products from their friends, family or someone they trust they are more inclined to make a purchase (OECD, 2019).

The models related to affiliate marketing are the following (Bjerkan et al., 2020):

- Cost per click: The partner is rewarded with a small amount for an action performed by the visitor on an advertiser's creative image or text. It is the cost that advertisers pay when a user clicks on their ad.
- Cost per Action. The affiliate is paid for a specific action that the visitor takes on the advertiser's website, such as completing a membership registration form or signing up for a newsletter.
- Cost per Sale. The partner is paid for each online sale that will take place in a certain period of time from the advertiser's website.
- Revenue Sharing. The advertised business shares a part of its profits with the (affiliate) partner. This method is widespread in gambling websites.
- Cost per Thousand or Cost per View (CPM). It is the cost that advertisers pay to have their ad appear a thousand times. The partner receives an amount of money for every 1000 views of an ad regardless of sales or other actions.
- Cost per Install. The affiliate is paid an amount of money for each installation of software programs.

3) Viral Marketing

According to Wilson (2012) viral marketing is any marketing technique that induces websites or users to pass on a marketing message to other websites or users, creating a potentially exponential increase in the visibility and effect of the message. Viral marketing is used by most large companies as it is an effective method of promoting products and services. It is named "viral" because the passing process of a marketing message mimics the spreading of a virus from a person to another.

It is a process in which the customers or consumers themselves become agents of the spread, i.e. they transmit the message that the company wants to promote to friends, acquaintances,

relatives and colleagues, etc. It refers to actions that motivate users to spread the information to as many recipients as possible. This is the marketing technique of electronic transmission of information from mouth to mouth (word-of-mouth) (Leskovec, 2007).

Aral and Walker (2011) investigated the effect on adoption among 2 million Facebook users of having viral features. By adding just one "Share" button to the product, a 400% increase in peer-to-peer influence on the product purchase was seen. Additionally they report that viral product design has been shown to be up to 10 times more effective at increasing adoption than traditional banner ads and up to twice as effective as email messages, showing that viral products are more effective than traditional marketing.

For viral marketing to be successful, three key parts are important, the message, the messenger, and the environment. Some effective marketing techniques include targeting the right audience and channels, creating videos, offering a valuable service or free product, creating emotional approach, social outreach, and enabling easy sharing and downloading message (Kaur et al., 2015). In other words, viral marketing aims to create positive "buzz" around the business, product or service being promoted, through consumer communication.

The advantages of this practice are of an economic nature, since the dissemination of a campaign is free, but also of a social nature, because a feeling of trust is created among consumers.

In order for this method of marketing to succeed and the promotional message to spread like a virus, it should entice the user's interest to spread it. Viral campaigns can be in the form of videos, e-books or cards, newsletters, or a game delivered via email or social networks. Figure 2 illustrates the viral loop.

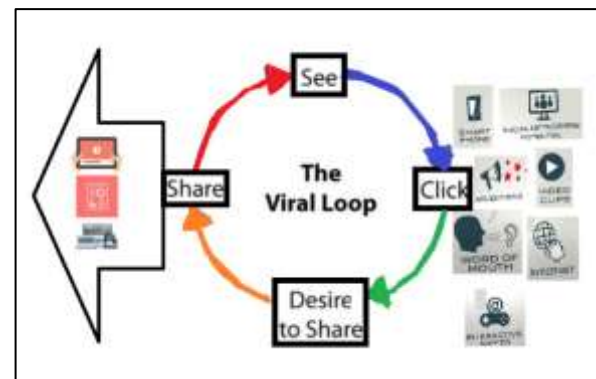


Fig. 1 Viral loop

Source: <https://rafichowdhury.com/viral-marketing-business-growth/>

4) Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

Search Engine Marketing, in short SEM, is how to increase website traffic by buying search engine ads in e.g. Google, Yahoo, Bing, and even Yandex search engines (Gudivada et al., 2015).

In today's digital internet society to search for information or a website one needs search engines. These engines are pages on

the internet where they record and rank the various websites thus facilitating the search for information on the internet. The result of the search is a set of electronics website addresses relevant to the search topic. Engines use complex algorithms to rank various websites as relevant to a search.

According to the global statistical service Statcounter (gs.statcounter.com) the years 2017-2018 the most popular search engine worldwide was Google with a percentage that reaches 91.63%, followed by Bing, Yahoo, Baidu, Yandex Ru and Shenma. To perform a search the user types one or more words or even a whole phrase.

The goal of marketing through search engines is to achieve the highest possible visibility in search engines, for searches related to business or the product/service (Aswani et al., 2018).

Search engines are widely used by consumers worldwide and are therefore a significant part of consumption and advertising. Consumers search with 'keywords' for products through search engines. Businesses that seek to appear in search engines are constantly growing with a lot of competition for the top positions in search-results-websites, which has led to the development of another industry, search engine optimization, which includes building and networking techniques that offer better positions in the results.

This marketing practice is characterized as a direct sales channel as it relies on the use of search engines to sell directly to consumers. Its goal is to achieve the highest possible visibility in search engine results, for searches related to the company or product/service (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2011).

Search engine advertising involves paid-for ads in the following three ways (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012):

- **Structured Search:** Ranking of websites depends on algorithms that use basic search engine structures. Today, the method of using paid advertising is known, in order to increase the search of the page and its traffic rates. In this way, more and more companies are constantly being added to the index of search engines with the aim of better and more direct visibility of each company.
- **Keyword Advertising:** In this type of digital marketing, companies buy keywords through an online auction. So, when a user/consumer types in that keyword, the ad usually appears at the top of the page or on the right. The more money a company allocates, the higher it is placed on the list.
At the same time, in some search engines the positions of the advertisements are not only classified based on the amount of money, but also based on the number of hits (clicks) they have.
- **Keyword Network Advertising:** In 2002, Google introduced keyword network advertising, where the owners of the website join the network and accept the display of ads from the search engine on their websites.

5) Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is one of the most modern and successful methods. It is an advanced form of interactive and two-way communication and networking (peer-to-peer, many-to-many) (Alves, 2016). The term social media refers to the set of applications based on the Internet, which have been created based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media marketing aims not only to create an advertising campaign, but also to develop dialogue with user communities (Hill & Moran, 2011). Although in the beginning, most businesses doubted its capabilities, it has now come to dominate this space. All successful businesses now have social media strategies in place.

Blogs, discussion forums, chat rooms, virtual communities, etc. belong to the same category of media, with the aim not only of creating an advertising campaign, but also of developing dialogue with user communities.

Some of the most successful platforms are Facebook which ranks first worldwide according to statista (www.statista.com) followed by Whatsapp, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, Google plus, Youtube and blogs (Tuten & Solomon, 2014).

The information is shared with others that could be characterized as a word of mouth advertising method. The information shared is related to an attractive message which can take any form. Social media has increased traffic, attracts a larger audience and enables users to be able to discuss a subject (Singh & Singh, 2018). Additionally, this type of marketing offers several opportunities to promote products or services. Therefore, for each case it is necessary to choose the appropriate method. Promotional methods include several elements to do the item more attractive. The categories that exist are indirect and direct promotion.

Direct advertising is when a link is promoted directly, combined with an image or short description, and points to the advertiser's page. An example might be a Facebook advertising link that presents a product or service placed on a user's wall. Indirect advertising is done when a link is promoted that leads to an article on a personal website or blog, which is intended to promote the advertiser's website with an affiliate link. In this case, advertising is done indirectly, because the user using social media drives visits to his website and from there to the advertiser's website.

Businesses, according to Tuten and Solomon (2014), initially aim to increase recognition and recommendations from their presence on social media. Through social media, users can spread a brand by making it widely known, through various actions offered by each application. Also, businesses have a better knowledge on customers, since they can interact quickly and directly with them, understanding their problems and their needs. Thus, they create and strengthen their relationships with customers. Businesses have the possibility to present

themselves in a targeted and more effective way to the desired audience.

With Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc. businesses can effectively achieve support for marketing actions (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). This means that they can promote marketing actions in a more indirect but also fun and attractive way. Finally, it is important for a business to create loyalty, acquire new customers and increase sales by using social network applications.

There was a 56% global sales growth of AR / VR headsets from 2017 to 2021. In 2021, more than 30% of consumers bought goods or services after seeing an influencer post or company advertisement on TikTok (Euromonitor International, 2022). The primary goal is to build brand awareness among influential consumers who are pioneering platform engagement. Companies that start establishing a presence now will be at the forefront as virtual social environments and AR / VR develop (Euromonitor International, 2022).

The following figure shows the growth trend for global sales of AR / VR Headsets and Online Games (in billion \$) during the years 2015-2021.

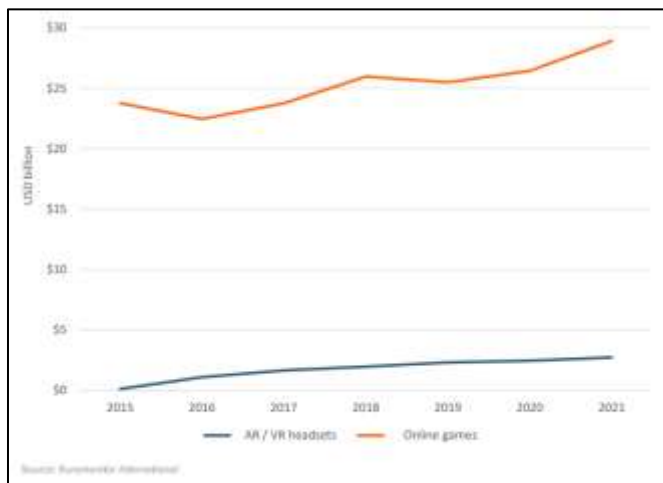


Fig. 2 Global Sales of AR / VR Headsets and Online Games

Source: Euromonitor International, 2022

6) Mobile Marketing (M-Marketing)

According to Amirhanpour et al. (2014) mobile marketing is a set of practices that allows businesses and organizations to communicate with their customers in an interactive way through any device or network. The use of mobile devices (such as smartphones and tablets) is increasing at a rapid rate, resulting in an increase in applications that each business uses for its promotion and expansion (Kaplan, 2012).

M-Marketing includes all those activities required to communicate with customers via mobile devices in order to promote sales and services as well as display information about these goods and services.

According to the American Marketing Association, M-Marketing is an organizational function and a series of

procedures for the promotion and creation of added value to products as well as a better management of customer relations with businesses, through mobile devices.

M-Marketing is marketing method that uses a wireless medium and provides consumers at any time and in any place with personalized information about goods, services, ideas (Kumar & Mukherjee, 2013).

The main marketing techniques applied to mobile devices are the following (Aydin & Karamehmet, 2017; Kaplan, 2012):

- Display advertising
- Electronic messages (sms, mms, notifications, voice mail)
- Mobile Coupons
- Content search engines

III. DISCUSSION

In today's era, the rapid development of internet and new technologies have brought about remarkable changes in the way businesses operate and do business. Internet is used today not only for exchange information, but also for business development. Information is everywhere in a person's environment, leading more and more businesses to integrate the different strategies offered by digital marketing in their daily life, reaping the maximum benefits.

Online marketing environment creates a number of opportunities as well as challenges in digital marketing. Consumers are becoming more attentive, but, on the other hand, the business has the ability to integrate various kinds of information into a single message (Euromonitor International, 2022).

It is the right time to develop a better connection between sales and marketing, and as one marketing expert said: 'Sales processes and lead generation have had to change a lot with social distancing, with an increased digital presence and ways to hold sales presentations virtually' (Steimer 2020, p. 53). Traditional marketing models and strategies are being challenged. Businesses must evolve in line with consumers' behavior changes.

Nowadays, buying habits do not necessarily imply brand loyalty. Successful businesses will follow consumer terms. Hybrid models will effectively allow businesses to pivot between in-person and virtual engagements while the immediate future remains unpredictable.

Sustainability will be competitive as consumers turn to environmentally friendly products and communities. New distribution channels and trade routes could provide additional revenue.

Partnerships with other players in various sectors should be considered by businesses to share resources, expand their reach and achieve goals beyond their current operational capabilities (Euromonitor International, 2022).

What is certain is that customers "move" and businesses must move with them or risk losing them.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is a commonplace that today online shopping is growing at a rapid pace. Digital marketing is now one of the most important tools - if not the most important - of modern businesses.

Digital marketing has given new perspectives and opportunities to businesses turning them into more innovative, competitive and profitable.

In the years 2022, a number of businesses seeking to strengthen their position in the international market are resorting to digital marketing and specifically to the modern tools and means it offers to achieve this.

Digital marketing is a game changer in the field of advertising and selling, helping the business to grow, increase its sales and profits and strengthen its product. It should not be forgotten that digital media and tools are renewed daily, which means that businesses must be updated and follow new data constantly to prevail in this digital world.

The main purpose of this paper is understanding some issues concerning the use of digital marketing in businesses.

It is found that official website is the most important tool in business effort for a successful digital presence in a highly competitive and constantly changing business environment (Kaur et al., 2015; Bjerkan et al., 2020).

At this point, it is appropriate to mention that digital marketing is an important help for a business, because as mentioned the advantages are many and the majority of potential customers are in the digital market (Euromonitor International, 2022; Kaur et al., 2015; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). A significant percentage intend to use it in the future understanding the value of digital marketing.

Increasing brand awareness and establishing reputation is a major advantage that digital marketing provides along with a multitude of others (Kannan & Hongshuang 2017; Kumar and Lall, 2016).

The most important tools/means of digital marketing that are used to a greater extent by the businesses are email marketing and social media marketing. Researches, also, found that today's businesses have understood the necessity and importance of these tools, so they have adapted their practices accordingly (Kannan & Hongshuang, 2017; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

The literature regarding the performance of digital marketing shows that a large part of the businesses are still at an early stage. However, it is pointed out that the measurement of effectiveness is very important for the promotion of products through the Internet, so that companies can correct any mistakes that have occurred. Digital marketing provides useful communication measurement applications and almost every action on the internet can be tracked.

As far as affiliate marketing is concerned, it seems to be used in less than half of the businesses that use digital marketing, while those that use it, basically choose the Cost per click model / advertising campaign, in which the affiliate collects a small amount for each click.

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