

Use Digital Marketing to Build Demand for Your Product

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If you're like many entrepreneurs, you've got a product or service and are looking to increase the number of people you sell it to. Finding and reaching the people who have the problem that your product solves is the hard part – that's marketing. In this article and the video that goes with it, I'll discuss some marketing tools that are especially useful to early-stage, small-scale businesses, such as those run by solo entrepreneurs. In particular, I'm going to focus on digital marketing tools that can be implemented with minimal up-front investments.

Let's take a look at some key tools.

Search Engine Optimization - SEO

Search engine optimization (or SEO) is simply writing content on your website so that widely used search engines, like Google, take notice. Creating a blog, and regularly writing articles on your business's niche, will help people find your site, and eventually, find your product. When Google likes your website and the content you have on it, it ranks you higher in search results for certain keywords. So when a customer searches for a solution, it's more likely you pop up on the front page if you have great SEO. Of course, there are other search engines beyond Google, but the lessons here should stay consistent regardless of the search engine.

There are other ways beyond creating content to get your website noticed, but SEO gets technical fast. It can help to write a consistent blog with niche topics. Then work with other blogs and get them to link to your website (known as "backlinking"), and make sure your website is structured properly with high load speeds. All of these factors, among others, contribute to how much Google likes your website. Other important factors include: how consistently you create content on your site, and how well you target market shifts with new content. SEO is an ongoing process, and it's something you have to defend as the internet changes.

SEO can be inexpensive if you know what you're doing,

and you write the content yourself - but often this isn't the case. A part-time writer can be costly, but if someone on your team is already producing content, SEO may be a worthwhile time investment for them.

The largest drawback to this form of marketing, however, is the time commitment. After you write an article or create a backlink, it's going to take most search engines around 4-6 months to notice; this can also make SEO very difficult to track. If you want to keep up to date with how well your SEO is performing, consider using tools like Google Search Console or ahrefs.com to learn how customers are finding your website. Regardless, it's a long-term marketing investment, without a doubt.

So who can benefit from SEO? Just about any business, as long as your product is relatively unique. If you sell bikes, for instance, you're going to have a very, very hard time ranking, since there's so much competition from hundreds of websites all talking about bikes. But, let's say you run a website that helps students find travel abroad opportunities. That's not going to be nearly as populated of a space, and if you put effort into writing articles, eventually when students search "travel abroad opportunities" in Google, your website will pop up.

Pay-Per-Click Ads - PPC

PPC is probably the simplest form of marketing. You run ads on major platforms, and target your ads towards an audience you think will care. All the major platforms (Google, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn...) have ads managers for their respective sites. Check out the platforms most relevant to your audiences.

While running ads is definitely a skill, it's not hard to get started. Hundreds of YouTube tutorials show how to use each platform, and once you get the hang of it, finding customers with ads can be easy. Check out [this one](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iZl0bCyDPQ) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iZl0bCyDPQ>).

The main issue is the cost, because the ad platform



charges you every time someone sees your ad. If you can make more money off the sales from the customers that click than you spend on ads, congratulations, you're making a profit! But more often than not, getting to that point of profit can be very difficult. If you're not careful, PPC ads can cost a lot.

Luckily, they're extremely quick to test. You can start running your first ad in a few hours - and you'll see results a few hours after that. Create a campaign, a broadly targeted ad set, and one or two ads - spend no more than \$5 per day, and each day, watch the results. After that, duplicate your ad sets and target them to different audiences. Wait a few more days, and see if the results were different. Rinse and repeat!

Because you have such a range of ads platforms to choose from, usually you can find out where your customers are. But, as a general rule of thumb, if you have a low-priced product, making a profit on ads is going to be very difficult. If you sell something under \$30 (in total life-time value), for example, I wouldn't recommend paid advertising.

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is relatively new, but at its core, it's just reaching out to people with large followings on social media, and paying them to promote your product or service. In a way, it's an extension of the age-old process of celebrity endorsement. For instance, if I sell hot sauce, I might find food influencers on Instagram, and send them bottles of my hot sauce to post on their feed. Then, all their followers will see my awesome hot sauce, and they might buy a bottle of their own!

Costs are still somewhat undefined for influencers. Sometimes, if you're working with smaller influencers, or you create a product they really love, they'll work with you for free! But, if you're working with larger influencers, it can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to get them to promote you.

Finding and reaching out to influencers can take time, and finding ones interested in partnering with you can take even longer. I would expect a few weeks of active outreach before you find someone interested in working together, and then a few more weeks before the exchange is made.

Any company selling very directly to the consumer can often use influencers. If you're selling food, find foodies

on social media. If you're selling an app that helps with mental health, find YouTubers that teach mindfulness. If you sell to business professionals, find popular writers on LinkedIn. It can work for just about anyone unless your space is so specialized that you can't find a notable number of influencers or content creators.

It's also a good idea to note that influencers can integrate into other forms of marketing. They can help you create content, help you with PR, and more by making your ad creatives or content more interesting/effective!

Content Marketing

Content marketing is creating anything your customers might find value from. Make videos on YouTube, post on Instagram, write articles on LinkedIn...anything your customers might want to see. If you create enough content, and you're consistent and valuable, you'll build a following - and you can then sell to that audience. Just start by posting content wherever your audience spends time!

The content you create can come in a variety of formats. For example, it could include more "traditional" modes of digital communication, like email or newsletters, as well as social media content. Ideally, too, the formats you use should reinforce one another. For example, blogs can call attention to your social media accounts, which in turn can help generate subscribers to your newsletter. This kind of integrated approach is when marketing creates the most value.

Content marketing is completely free if you create the content yourself, which is why so many businesses and professionals opt to use it - but it is very time-consuming. Many businesses will hire a content marketer as a full-time employee if they're aggressive with their content strategy. If you need to scale beyond creating your own content part-time, it's going to become expensive.

Conclusion

In closing, most of the time, marketing isn't hard to start - but it can be expensive and/or time-consuming to run at scale, depending on your strategy. You'll want to select the most accessible forms of marketing to test in the beginning to see how your audience responds - then, once you know where your customers spend their time, and what mediums they trust and buy through, adapt your marketing plan to fit that information!

