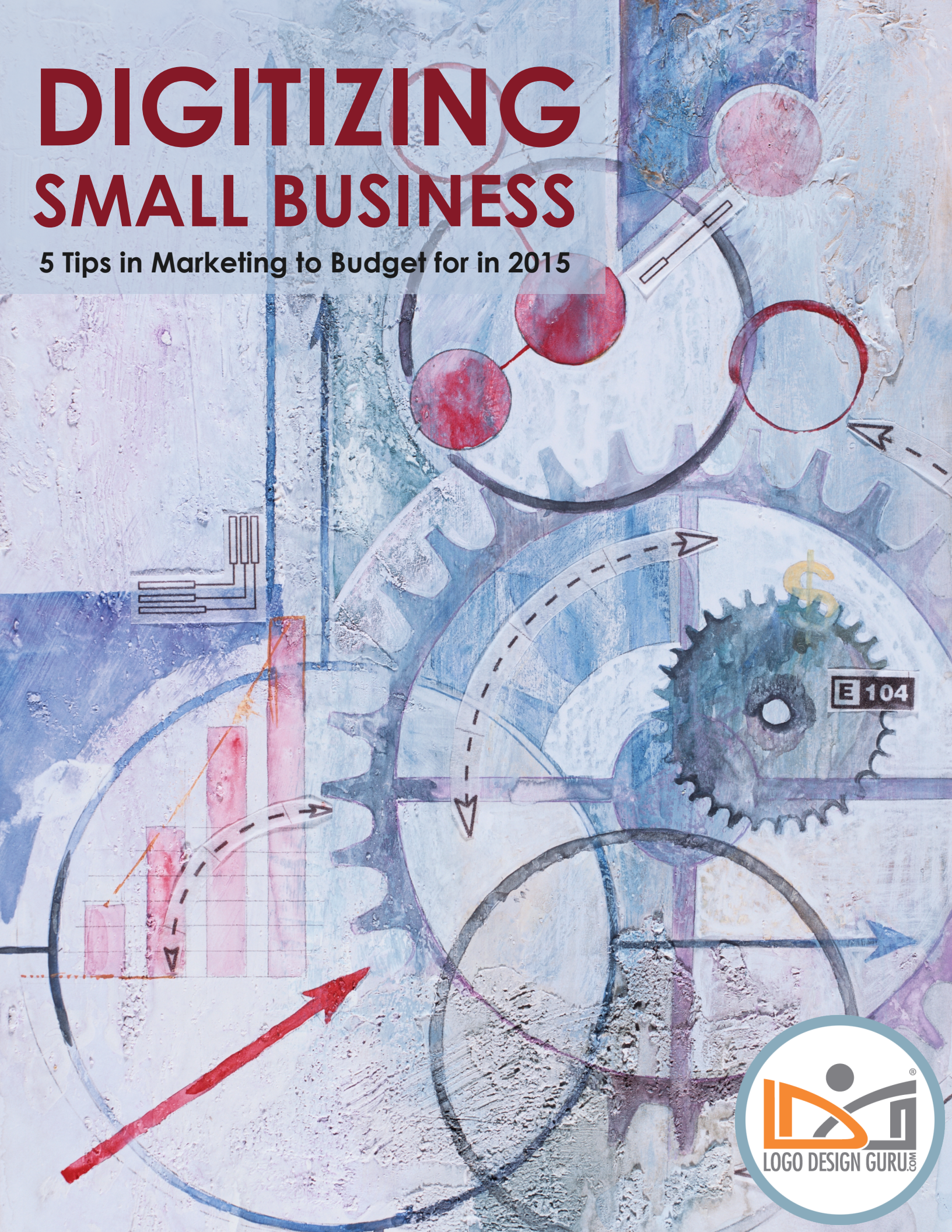


DIGITIZING SMALL BUSINESS

5 Tips in Marketing to Budget for in 2015



ABSTRACT

It is essential for small businesses to create digital marketing strategies in 2015. This e-book helps small businesses understand the five absolutely necessary facets of digital marketing they should invest in for the coming year.



AUTHOR



Hala Ali is a digital marketing consultant with a focus on small and mid-sized enterprises. I believe the focus of every business should be on creating a consistent brand identity online and offline.



THE HUMMINGBIRD REVOLUTION

In 2013 Google began to fetch more contextual results when queries were submitted. Instead of making use of exact keyword matches, a more human form of reference was used and Google began to anticipate queries. This algorithm update, popularly known as “Hummingbird”, has altered the landscape of the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) industry.



● Core of the Hummingbird Algorithm

The words “...better focus on the meaning behind the words” are the core to the algorithm change.

1. The future of digital marketing creates the need for a change in the industry. Businesses must understand that the signal being given is suggesting a trend towards creating a better user experience. In short, anticipate the need of the audience before the question is even asked.

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Hummingbird is the name of the new search platform that Google is using as of September 2013, the name comes from being “precise and fast” and is designed to better focus on the meaning behind the words.

SearchEngineLand.com

2. Many businesses are still grappling with the changes that Google is introducing in its algorithm, and even so called 'expert' SEO's are finding it hard to let go of the past optimization practices. You will find SEO companies advertising link building or even getting your website top results in months. These 'experts' seem to have missed the nuances of the Hummingbird update.

● How do Small Business take control of the Digital Marketing Strategies

“ If you create social media campaigns without audience engagement the campaigns will be doomed to obscurity and while link building is alive and flourishing, a business cannot just go out and 'buy links'. These tactics may give temporary results for ranking, in the long run they are going to get your site penalized.

There have been numerous articles published that give you a basic outline of some steps that should be taken to optimize your website for the future. One outstanding article is on Frobes.com written by Jayson DeMers, “[The Top 7 SEO Trends That Will Dominate 2015](#)”. DeMers gives a brief overview of the SEO industry and then establishes the premise for the seven optimization facets he considers online businesses should implement. Another articles is a guest post on searchengine-land.com, “[5 SEO Strategies That Will Still Work in 2015](#)”

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These two articles have similar principles and provide an exceptional preliminary basis from where to start your SEO in 2015. However, while they outline the actions that must be taken these two articles may still leave the small business owners (and even large corporation marketers) floundering.

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It's great to be told that long tail keywords are important and companies should consider site encryption but what is the landscape of SEO and SEM in the future and how do businesses learn to implement it successfully on a limited budget? (Especially given the clutter of information so prevalent in the Internet).

In his book, **YouTility**, Jay Baer (social media and content strategist & speaker) proposed a “...new marketing approach for the age of information overload and mobility” where “...you have to understand not just what your customers need, but how and where they prefer to access information.”



5 WAYS TO ANTICIPATE SEO AND SEM SUCCESS IN 2015

Small and Local businesses work on a tight budget and marketing is sometimes conceived as being a luxury rather than a necessity. Yet, in the year 2015 the priority of every business has to be focused on marketing. In the digital era, not having a competitive online presence and working without a specific SEO and SEM strategy can prove fatal. In the coming year your business budget priority should be allotted to the following:

1. Analytical Value

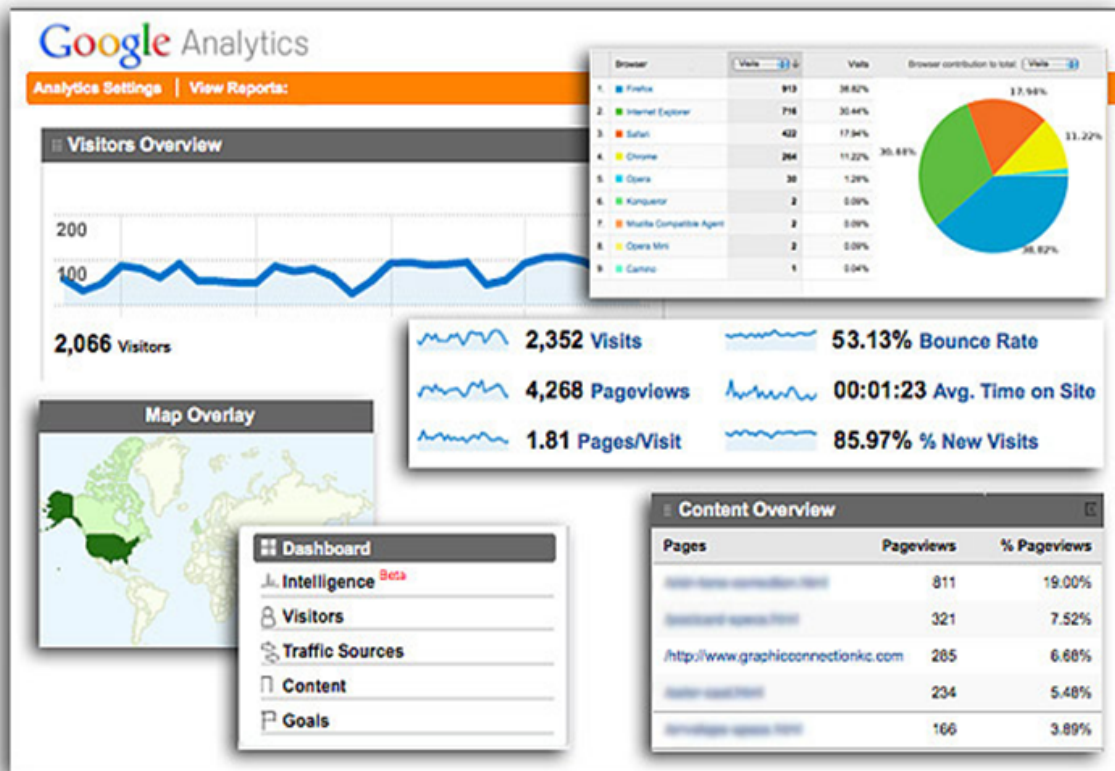
The first step of your marketing should be understanding how your audience interacts with your business. Analytics have been the single most undermined factor of SEO for the past decade. Most businesses fail to utilize the strategic value of the analytics simply because they cannot decipher them.

In 2008 Jeremiah Owyang said the following about **social media analytics**: ‘Social media measurement is like driving a modern car. You may have a dashboard with all the lights, toggles, gauges, and metrics, but remember, the most important piece of data to have in front of you is the GPS screen. The GPS screen indicates where you want to go (your objective), where you are and how to get there.’

“The key to a successful SEO strategy in the future is to know your consumers and this can be done through harnessing the strategic value of your analytics.”

For instance let's consider a scenario where you implement on page optimization tactics and have all the core features integrated from Meta tags to user friendly navigation. The analytics show that the website is getting more hits from Bing than Google for the home page but the services page has more traffic from Google.





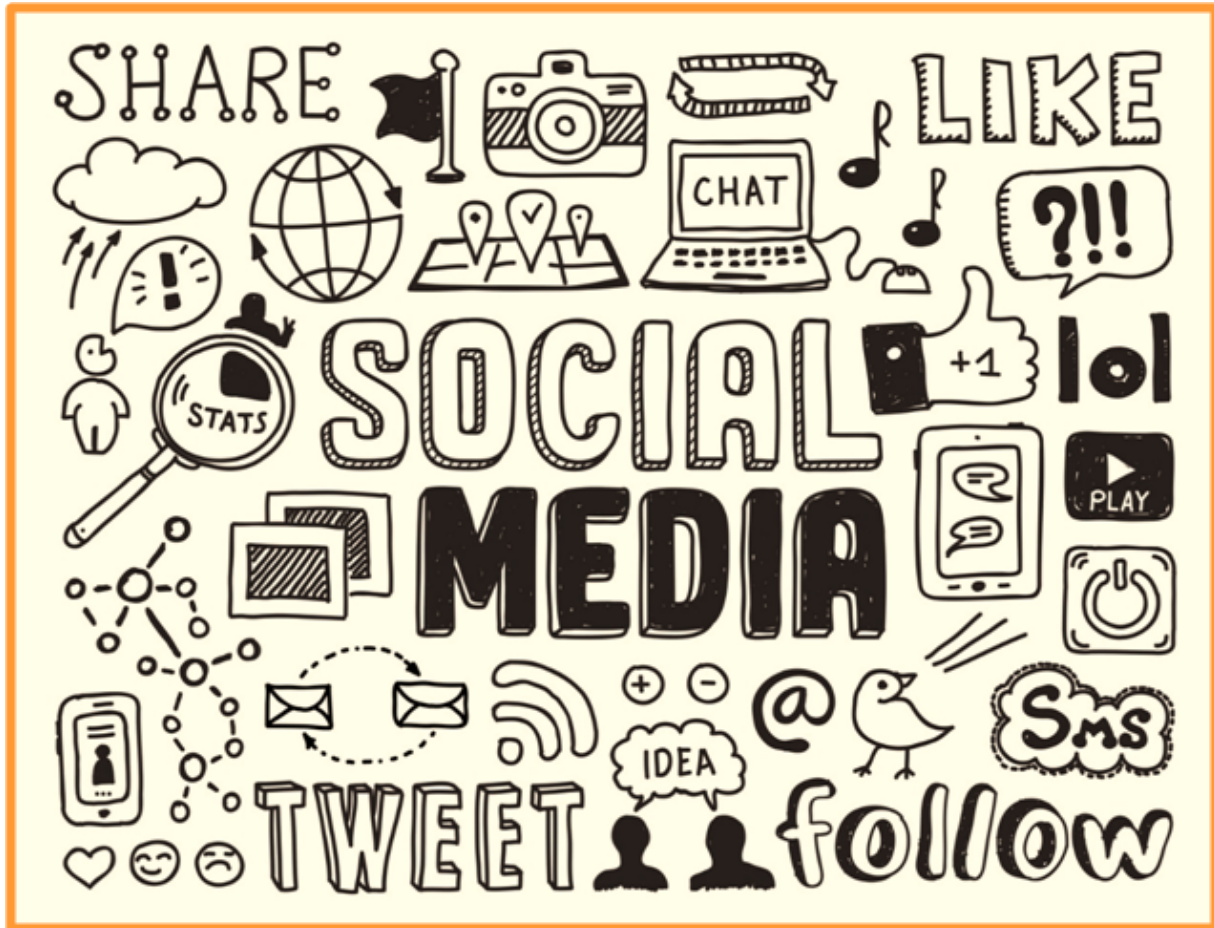
There are some questions that have to be asked to understand what the customer needs and preferred mode of interaction. Depending on the size of your business and your marketing team's ability, it may be prudent to hire an expert analytics professional who is capable of providing specific answers and raising the necessary questions that will allow your marketing team to fine tune your digital marketing strategy.

“ How many conversions is the traffic from Bing getting and how does that compare to the traffic from Google? What is the bounce rate? What do these statistics mean and how do they affect the business?

The bottom line is without a comprehensive understanding of the analytics of your business, no marketing strategy has a chance of success. Moz.com has an excellent article on [measuring and tracking success](#) for those businesses that want a starting point to understanding metrics and data.

2. Choose Business Intelligence VS Social Trends

In the fight for online popularity where social media signals influence search rankings, many businesses make a fatal mistake: they focus more on the social signals than business intelligence aka consumer needs.



Social media markets are a rapidly altering domain, and trends that made marketing gimmicks a success yesterday, can transform overnight and become a failure tomorrow. **In such a volatile social media marketing environment it is necessary for small businesses to market to value added channels.**

Every business has to commit to creating improved buyer personas and generate premises of the needs and motivations of the audience. Digital marketing has to focus on the company and the customers to prove successful.

The fact that the Fortune 500 companies are focusing on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Myspace and Digg to name a few social media sites is inconsequential to your marketing strategy. The only aspect of marketing trends that should effect a digital marketing strategy is how your audience is interacting with your business.

In the world of social media marketing it is the voice of what people are sharing that is essential. Small business owners have to be able to understand the nuances of the conversation and anticipate what the consumer needs are. Most of the time a couple of

Consider a restaurant. Anyone in the restaurant business should focus their SEO and SEM strategy on geo targeting and highlight local SEO tactics. Get listed in food specific social platforms like OpenTable.com. Get reviews on Yelp and Google Local. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter will work well to promote images of the diners, food and even the menu. Running contests makes sense. However, LinkedIn may not be as effective as it is more a B2B platform. Definitely have an owner profile on LinkedIn, but more of the marketing budget should go into the social sites that are consumer oriented.

“

It is vital to understand your business industry, outline your social media objectives and create specific goals in terms of long term prospects and consumer engagement before entering social media marketing.

Nevertheless, for those business owners who would like to embrace social media marketing wholeheartedly, keeping an eye of the technological trends and treating them like ‘seasonal’ marketing may prove effective. Use them while they are popular and then go back to concentrating on the core social sites.



3. Create a Collaborative SEO and SEM Strategy

Within this realm of social media clutter, marketers and savvy business owners require innovation and creativity to gain a distinct competitive advantage. The inability to create a collective SEO and SEM strategy will cause a fragmented audience to emerge and connections between the audience and the business will be filled with dissonance.



The fact is, marketing strategists have to realize that a shift in the market has taken place that is less manipulative and more influential. Brand and corporate owners lack the absolute control they had in the past, and thus, in order to negotiate space within the competitive environment, marketers need to become facilitators in constructing relationships between the business and the consumer.

It is erroneous for corporations to presume they need a “SEO Manager” or a “Social Media Manager”. The changes in the industry have created shifts that require a more post-modernistic style of thinking that challenge the current assumptions of marketing. Search engines want their algorithms to think more like humans, and yet, marketers have resorted more to reacting than creating dynamic strategies. The key to any successful marketing department for small businesses will rely on approaches that evaluate strategic communication in a more fluid mode.

Jacob Morgan in **MarketingProfs** said, “If we are going to start looking at social media in terms of quantifiable numbers then we need to start understanding how much our customers are worth, and this means looking at more than just how much a customer spends. A customer's value is not equal to how much they spend at your store. It's far more.”

In order to gain customer insight, SEO and SEM professionals have to work in a mutually beneficial manner. In the past these two departments have had a relationship biologists would describe as “commensalism”, where one benefits while the other remains unaffected. However, in today’s digital environment the relationship has become more symbiotic or mutual. If one benefits so does the other (by the same token-if one fails so does the other).

Unfortunately, in the current market digital agencies are floundering as they attempt to gain a deeper insight into the changes taking place. To give them their due, digital agencies realize that the various marketing departments, SEO, SEM and SEA (paid) have to be integrated however, the manner in which this is being done lacks a cohesive

In the digital world the larger businesses work with these agencies and may have successfully chosen agencies that are effectively assimilating all the departments.

Still, with low budgets small and local businesses remain at the bottom of the spectrum as they choose either SEO or SEM.

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To gain an edge in 2015 small businesses owners must work with digital marketers that provide a collective solution to their marketing needs.



4. Implement agile Digital Marketing to understand Return on Investment (ROI)

The crucial aspect to Return on Investment (ROI) is paying attention to the customer's value. This emerges not only from what they spend or how they convert but also from their use of the social media.

In order to understand ROI business owners must identify their marketing objective. Once that is done the rest of the data becomes easy to grasp.

“

Identify your Business Objective

- Do you want to build a brand?
- Generate leads?
- Create a better customer service?
- Streamline the communication channel or promote social responsibility?

David Rogers who is a member of the Columbia Business School faculty and considered is a leader in digital strategy has created a presentation on, “**Digital Marketing ROI: Which Half of My Digital Is Working?**”

“

ROI marketers must understand:

- How the connections between consumers are being made
- How consumers are interacting with the content being created on the business pages
- And through their own user generated content
- How the audience controls their online experience.



The most essential facet of the presentation is the slide where he presents the agile method of digital marketing, which he advocates. It helps decipher the dilemma of ROI for business owners and marketers. Rogers includes some questions that help businesses identify their objective.

Whatever the objective, there are, four main metrics to focus on:

1. Audience Metrics
2. Channel Engagement
3. Universal Engagements
4. Financial Metrics

These four metrics should be customized to create segmented to create Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and funneled throughout the organization (not only the marketing department).

Small business owners have to become savvy recruiters as they hire either agencies or personnel capable of delivering the ROI they are expecting in 2015.



5. Content Marketing Management is a Real World

This is the era of content marketing. No business can survive without having a strategic content marketing strategy. They have to have a department or person dedicated to creating an editorial calendar, managing and creating the content, and implementing a marketing program across the digital world.



Hence the word, Content Marketing Management.

Facebook will soon (or might already) not include brands that obviously promote themselves in their organic algorithm. This means to directly promote their brand, they must turn to paid advertising. Increased Facebook revenue obviously means an increase in share prices. **Conclusion?** The rest of the social media sites will soon choose a similar algorithm change, forcing brands to turn towards **paid search results** if they want to advertise their services or products.

For the big businesses this is an affordable avenue as they have huge marketing budgets. However, smaller businesses have limited budgets. This pricey mode of advertising is not something they can maintain in the long run.

In this content oriented market different content styles appeal to different audiences. One cookie cutter style does not fit all.

“ Depending on the size of the business a better option would be hiring a local digital agency that will take care of everything from SEO to content creation. This

Thus, each social media platform has to be targeted in a separate manner. LinkedIn audiences prefer professional tips, Facebook and Instagram have more visual audiences. Twitter is more social while Google+ is still trying to find its niche.

Fortunately, there are various tools that allow businesses to manage their own content marketing and utilize a system of organization that is self-explanatory. Nicolette Bear outlines five of these tools in her article, “[5 Content Marketing Tools for Better Planning, Management and Tracking](#).”

Nicole outlined sophisticated tools that help businesses streamline their content marketing. Again, great options for large companies but what about businesses struggling to survive?

Training programs are also available for business owners who may want to start the content creation on their own (though professional digital marketing is always the best choice considering the volatile manner of change the industry is currently facing).

One thing to remember is that online data is always changing. It is in a constant change of flux and innovation is what will beat the competition. Business owners must be ready to alter their marketing strategies mid-year if necessary because the numbers just don't add up. A/B testing must be continual, variations and alterations a consistent facet of the marketing. **It's better to scrap a strategy if the analytics don't show an effective ROI rather than dragging it to its morbid end.**



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