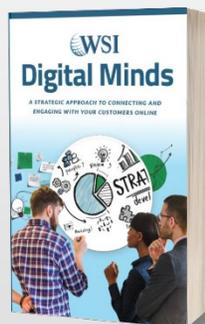




DIGITAL MINDS CHAPTER 3

PLANNING YOUR DIGITAL STRATEGY

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The following is a chapter from WSI's 3rd book, *Digital Minds: A Strategic Approach to Connecting and Engaging with Your Customers Online*. If you'd like to reach the book in its entirety you can purchase a copy on Amazon.com here:

<https://bit.ly/wsibook3>

So, you've defined your ideal customers—now, how do you reach them?

To reach your target audience in today's business world, you must have a solid digital strategy in place. You'll notice we called it a "digital strategy" rather than a "digital marketing strategy," since we believe this goes way beyond marketing. Your digital strategy should flow out from your broader business goals and objectives. It should involve more people than just your Marketing Team—it should include all C-level strategists.

As a Marketer, Consultant, and head of a digital agency, I have helped many companies, varying in size and industry with their digital solutions. Over the years, I have noticed some consistencies between company size and their digital strategy. Generally speaking:

- Large companies usually have a plan already outlined and need help defining what implementation might look like. In most cases, a digital component has been included.
- Small and medium-sized companies often don't have a strategy outlined or documented. In most cases, it resides in the owner's or CEO's head and doesn't include a digital component.

Regardless of the size of your company, we recommend following a checklist approach as you plan your digital strategy.

If you have a documented digital strategy in place, this checklist will help you validate that it is comprehensive. And if you don't have an approach planned out yet, don't worry, this will help you get started.

Digital Strategy Checklist

As you will recall, we use the term digital strategy, not a digital marketing strategy. So, when it comes to creating a checklist to help you plan out and validate your strategy, it's important to review some basic business concepts along with the standard marketing elements.

Here are the main questions that should be part of your digital strategy checklist.

Your Elevator Pitch

Whether you're a business owner or your company's marketing executive, you should have an elevator pitch already drafted. This pitch should describe what you do, what you sell, and what problem your product or service is trying to solve for your customers.

That's why the first question on our digital strategy checklist is to identify your elevator pitch. Ask yourself: What do we do?



It may seem basic, but in digital spaces like websites, Facebook, or Twitter, you need to make sure that your visitors understand what it is that you do. Having a clear and concise elevator pitch will deliver that message in a consistent way to all your web properties.

Here are some examples of good elevator pitches from real companies. Note that these are all very short. They are only one sentence long and convey only the most essential information:

- **Tech.us** provides full-stack software development teams for your business.
- **Mattel** is a leading global children’s entertainment company that specializes in the design and production of quality toys and consumer products.
- **Huxley** delivers world-class recruitment services that adapt as businesses evolve.
- **Rooftop Anchor, Inc.** engineers, manufactures and installs fall protection and fall arrest systems for commercial rooftop and industrial applications.

Understand Your “Why”

In his book, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, Simon Sinek (2011) talks about companies defining three things:

1. What they do
2. How they do it
3. Why they do it

Since answering the “what” is the easiest of the three questions, companies usually start with it first--just as we did with the elevator pitch in our checklist. Some companies also discuss the “how,” which may involve unique processes or behind-the-scenes information on how the product works or the service is delivered. It is a bit rarer for companies to define or share the “why” they do what they do.

Sinek suggests you should change the order of how you answer these questions when devising your marketing messaging—start with the “why,” then the “how,” and finish with the “what.” In our checklist, we chose to start with the “what” because it was easier. But now that we understand the importance of the “why” and “how,” we will introduce these other two questions to our digital strategy checklist.

1. Why do we do what we do?
2. How do we do what we do?

The “why” question will allow you to create an emotional connection between your company and your buyer personas. The “how” question will appeal to your audience’s rational brain and speak to the processes, technologies, or methodologies associated with your business. The how is all about “how” you may do things differently from your competitors.

Your Buyer Personas

We just discussed the importance of defining your buyer personas in Chapter 2, so we won't go into details here on how to determine who they are or how to outline them. But knowing and understanding your target audience is crucial to the success of your digital strategy.

It's why we'll be adding the following questions to our checklist: Who is our buyer persona? Do we have a clear definition of our buyer personas?

If you are ever in doubt of how you should be targeting your ads, what your messaging should be, or which channels you should be investing time and money into, revert back to the buyer personas. They are your primary customers and will always guide you in the right direction.

Your Competitive Advantage

When defining your digital strategy, you should consider your competition. So, the next question to answer on your checklist is: Do we know our competition online? Have we performed a competitive analysis that provides insights into our main competitors on the internet?

If the answer to that question is "no" then check out or revisit Chapter 1 in this book. Once you have information on your competition, you'll define what your competitive advantage will be so that you can differentiate yourself.

In a 1996 Harvard Business Review article written by Michael E. Porter called *What is Strategy?* He said a business' competitive strategy is about:

"Being different by deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value."

So, based on your competition, determine if your business delivers a unique value mix. Then ask yourself these questions (which we'll be adding to the checklist): What is our differentiation? What do we do differently from others who do what we do?

These questions are important because most businesses in the digital world use a lot of the same channels, platforms, social networks, keywords, content management systems, and payment gateways. So, those that stand out are the ones that find a way to combine these elements uniquely while responding to the needs of their defined buyer personas.

What Are Your Trade-Offs?

As part of your strategy, you must also define your trade-offs. What will you say “no” to? Either because some business activities may not be profitable or because they don’t fit your goals.

So, let’s add another question to our checklist: What are the activities, services, or products in our current portfolio that we cannot or do not wish to promote, deliver, offer or sell?

This question is vital because, in digital marketing, the more focused you are, the more effective and efficient your campaigns will be.

So you have to make a choice—you cannot target everybody and try to sell everything. Chances are, you have more products or services in your portfolio than the ones you can profitably push through your digital strategy. So, now’s the time to identify the ones that matter.

Are You Competing in a Red Ocean or a Blue Ocean?

Another pair of authors that can help us define essential questions for our checklist are W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne (2015).

In their book, *Blue Ocean Strategy*, they define markets as follows:

[There are] two sorts of oceans: red oceans and blue oceans. In the red oceans, industry boundaries are defined and accepted, and the competitive rules of the game are known; here, companies try to outperform their rivals to grab a greater share of existing demand, and as the market space gets crowded, opportunities for profits and growth are reduced. Products become commodities, and cutthroat competition turns the red ocean bloody.

Blue oceans, in contrast, are defined by untapped market space, demand creation, and the opportunity for highly profitable growth. Although some blue oceans are created well beyond existing industry boundaries, most are created from within red oceans by expanding existing industry boundaries. In blue oceans, competition is irrelevant because the rules of the game are waiting to be set.

From this, we can define two more questions for our digital strategy checklist:

1. Are we competing in a very well-known arena where sales will come from grabbing a piece of an existing pie? If so, what are the features that our competition uses to attract customers?

2. Are we offering something that has little competition and requires a new market? If so, what do we offer that others don't? How do we describe that unique benefit or offering that sets us apart from competitors, and that may need some 'evangelizing' to resonate with consumers?

These questions are important because when you begin designing the messages for your buyer personas, you need to know what to say.

If your product or service belongs to a Red Ocean market, your messages should be tailored to outdo rivals. You should also look for ways to stand out in one or two dimensions that will be the flagship of the strategy.

But, if your product or service belongs to a Blue Ocean market, you will need to explain it based on a problem the customer may not know they have. You'll also likely spend more time on education and evangelizing.

Defining Goals Within Your Strategy

If you have answers to the first set of questions on the digital strategy checklist, you can start thinking about your marketing message. And the story you need to tell your buying personas.

Your message should be defined in terms of the goal you are trying to accomplish. There are three main goals most businesses will pursue a digital strategy:

1. Generate leads to increase sales
2. Position your brand to gain authority and relevance
3. Communicate with customers, prospects, and partners to stay top of mind, nurture relationships, inform on other products, services and programs, and to gather feedback

Establishing your primary goals is crucial because it will define the message you need to communicate, and the story you need to tell. Be sure to check out the SMART goals section of Chapter 12 for more on creating actionable goals.

Let's add another question to our digital strategy checklist: What are the goals of our strategy?

Building Your Core Message

Online campaigns revolve around content and at the heart of great content is often a story. Today's technology has come a long way in its ability to help businesses tell their story. Now it's not just about the content you are sharing, but the context or meaning behind your messages. Technology now allows a user to infer the context behind your message—making the magic formula for developing your core messages a combination of content with context. Storytelling should be the foundation of the content you deliver to your buyer personas, but it also needs to entice an emotion or reaction from your audience. Your digital strategy should tell, as well as emote a story to sell your products, attract employees, and position your brand in the market.

The human brain thinks in story mode. When an idea follows a narrative curve, it becomes easier to remember; and if that sequence connects with emotions, then it will impact the person and move them to action.

When thinking about your core message and the story that it will convey, we should add another question to our checklist: What is the core message and the main idea that we want our potential customers to receive?

It is natural to want to use several messages, but it's always better to focus. Use the answers to our previous checklist questions to hone in on your main message.

As an example, let's imagine a company with two different messages to communicate in their digital strategy.

The company is a manufacturer of hand tools and equipment. Let's call them "TFY" (Tools for You). They're targeting two primary buyer personas:

1. The consumer, who will ultimately be using the tools
2. The retail stores where their tools are sold (their distribution channel)

According to our checklist questions, you should have different veins of messaging, that will look something like this:

TFY's message to the consumer (B2C)

We believe that great tools amplify excellent human skills. At TFY, we provide durable, high-tech, top quality products to make your life easier, and your work more productive. We stand behind our products with a lifetime warranty. If you are a contractor, home builder, construction industry worker, or just an enthusiast that takes his hobby seriously, you can rely on us to support your hard work. Find our products nationwide in hardware, equipment, and home improvement stores. Remember, if the product fails to perform for any reason, we will replace it, no proof of purchase required!

TFY's message to the distributor (B2B)

At TFY, we know that a trusted and loyal customer base is your most valuable asset. And that you need excellent products to fulfill your consumers' demanding needs. We also know that you work hard, and that business should be profitable in every sale and every service you deliver. And since we know all that, we want to be your partner and work side-by-side to keep and grow your customer base. At TFY, we support your business with training, promotions, lifetime warranty, service pick-up, and credit options.

Let's take an even closer look by applying the TFY example to our existing checklist questions:

1. What do you do?

- B2C: We provide durable high-tech top quality products to make your life easier and your work more productive.
- B2B: We want to be your partner and work side-by-side to keep and grow your customer base. We support your business with training, promotions, lifetime warranty, service pick-up, and credit options.

2. Why do you do what you do?

- B2C: We believe that great tools amplify excellent human skills.
- B2B: We know that a trusted and loyal customer base is your most valuable asset and that you need excellent products to fulfill their demanding needs.

3. How do we do what we do?

- High-quality tools.
- Provide a lifetime warranty.
- Find our products nationwide in hardware, equipment, and home improvement stores.
- Affordable prices and credit.

4. Who is our buyer persona? Do we have a clear definition of our buyer personas?

- B2C: Homebuilder, skilled worker in the construction industry or enthusiast.
- B2B: Home improvement stores, hardware stores.

5. Do we know our competition online? Have we performed a competitive analysis that provides insights into your main competitors on the internet?

- A competitive analysis answers this one.

6. What is our differentiation? What do we do differently from others that do what we do?

- B2C: Lifetime warranty, no proof of purchase required, and nationwide pick-up.
- B2B: Training, promotions, lifetime warranty, service pick-up, and credit options.

7. What are the activities, services, or products in our current portfolio that we cannot or do not wish to promote, deliver, offer, or sell?

- DIY (do-it-yourself) tutorials or books.

8. If TFY is a “red ocean” market: Are we competing in a very well-known arena where sales will come from grabbing a piece of an existing pie?

- We'll provide more features and new technology: local availability, reasonable price, credit options, and lifetime warranty with pick-up service.

9. If TFY is in a “blue ocean” market: Are we offering something that has little competition and requires a new market?

- B2C: We offer the latest innovations in hardware and provide free educational resources to guide you on how to use these new tools.
- B2B: We offer demo units and in-store technicians to showcase the products and provide hands-on clinics in your store.

10. What are the goals of our strategy?

- B2C: Brand positioning.
- B2B: To attract new distribution channels.

11. What are the core message and the main idea that we want our potential customers to receive?

- Durability, more features, and new technology, as well as local availability, reasonable price, credit options, and lifetime warranty with pick-up service.

Defining the Channels

Once you have identified the components of your message, it’s time to decide which online channels you want to use to tell your story. Since each channel requires a different format, your creative team should be briefed on how to present the story best for that channel.

Consider your website, your blog, and social networks where your target audience spends time. Some channels may not be effective for your particular brand, so be selective. In the next chapter, we discuss which digital channels you should use to reach your buying personas based on where they are searching for your products or services.

But when it comes to our digital strategy checklist, let’s add another question to the list: What are the digital channels that I will use to reach each buyer persona?

This question is key because it will help you focus on fewer channels and be more productive instead of trying to cover them all. If you decide to use multiple channels, be aware that they’ll all vary in format and structure. It’ll, therefore, require more work on your part to gain traction.

When it comes to social networks, keep messages brief, since most social content is consumed on mobile devices. At the same time, however, take advantage of every element at your disposal for each channel, and be open to multiple formats including text, surveys, questions, images, animations, and videos.

Likewise, keep in mind that engagement (one of the most critical metrics) usually calls for a real conversation. So, for every digital channel that you choose, ask yourself whether you have the resources to maintain communication with your audience there or not. We’ll cover more on social networks later in the book.

Building Your List and Your Database

A successful digital strategy will generate responses, contacts, leads, customers, and repeat customers. But not everything will happen at once. Even if you do everything “perfectly,” your message might arrive at a prospect too early or too late. It might arrive at the right moment, but they may not have any money or budget at that time to make a purchase. Or maybe when the budget finally is available, they will not remember your services or contact information.

This is why nurturing your prospect base and your customer base is very fundamental. You have to make sure that your message, your brand, and your services remain top of mind so when the right moment arrives, you’ll get a sale.

Remaining top of mind requires a consistent communication strategy and a powerful message aligned to the buyer persona and the customer journey. But before that, you need to build your list and your database. If you want your messages to keep reaching your prospect until they are ready to buy, develop a process around storing lead and customer data. A modern CRM (customer relationship management) system should do the trick. Choose a platform that allows you to deliver messages at each stage of your customers’ journey and track your sales pipeline as well.

In Chapter 10 we’ll cover this topic of lead nurturing further, so at this stage let’s add this question to our checklist: Do you have a database of prospects and a database of customers that can be targeted through the digital marketing strategy? If so, where are they and what is required to merge them into one system?

Measuring Results, the Final Element of the Strategy

All the components of a digital marketing strategy should be measured against set KPIs (key performance indicators). Your KPIs should be aligned with the goals of your strategy (Consult Chapter 12 for more info on KPIs and tracking).

If your goal is to generate leads to increase sales, then your KPIs may involve site performance, visitors, conversion, cost of acquisition, and sales.

And if your goal is to communicate and build relationships with customers and prospects, then you’ll want to track repeat visitors, attribution, website bounce rate, shares, and views.

If this seems like a lot of work, there’s good news—marketing automation tools and software systems can help you achieve more in less time. However, most of these tools, platforms, and applications will have their analytics and metrics distributed in different places, which can sometimes make it challenging to analyze and draw useful conclusions. We suggest you use a dashboard tool like Google Data Studio to help connect your data from multiple sources in one single place. Alternately, you can hire an agency that already has these tools in place to configure and execute your strategy.

As we look to complete our digital strategy checklist, the two final questions we'll be adding are:

1. What are the KPIs that we need to measure?
2. What is the platform, application, or tool that will deliver each metric?

The Complete Checklist

Building your digital strategy requires answering important questions. Throughout this chapter, we have drafted a checklist with a set of items that will help you develop your strategy or validate the one you already have. Here's the full checklist for your reference:

1. What do we do?
2. Why do we do what we do?
3. How do we do what we do?
4. Who is our buyer persona? Do we have a clear definition of our buyer personas?
5. Do we know our competition online? Have we performed a competitive analysis online that provides insights into our main competitors online?
6. What is our differentiation? What do we do differently from others that do what do you do?
7. What are the activities, services, or products in our current portfolio that we cannot or do not wish to promote, deliver, offer, or sell?
8. Are we competing in a very well-known arena where sales will come from grabbing a piece of an existing pie?
 - a. If so, what are the features that our competition uses to attract customers?
 - b. What are the features that our customers expect from our product?
9. Are we offering something that has little competition and requires a new market?
 - a. If so, what do we offer that others don't?
 - b. How do we describe that new benefit or offering that sets us apart from competitors, and that may need some "evangelizing" to resonate with consumers?
10. What are the goals of our strategy?
11. What are the core message and the main idea that we want our potential customers to receive?
12. What are the channels that we will use for each buying persona?
13. Do we have a database of prospects and a database of customers that can be targeted through our digital marketing strategy?
 - a. If so, where are they and what is required to merge them into one system?
14. What are the KPIs that we need to measure?
15. What is the platform, application, or tool that will deliver each metric?

As you read through the rest of the book, you may define other questions that you want to consider while planning your digital strategy. Feel free to take this checklist and adjust and tweak as you see fit.

TIP: To download our Digital Strategy Checklist template and get started on planning your digital strategy, please visit www.wsiworld.com/book-resources.

About the Author

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Carlos Guzman is a recognized expert within the WSI global community, where he holds a badge as a Top Gun. He contributes as a member of the Internet Consultants Advisory Council, the WSI AdaptiveSEO Consortium, the WSI Google Alliance and other groups developing best practices for the WSI system. He has received acknowledgments for "Outstanding Contributor," "Top Deal" and "Top Consultant," and frequently writes and lectures on digital marketing. Carlos also leads Prospect Factory; a top-ranked full-service digital marketing agency in Mexico who works with medium-to-large companies, government institutions, and political parties in LATAM.

About WSI

For 25 years, WSI has been providing digital marketing services and comprehensive marketing strategies to businesses of all sizes and across various industries. We are the largest network of digital marketing agencies around the world.

We are a full-service digital marketing agency that helps elevate your online brand, generate more leads and sales, and improve your overall marketing ROI. Our Digital Marketing Consultants use their knowledge and expertise to make a difference for businesses all around the world.

We don't believe in the "one-size-fits-all" approach to digital marketing. Instead, we take the time to understand your organization and customers so we can recommend a strategy based on your individual business needs. When you invest in any of WSI's digital marketing solutions, you'll have some of the top minds in the industry contributing to your goals and vision.

You have a vision for your business. We can help make it happen. Reach out, we're happy to help.

