THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TRENDS ON MARKETING

Daliborka Blazheska[1]
Natasha Ristovska
Sashko Gramatnikovski

Abstract:
The growing presence of the internet in people's daily lives gives us the right to think about the growing use of digital marketing. Companies should use the internet and social networks to promote and sell their products, as digital marketing is extremely important for running a business. New developments in global marketing inspire new ways where companies connect with their customers, by focusing on mass marketing. With the help of modern internet, marketing companies carefully choose their clients and build long-lasting relationships with already selected clients. This labor puts an accent on the research of how much Macedonian companies are aware of the impact of digital marketing on business and changes in traditional ways of communication. From the research we can see that it is a necessity to create and apply digital strategies for more efficient communication with the customers, and hence better results in business. Every company should devise a strategy that will combine traditional and modern communication media.

Keywords: digital marketing, social networks, digital strategies, communication, business success.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies are increasingly present in the daily lives of a large part of the world's population. They have a huge impact on people's lives, as almost all aspects of human life have changed with the use of digital technology. We notice the changes in the business processes, the search for new skills, new ways of spending free time so we can see the impact not only on the business, but also on the whole way of living. Over time, companies began to take advantage of the benefits of the modern digital age, especially when they promote their brand. Their business processes and relations with the customers are based on the use of digital technologies so they can easily get to know them and get in touch with them. On the other hand clients can learn more about the company and their activity and can compare their experiences and thoughts for certain products and services. The digital marketing has many channels and fields that help us advertise, present and sell our products or services and communicate with our (potential) customers. In order to decide which channel is suitable and accomplishes

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[1]**Daliborka Blazheska,** Ph.D., Associate Professor; **Natasha Ristovska,** Ph.D., Associate Professor; **Sashko Gramatnikovski,** Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Tourism and Management in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia.

the goal of increasing the brand's visibility, site visits, the number of sold products or other forms of conversion, we must test the characteristics of every individual. Digital marketing enables us to communicate with potential customers and it has measurable results. Digital marketing tools are a relatively "new" way in which marketing managers use modern technologies in their businesses. Failure to apply digital marketing also means "loss" of market leadership. Lagging behind the competition in terms of global, digital, trends in our own operations cannot and must not be the goal of any company. The question arises: Why do marketing managers choose to follow individual digital trends, or what is the importance of applying digital marketing trends.

1. DIGITAL TRENDS AND MARKETING

Digital trends have a significant impact on the overall operation of modern businesses, especially in the digital transformation of the company, as well as on marketing as a business philosophy, activity and business function in the company. The digital transformation of the business cannot be imagined without the simultaneous application of digital marketing tools in the company (Andzulis, Panagopoulos, and Rapp 2012).

Companies that continuously follow and apply modern digital trends, in relation to their competitors, can "make" the necessary adjustments to their own operations, because they are more flexible than other market players who do not follow or inappropriately "quickly" implement digital trends in their own work (Descotes, and Delassus 2015).

In the 21st century, companies are increasingly exposed to external influences. The impact of digital trends on business performance is also reflected in the increasing degree of flexibility of the company. The way in which a company can effectively implement "new" market trends in its own business, such as changes in digital technologies, is directly reflected in marketing. Successful operation in a digital market environment means timely adjustment of the company's marketing strategy in accordance with current digital trends. Which digital marketing tools the company will use depends on the created marketing strategy (Coviello, Winklhofer, and Hamilton 2006). The company can choose to work entirely using only digital marketing tools, but also by combining the use of traditional and digital marketing tools.

In the 21st century, a business cannot be imagined not using several digital marketing tools, e.g. web marketing, social networks, etc.

The degree of application of one or more digital marketing tools in a company depends on the digital literacy of decision makers, strategists and marketing managers as well as the chosen way in which the company wants to communicate with the target market.

2. BENEFITS OF USING DIGITAL MARKETING

We live in a digital world and the best strategy for companies to better connect with their customers is through digital channels where customers spend most of their time.

The key is to discover the benefits of marketing through digital channels as soon as possible and realize how important a digital marketing strategy is. Compared to traditional marketing, digital marketing offers methods and channels to understand the behavior of consumers on time (Susskind, et al 2000).

This means that businesses can evaluate much better how their marketing campaign is going and will know how to adapt accordingly. The specific benefits of using digital marketing are the following (Fulgoni, and Lipsman 2014):

- Measurable results. One of the biggest reasons why digital marketing has managed to surpass the traditional is due to the fact that it offers measurable results. We cannot count how many people have seen the billboard or how many people have read the flyer, but when we use digital marketing, we can get solid and real results that show us exactly how many people have clicked a certain link and read the web age. This will help us to focus on the segment where do our potential clients come from.

- Flexibility. The clients nowadays are interested for personalized experiences that satisfy their needs. Here we can single out digital marketing as it enables us to take advantage of the interests of individual clients and send them a unique marketing message. We can adapt the messages according to groups of consumers and precisely this personalization will make the consumer feel special as he gets the effect that the message is meant just for him.

- Access to a larger audience. Through digital marketing, we can reach a large and global audience thanks to the internet that is present in every country. On the other hand, traditional marketing limits us to a specific geographical area.

- Greater availability. One of the greatest problems of traditional marketing is that marketing methods such as TV advertisements, billboards and radio advertisements are available just for greater businesses and small ones usually cannot afford paying that type of advertisements. This does not refer to digital marketing because through him every company has the ability to reach the audience they need regardless of how great they are.

- Increased number of conversions. It only takes a few clicks to get the client online. People do not have to visit our shop or come to us to become clients. Now they can find all the information about our business online and they can become our clients literally while they are sitting at home, of course, if we approach to them with the right tactics of digital marketing.

3. DIGITAL MARKETING CHANNELS FOR SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS OPERATION

The application of digital trends can have greater power of the local self-government and to organize this event for successful business. Another characteristic that applies to digital marketing is creativity.

The most commonly used channels are (Koushiki 2015):

- **Website.** One of the strongest internet marketing communication tools is a functional web page that clients can easily access. Each web page has its own URL, which is a fundamental network identification for any single resource connected to the internet. Websites must be functional, informative, use simple navigation, make shopping easy for customers, and keep them up to date (Lewes 2010).

- **Social networks.** Social networks on the internet are an area where people who share common connections can interact with each other. Some of the leaders here are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, MySpace, LinkedIn and

many others, which together occupie for 90% of the total internet activity. Social network visitors are just one way of measuring the impact of social networks. The reviews of the pages, the time spent on them, the attention, as well as the frequency of the visits. Today, social networks are turning into huge, rich businesses.

- **Banners.** Banners come in several forms: static ads, pop-up ads, and floating ads. They are different, creative, depending on the way companies think the message should be conveyed, but their purpose is the same, they exist to attract attention and then take customers to a company website or a specific page for a special offer. A positive feature of banners is that they contain short and clear information about what a company actually offers. It is necessary to emphasize the positive sides of the product or service in comparison with the competition, because it is necessary to attract customers from the competition. In order to be noticed by the clients, some animations are needed that would be characteristic for the company. The banner campaign is quite successful because it attracts a solid number of visitors from the Internet population, which leads to its financial justification.

- **Email Marketing.** Email marketing is a structured, systematic process and one of the most successful channels for transmitting (relevant) marketing messages to your target audience. By sending e-mails, we introduce ourselves to potential clients and try to arouse their interest. Customers can follow our latest announcements, offers and campaigns. Personal approach is just as important in email marketing, as we approach each client directly. This allows him to feel that the message, and the offer is specially made for him. The e-mail message is recommended to be short and concise.

- **Mobile Marketing.** Consumers devote a large portion of their time on smartphones, which is very important for using the benefits of mobile phones. Mobile marketing strategies are: Advertising through applications, Advertising based on location, Search engine marketing, QR codes, SMS and MMS messages.

- **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** - SEO is a process of optimizing sites in order to rank as high as possible on the search engine rankings of an organic search engine. In essence, it is about optimization that the web page becomes more expressive for searchers, which means that it is easier to detect and consequently it may be ranked among the first results in the list.

- **PPC** (cost per click) campaigns - pay per click campaign is charged after actual clicks on ads. They are visually different from other ads and are located to the right of the search lists. To get started with PPC, you first need to register your website with one or all three major search engines. Of course, before you start advertising, it is necessary to create ads. Then, the keywords for which the ad will appear and the maximum price for one click is determined. Higher price means higher position among other paid ads. Most major search engines, with the exception of Google, allow websites to pay for inclusion in their search results listings, and most have adopted a paid advertising model that providing guidance on improving website visibility.

and other digital marketing channels.

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4. CREATING DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES AND MEASURING THEIR PERFORMANCE

When designing a digital marketing strategy, we must carefully follow the goals and the vision of the company (Lipsman et al. 2012). By analyzing the market, we discover new opportunities on the market, and identifying the current state of the company can provide us the basis for measuring the success of the new strategy.

First of all, it is necessary to determine the characteristics of the clients (Malthouse et al. 2004):

- goals and values: to determine what our client wants to achieve and which values are most important to him;
- which sources of information are going to be used;
- demographic data: age, gender, marital status, income;
- concern: why would the customer decide not to buy our product or service.

In this way we introduce ourselves to the client, we get closer to his character and we begin to better understand his needs. If we understand his needs, we can approach, and in fact the approach is of a key importance to digital marketing. Defining the character of the client helps us in writing interesting and useful content for him, creating an advertisement and maintaining the relationship with him.

The approach should be adjusted according to the client's character. We need to make sure to help the client overcome the challenges and to persuade him, despite the doubt and the hesitation, to decide to buy our service, reserve it or anything else that accomplishes the goal of our company.

The importance of our business is the answer to the question "How does the client feel and what have we done for him?" (Meyer, Gremler, and Hogreve 2014). Understanding the importance of our business is base for the next step-formulating the message we want to sent to the client.

The following guidelines will help us to formulate the message (Mikolon, et al. 2015):

- What does my story tell the target client?
- Why is my story interesting for him?
- What emotions does my story evoke?
- How is my story related to the needs of the client?
- What kind of campaign will this story bring us to in relation to the product / service?

With this message we are going to try to attract the interest of the client and convince him that our brand is what he is looking for.

First of all, we want to attract the attention of new clients or to introduce them to our story. This means that we are present enough in their daily life, for them to start recognizing our brand and to understand our message. After this step, potential buyers are informed and aware that we are offering a solution to their problem. The next thing we need to do is connect with them (Ries, and Ries 2004). This can be done through creative writing of texts, which means writing useful and fun content for the client that will provoke some kind of interaction with the client, that in the end will bring us to our goal.

Based on the user's analysis, which we have previously done, we have a rough idea of which platform the client uses. When choosing, more attention is paid to the popular

platforms of the user, or to our assessment or assumption of them which aims at greater reach, because advertising on platforms where the presence of potential customers is small is not in our interest.

We decide on which channels we will advertise our brand and we come to the next phase - preparation of contents. With the content that we share, we attract the audience, we gain its attention and trust, and direct it to the final action (purchase, transfer and use of mobile application).

The quality and adequacy of the content is essential for successful advertising. The content must be prepared on the basis of the characteristics of the target groups, adapted to their interests and must meet their needs for answering questions or solutions to a particular problem. There are different types and forms of content: textual, audio and visual. We share the content in the form of a blog post, post on social networks, articles, digital magazines, e-books, pictures, video and audio recordings (Pozzi 2012).

Creative writing of texts means creating a text that will turn untrustworthy clients into confidential and prepared for a specific campaign, which is our ultimate goal. It is recommended to follow the following five guidelines for creating a call for action (Papasolomou, and Yioula 2012):

- Call for action on every page of the site;
- Start with a command, for example: withdraw, subscribe, share;
- Emphasize how easily and quickly the action can be implemented, for example: "Reserve immediately";
- Use contrasting colors, so the call would be more noticeable and would attract attention;
- We must be careful not to leave the impression that our offer is an obligation. It is recommended to use non-binding terms, such as "Order a free sample" instead of "Buy now".

After establishing the presence of the company on different platforms, the next step is maintaining it, which means that we must remain involved in the experience and daily life of the clients, and in that way they will be included in ours, which will stimulate interaction and getting a response from them. We will keep their interest with interesting posts and articles, favorable promotions, discounts and offers. Establishing and using digital marketing is a long and continuous process that is not limited in time which means that the maintenance of the entire marketing infrastructure is of key importance. We have to expand our story continually, in order to follow the initial goal, promote the brand and to preserve the uniqueness that the clients saw and because of which choose us.

We need to follow the progress, to measure the performances in time, because in that way we will recognize our strengths and weaknesses. By doing this we can see what our good sides are and support them, and then learn from our mistakes and try to correct them. Measuring success and assessing progress helps making further decisions that improve the approach and help us ensure the effectiveness of the digital marketing campaign.

5. REASERCH

In order to understand the impact and application of digital marketing in the business operations of companies, a survey was conducted of 67 companies (small and medium business) in the Republic of North Macedonia from different areas. Data collection was done based on a survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was distributed to employees in management positions in companies, marketing directors and PR directors. From the conducted survey, only a part of the questions that are key for this research are singled out.

One of the key questions was: Does direct marketing improve your business easier? According to the answers, the following data were obtained:
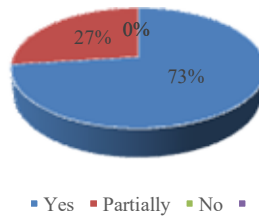
Does direct marketing make your business easier?

27% 0%

73%

■ Yes   ■ Partially   ■ No   ■

Chart 1. Percentage overview of the impact of direct marketing on business operations

According to the obtained data, 73% of the respondents believe that direct marketing affects the positive result of the business and 27% of the respondents believe that it partially affects their positive results. This shows that many respondents have seen the need to use digital marketing to improve their business and helps them to establish constant communication with their customers.

When asked what you would do to increase the use of digital marketing in customer communication, the following data were obtained:
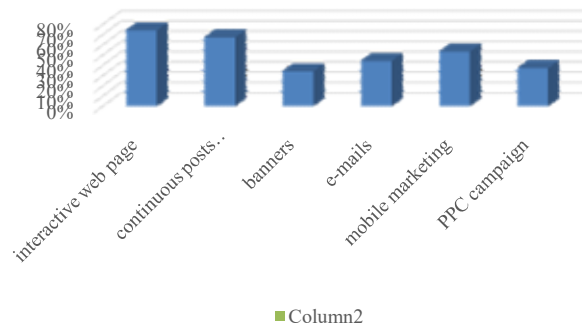

interactive web page   continuous posts..   banners   e-mails   mobile marketing   PPC campaign

■ Column2

Chart 2. Percentage overview of increased use of digital marketing in customer communication

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According to the obtained data, 75% of the respondents think that the use of digital marketing will increase through an interactive website, 68% of the respondents think that the use of digital marketing will increase with continuous posting on social networks, 54% of the respondents think it will increase through mobile marketing, 38% of respondents think it will increase with a PPC campaign and 35% of respondents think it will increase with banners. This shows that companies are aware of how they can maintain communication with customers, and that this would be achieved through an interactive website and continuous posting on social media, but also by using mobile marketing. When asked what do you usually post on your company website, the following information is provided:

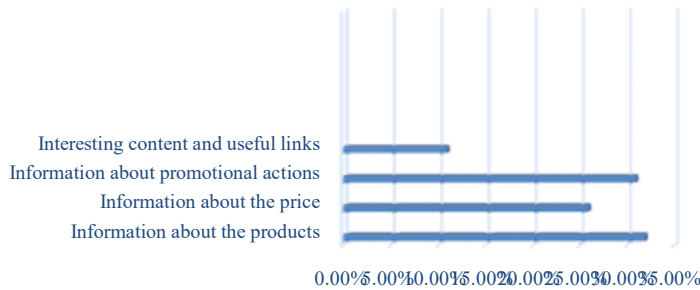**The most common announcements of the company**

Chart 3. Percentage view of web site posts

Based on the obtained data, it can be noticed that most companies publish information about their products and services, 31% of respondents answered that they publish information about promotional actions, 26% of the respondents publish information about the price of their products and services and 11% of respondents answered that they publish interesting content and useful links.

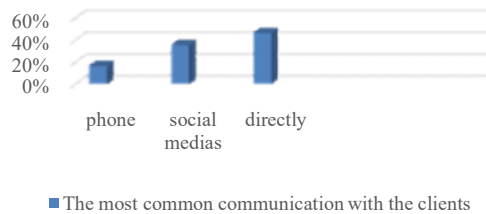When asked how you usually interact with customers, the following data was obtained:

■ The most common communication with the clients

Chart 4. Percentage overview of the most common types of communication with customers

Based on the obtained data we can see that the most common type of communication with clients is direct communication and 47% of respondents

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confirmed that, 36% of respondents answered that they usually communicate through social media and 17% of respondents answered that they communicate by phone.

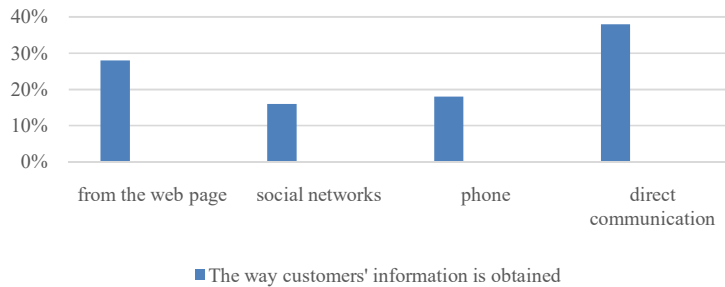When asked how you get information about your customers, the following data was obtained:

Chart 5. Percentage overview of how customer information is obtained

Based on the processed data, 38% of the respondents get information about the clients through direct communication, 28% of the respondents use the website and get information about their clients based on the number of visits under each post , 18% of the respondents receive the data by phone and 16% from the respondents receive the information through social networks.

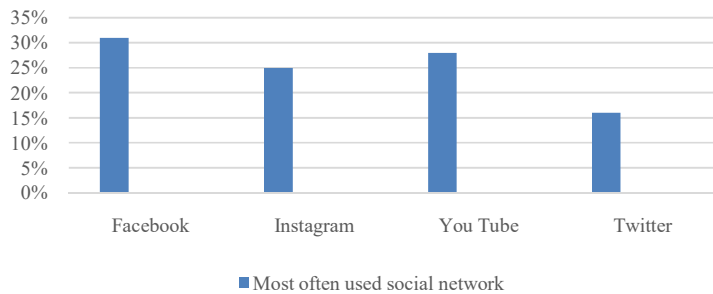When asked which of the social networks you usually use, the following data were obtained:

Chart 6. Percentage view of the most frequently used social network

According to the obtained data, the most frequently used social network is Facebook and 31% of the respondents confirmed this, then with 28% second most frequently used network is YouTube, 25% said it is Instagram and 16% said it is Twitter.

When asked which direct marketing strategies you use in your business, the following data were obtained:
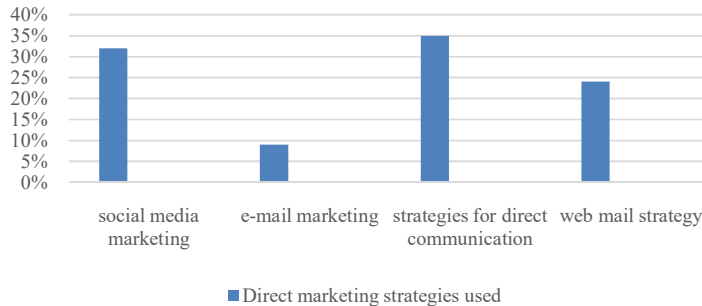
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Chart 7. Percentage overview of used direct marketing strategies

Based on the processed data, 35% of the respondents use the strategy of direct communication, 32% of the respondents said they used the strategy of social media, 24% of the respondents used the strategy of an interactive website and 9% of the respondents use the email strategy.

CONCLUSION

The companies in the Republic of North Macedonia are aware of the advantages and necessity of using digital marketing and developing digital strategies. In order to increase the use of digital marketing and to establish continuous communication with customers, it is necessary to have an interactive website and continuous posting on social networks. We also should not forget PPC campaigns and mobile marketing because the clients dedicate a large part of their time to their smartphones, which is very important when it comes to using the benefits of mobile marketing in order to advertise your brand.

The company website is one of the strongest marketing communication tools. It should be functional, and the customers should be able to find it easily. Websites must be informative and provide information about products or services, their prices and promotions, and of course offer online sales that will bring the company a number of benefits. Companies prefer direct communication with customers, but are aware that it should be combined with digital communication.

According to the obtained results, the companies use digital marketing and are constantly present on social networks, most of which are on Facebook, but still do not fully use digital marketing to enter the market aggressively. Based on the research, it is recommended to create and apply digital strategies for more efficient communication with the company's customers, and hence get better results in improving the business. Every company should devise a strategy that will combine traditional and modern communication media.

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