

SIMPLE

REASONS WHY

DIGITAL

CAMPAIGNS

BREAK THROUGH

BY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was edited and proofread by Jim Moore of [Word Jones](#). The only person I trust to fiddle with my prose, inject commas or strike really, super lame and redundant adjectives. Note: I didn't let him proofread this section.

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PREFACE

Many years ago, marketers felt the need to explain everything about their product or service in a single advertisement. Yawn.

But then along came the internet – changing marketing forever. The internet allowed us to isolate different parts of the overall sales process into different channels.

This evolution in marketing freed advertisements from the burden of carrying the entire customer conversion process in every ad. Instead of trying to convert consumers the very first time they encountered the brand, we were able to create broad awareness campaigns that simply brought the product or service to the consumer's attention.

Before the broad awareness campaign

launched, we seeded the web with research materials, technical specifications, features, benefits and other information for those who wanted to investigate the brand after seeing our advertisement. And finally, we presented consumers with an irresistible incentive to buy. This integrated approach allowed each channel to contribute to the customer conversion process, and in doing so, created a classic marketing funnel.

Another benefit that evolved from the emergence of the internet was the ability for marketers to push the envelope of each channel – in theory, improving the overall performance of the advertisements. It appeared to make marketing better by making it simpler, although appearances can be deceptive.

Simple Reasons Why Digital Campaigns Break Through

Today, the number of people and the time they spend on the internet rivals the averages of mass media channels. It's why spending on [digital marketing surpassed television in 2016](#). All this time and attention on the web gives us the opportunity to create entire marketing funnels online, mapping each channel to the different parts of the customer's journey.

In general terms, specific channels are more effective in different segments of your marketing funnel, but they all must have measurable objectives.

- The top of the marketing funnel is used to break through the clutter and get the attention of consumers. Your goal is to reach the greatest number of relevant consumers possible, because as they travel down the marketing funnel a large number will fall away as part of the process. Broad awareness is typically measured by impressions.
- The middle of the funnel is where consumers build a preference for your brand, or someone else's product or service. Consideration is measured by dwell time, bounce rate and engagement.
- The bottom of the funnel is where a consumer is ready to make a decision. Leads are measured in terms of clicks and conversions.

Strategists have tinkered with the name of this process ever since [Elias St. Elmo Lewis](#) invented the marketing funnel in 1898. Though many have declared the marketing funnel dead, it continues to rise from the ashes like the phoenix. Why? The marketing funnel is modeled on basic human behavior; fall in love with something, search out reasons to validate or disprove one's emotional attachment and then take action.

Whatever you choose to call the marketing funnel these days, the consumer's journey through it is a lot more complicated. Consumers don't move straight down the funnel like they used to. Rather, they take a zigzag path. You can thank the internet for that. And today, the marketing funnel looks less like a funnel and more like a strawberry – bulging in the middle. There are endless options online, and with them, many opportunities to lose a consumer to someone with a killer digital presence. It's why your online presence is critical.

In a recent Nielsen survey, American respondents said they often research products online (63%) and look up reviews (63%).

According to this research, marketers cannot afford to ignore consumers on the internet. They're far more proactive than they were just a few years ago. The internet is at their fingertips, every minute of the day, and they have unprecedented access to influential

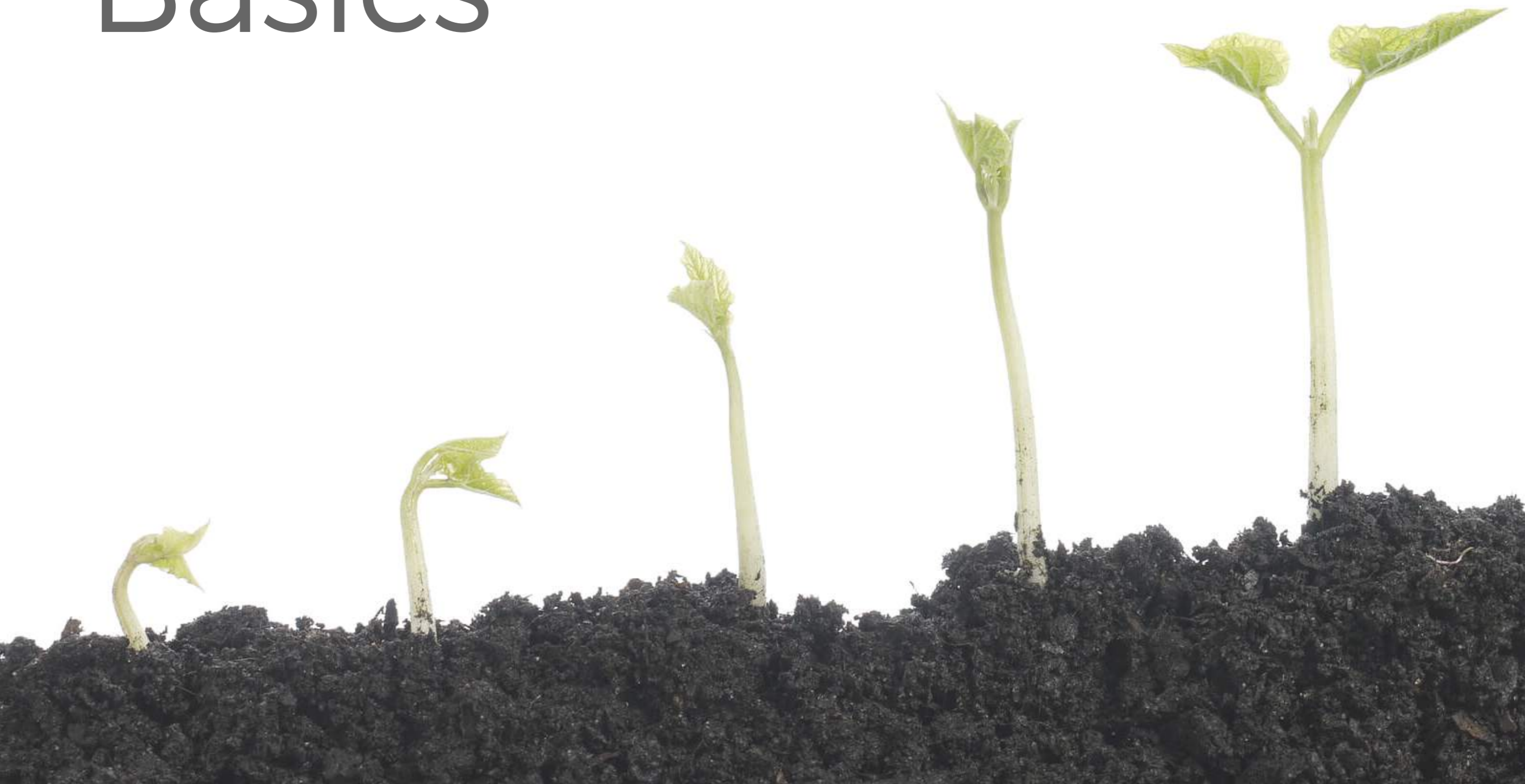
Simple Reasons Why Digital Campaigns Break Through

information. Therefore, you need to take additional steps – well beyond digital marketing – in order to be successful.

- Be sure the answers to consumer questions are easily found on your website. Your website should be the solution to their problems; other sites on the web are where you show consumers that you care.
- Invest in 'how-to' videos to enhance the online consumer experience.
- Solicit positive reviews from your best customers.
- Make sure your content marketing adds value to your audience.
- Invest in the channels your audience frequents.
- Use SEO to make your assets easier to find in search results, so consumers don't need to look too hard to find you. If your competitor's information is easier to find, they could easily steal away your leads.
- Always build the bottom of the marketing funnel first, so you're not throwing away leads.
- Scale awareness campaigns as large as possible, until they stop delivering a positive return on your investment.
- Be sure actionable data points inform your strategy.
- Make the process as frictionless as possible to create more conversions.
- Apply emerging technologies to basic human behaviors, because this clarifies your key performance indicators.
- Measure everything, and learn from the results.

The internet isn't changing advertising; it has changed it – forever. The models might be similar to traditional advertising, but the opportunities and tactics are foreign to many. As a result, this is where we're going to spend most of our focus, discussing the opportunities and tactics of an effective digital marketing campaign.

The Basics



People go to your website to solve a problem, so you need to be the solution. In other words, if your website traffic isn't converting visitors into sales, it's because you're attracting people who aren't interested in the problem, or you're failing to convey the clear advantage of your solution. It's the traffic, the message, or both.



STOP GUESSING

Align your message to the right audience. To do that, you'll need to know a little bit more than simple demographics. You need to understand the audience and what they want.

- People who have already bought the product are a great way for you to learn about your ideal customer. You can do this through online surveys using Facebook, AdWords, Survey Monkey and Survata.
- Buying a copycat list of customers that resembles your customer list is also a great way to learn more about your ideal customer.
- Pay for panel research surveys and focus groups.
- Try the old-fashioned idea of picking up the telephone and calling people who have bought your product.
- Amazon and similar online sites are a great resource. Read the reviews of people who have bought the product, reviews left on competitors' storefronts, and even reviews for the top-selling books in your category.
- Keyword research tools are filled with phrases that will give you great insights too.

TALK ABOUT PAINS AND PASSIONS

After you've researched the wants and needs of your audience, you'll need to create messages that speak specifically to their frustrations and aspirations. Identify the benefits in your product or service that solve the issues they say are important to them. Your message should demonstrate that you understand their situation and have a solution for their pain points or passions.

THERE ARE RICHES IN THE NICHES

Once you're clear on your messaging, then focus on the traffic.

Effective digital marketers understand that you target specific audiences with specific messages. Get super-granular. For example, target men who live in Seattle, graduated from the University of Washington and are over 40 years old.



Write a headline that speaks specifically to their individual experience. Example, “Why Do U-Dub Grads Get Deeper Discounts on Car Insurance?” The conversions will be higher with a niche approach than with a broad approach, but you’ll need to target many different niches to develop an effective reach.

In order to find out what’s delivering the best ROI, it’s best to separate out the traffic coming to your landing pages. Below are different ways to separate out these audiences:

- **Tag your campaigns with UTM codes**
- **Track which landing pages the customer visited**
- **Review referral traffic numbers**

This approach should provide you with enough information to start split-testing, so you can confirm that everything’s working to its fullest potential. However, there’s no need to test every last thing. Start with testing headlines and images, and then if you feel there’s a need, test other aspects. An effective headline that maps back to a pain point or passion will increase sales more effectively than any other thing you can test. So start there, but there are a few other things you should keep in mind.

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

When calculating your ROI, you should understand the lifetime value of the customer. It might cost \$2 to attract the initial lead, but if they’re worth \$30 a year, don’t be afraid to spend a lot more. If your competition is unwilling to spend \$3 for a lead, you can outbid them. You have a decided advantage when you understand that spending \$5 on a lead is still a great bargain.

REACH FOR THE STARS

It’s always a good idea to test a broader audience with a broader message. Continue testing until you’ve reached the widest audience that still delivers a positive ROI. This could mean you need many broad messages.

If you end up doing a broad campaign, your landing page needs to separate your audience into unique funnels. For example, if you're creating a general medical landing page and driving traffic there with a broad headline like "Look Sensational in 2017," you should feature links to different subcategories: Plastic Surgery, Botox, Liposuction and Tattoo Removal. Make each of the subcategories prominent, so people coming to the site quickly see the relevant experience they were expecting. You should have a higher conversion rate after they move from the general landing page to the specific landing page.

If the niche approach is better at converting visitors to your site, you'll need to customize many messages for many unique audiences. If the broad approach proves to be better, don't be afraid to add a few niche campaigns into the mix. Typically, a combination of a broad and a niche approach works best.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

If you have a lower price point, the buying cycle should be short. If a potential customer doesn't buy right away, you should let them go. If you have a higher price point, the customer journey can be longer, so it's not as important if they don't buy right away. Retarget them as suggested below.

RETARGET WITH LOVE

Seek to establish a great relationship with your potential customers. You can do this by adding value to their lives with great content that informs, entertains and engages them. Some people think the financial value is in the customer list, but it's really in the value of the relationships you have with the people on the list. Great content sells better than even the best offers. This strategy creates the opportunity for consumers to re-engage with your marketing funnel.

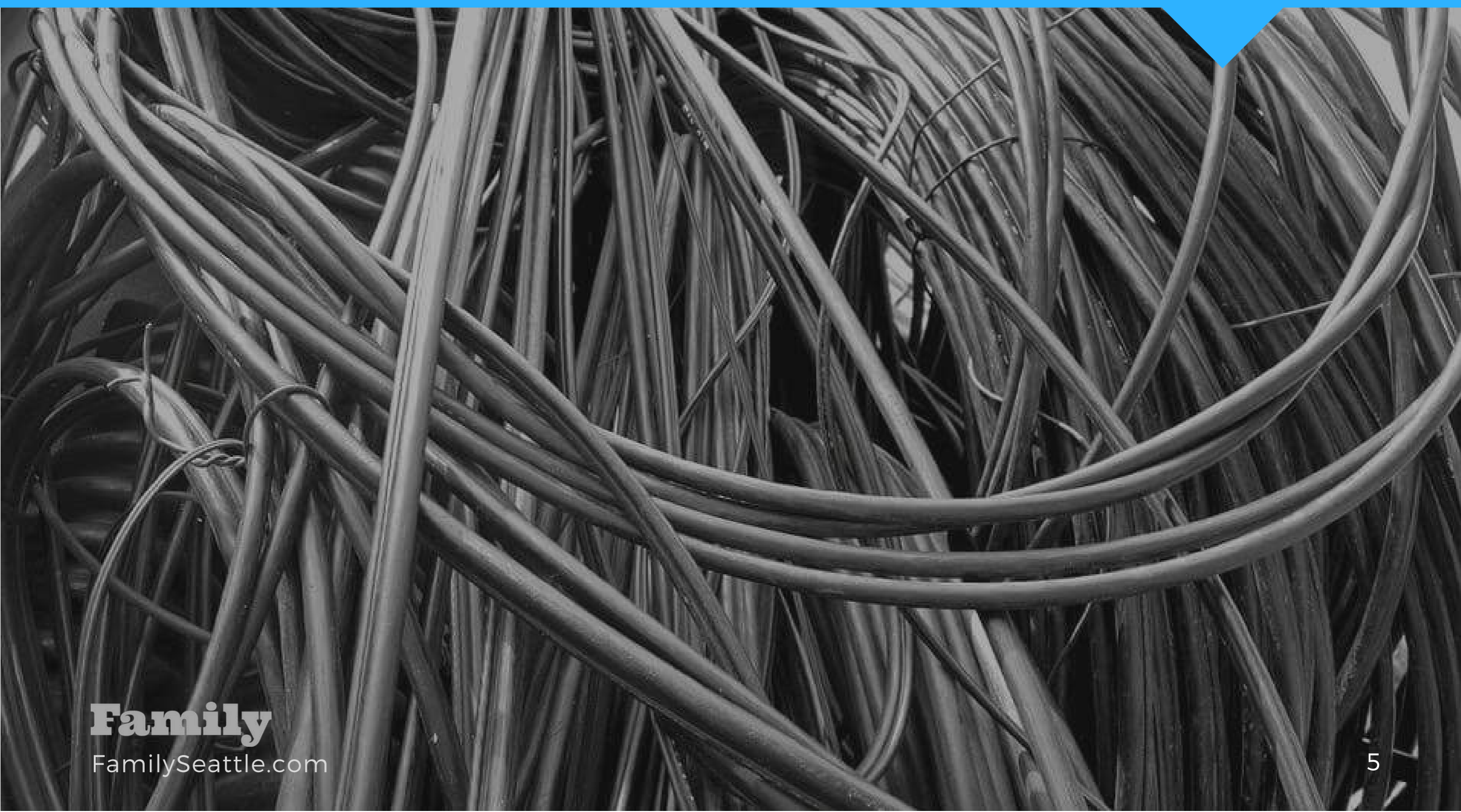
You need to be able to align the audience with the message. Optimize. Rinse. Repeat. The next chapter explains how to manage longer buying cycles in the digital world.



The Long Game of Digital Marketing



Many rookie digital marketers think they'll instantly convert cold leads. In fact, most cold leads take a significant amount of time before making a decision. You need to nurture them.



The next few pages explain the keys to attractive lead magnets, why webinars work so well, the nurturing process and little tricks that nudge consumers toward a purchasing decision, a plan for when someone announces they're interested in buying, fulfillment when the customer buys and, finally, the steps to take when they don't make a purchase.

Some other rookie mistakes include not anticipating:

- **What to do if someone clicks**
- **What to do if someone doesn't click**
- **What to do after the person becomes a new subscriber**

The overarching solution is to create a complete digital marketing funnel.

CONVERTING COLD LEADS

Nurture leads over the entire customer journey – from ice-cold leads to white-hot evangelists – for higher conversions. This approach obviously works better than simply buying digital space and hoping for the best. However, it's much more complicated. The following is an action plan for creating a more effective digital marketing campaign, and what makes it work.

- **Lead magnets**
- **Webinars**
- **Follow-up**
- **Fulfillment**
- **Long-term nurturing**
- **List segmentation**
- **List hygiene**

But, before we go too far, you need to invest in some sort of marketing automation tool. It's important to select a robust CRM system like Infusionsoft, Rainmaker, Drip or Active Campaign that allows you to do all the steps described in this process. There are many different systems out there, with more being added every day.

Never forget to align the lead magnet with your solution.

After building a successful marketing funnel around your flagship product or service, you'll have the basic blueprint for building the next funnel for your other products or services. It's important not to try implementing multiple funnels at the beginning of the process. All categories are different. There are subtle variations that'll need to be tested out before expanding into multiple funnels.

LEAD MAGNETS



Your first campaign should start the conversation with a promise. You are promising what you'll do for them after they become a new subscriber. Lead magnets are some of the simplest ways to do that. A lead magnet could be a checklist, a blueprint, a playbook, a quick video or a video series. There are a lot of different types of lead magnets. However, the critical points are as follows:

- Design your lead magnet so that it captures the essence of your product or service. Make sure the offer and the product align. For example, if you're selling a healthy meals subscription, don't talk about exercise in the offer. It sets up the audience for the wrong solution. Align your magnet with your solution. If you're not generating a list of prospects aligned with your solution, you're potentially sabotaging your own success.
- Every product is different. However, the easiest way to create a lead magnet that aligns with your solution is to offer a piece of the product as part of your lead magnet. It's referred to as splintering, and many lead magnets are either a checklist or a workbook, pulled straight from the actual product.
- Another successful tactic is a swipe file. If a person downloads a free swipe file and sees how fantastic the product looks, it will encourage them to explore how they can do the same.

Never forget to align the lead magnet with your solution.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

If you're selling a service rather than a product, you might need to take a different approach to warming up those cold leads - but your message should always align with your solution. Here's a perfect example. My agency recently developed a campaign to recruit new state troopers. We created three sets of Facebook ads together with landing pages as a way to warm up the leads.

The ad copy leveraged the three great motivators: sex, greed and fear. Each ad linked to one of the three corresponding landing pages: prestige (sex), financial gain (greed) and providing for the family (fear).



Leads driven to the landing pages converted at a much higher rate than direct traffic, due to the landing pages mapping back to the solution promised in the original Facebook ad.

If you have a warm audience, you can definitely have a campaign that takes people right to a purchasing decision. However, when the traffic is cooler, the goal of your lead magnet campaign isn't to make the sale. Rather, it's to encourage the consumer to take the next small step toward conversion. It's referred to as the commitment curve – having a person take small incremental steps before they make a buying decision. Those next steps might include a webinar or live consultation.

EMAIL CADENCE

After a person provides their email address in exchange for your lead magnet, you have an implied agreement to be responsible for what you send them. Take that research you did (outlined in the last chapter) and craft stories and case studies, demonstrating you're the solution for their pain points and passions.

If you're dragging out the conversation beyond three to five emails, they're probably not going to convert – but any shorter and they probably don't know you well enough to make a purchase. Possibly begin by sending emails every other day and continue to test for effectiveness. The number of emails will vary from category to category, so it's best to test the cadence.

Another variable to consider is the length of your content. For example, if you're offering a 20-minute video, you might want to give them an extra day to get through that much material. However, if you're offering a short checklist, it's probably going to be OK to send an email every other day. It comes down to knowing your target audience, understanding what they want and considering what type of content you're delivering.

You might be seeing good conversion numbers by this point. However, a lot of consumers will need more nurturing if it's a complicated or longer buying process.

LIVE WEBINARS



Webinars are used as part of a longer nurturing process. If presented correctly, they dramatically expedite conversions. You've already delivered value with your lead magnet, and they've heard about your product in three to five emails, so now present them with the opportunity to learn more – extending the relationship. Again, it's necessary to think about the commitment curve; we're moving the potential customer along in small steps, call micro-commitments.

If you're unfamiliar with presenting webinars, start by doing live webinars. Only after your presentation has been perfected should you move on to creating evergreen webinars. Here's a process to help get a potential customer signed up and engaged in your webinar.

First, send out an offer for the webinar. It's a live event, so there's already a sense of urgency built into your offer. After people sign up for it, send four emails before the webinar starts: one is the confirmation email, which goes out immediately; the next one goes out the morning of the webinar; the third is sent an hour before the webinar and, finally, the last one is 15 minutes before the start. If you have the person's phone number, send a reminder text message 15 minutes before the start. Many people are extremely busy and need these reminders.

People also need to know something about the webinar host. It can also be beneficial to include some sort of tip, list, lesson or video in these reminder emails. Always look for ways to provide added value.

Right before the webinar, make sure you send an email instructing everyone to download the workbook. This is another micro-commitment that's going to make them more likely to attend. Filling in the workbook is a further micro-commitment and increases engagement.

FOLLOW-UP

After the webinar, you need a follow-up process. A good way of doing this is by sending out a series of emails. Some will go to the people who attended the webinar, and others will go to those who declined the invitation.



More emails will be sent to people who purchased products, and those who did not.

- Send an offer to everyone who attended. It needs to include some sort of urgency or legitimate scarcity, such as an expiring bonus offer.
- Send an email to those who purchased, thanking them and encouraging them to share the experience.
- Send an email to those who did not attend the webinar and aren't engaged. In short, you need to recruit them to another webinar, or use a different tactic.
- Create an entire campaign for those who attended the webinar and didn't buy after hearing the offer.

It's important to continue weaving your story into these emails – just like the earlier emails you sent before the webinar. This keeps your messaging on brand and points to you as the logical solution for their pain points and passions.

THEY DID NOT PURCHASE

So they signed up for your lead magnet, opened your emails, attended your webinar and still didn't buy. It's usually not because the issue went away. They're probably still looking for a solution. Here's a list of the next steps.

As soon as the offer expires, send out an email that says something like this: "Hey, I noticed you've decided not to buy. I'm only trying to get better, and would love to know why you didn't." Provide a list of options for them to choose from. Their feedback will help you refine your messaging.

After three to five days have elapsed, send three to five more emails to each person. These emails should be sent over a period of about one week. They should be more educational and subtle. Don't be aggressive. Don't use pressure. These emails are aimed at people who need a little more time and information before making a decision.

You might consider showing them case studies, talking about the transformative opportunity and telling them stories about how the product or service has helped other people. As always, align the conversation around your solution. Package your best material and answers to every



objection someone might have to purchasing your product or service.

Only send out this series of emails once. Never put them through the follow-up process again. If they don't buy, you need to let them go.

The last email you should send contains a subject line like this: "Please Unsubscribe." The body copy basically says, "We understand, you probably have a lot going on, and we don't want to be just another email you have to deal with. We'd love you to stick around, but hey, if you're not going to open it, we'd rather you just click here and we'll unsubscribe you from our system."

LONG-TERM NURTURE CAMPAIGN

For those people who haven't opted out of your list, you need to create a long-term nurture campaign. This can last between three and six weeks and should teach people more about the most popular benefits of your product or service. It keeps you well placed in the minds of the people on your list without fatiguing them.

Use two emails per week combined with retargeting campaigns to move people further down the sales funnel. The reason they originally downloaded the lead magnet is because there was an issue they'd like resolved. It's likely that this issue still exists, so it's important to continue nurturing these leads while they remain warm.

Any campaign outside this six-week period is going to show diminishing value. However, let's focus on what to do when you close one of these leads.

FULFILLMENT

Fulfillment is more than delivering the product or service.

After someone purchases, it's useful to send a confirmation email thanking them and asking if they have any initial questions. Don't just take their money and forget about them. If you provide a great customer experience, they'll be more likely to share their story with others. Don't be shy



about sending follow-up emails explaining how others are benefitting from the product or service.

Finally, send a follow-up email a couple weeks after the purchase to make sure they're happy and don't have any questions. Always ask for feedback. The customer wants to know you're still engaged with them. There's a fine line between pestering and showing that you care about them and their experiences. Monitor any feedback closely. This is your time to shine.

LIST SEGMENTATION

List segmentation and surveys help surface important information about your customers or potential customers. They help you create better emails, webinars and products or services.

Survey by sending out an email that says something like this: "Hey, we're trying to create world-class content. Click the links below that best describe you." Provide them a list of relevant issues that correspond to the benefits of your product or service. Segment your list by tagging people in your CRM system with how they replied to the survey.

When you create and send content addressing what they just told you was an issue for them, you're giving them exactly what they're looking for. Let's say, for example, some people on your list wanted help with time management. Now that all the responses have been attributed to individuals in your CRM system, you can send specific content explaining why your product or service provides superior time management tools - to only those individuals who said time management was an issue.

Those who have identified other issues receive different content, highlighting how your product or service addresses their specific issue. By continually surveying and segmenting your list, you'll be able to improve the content sent to consumers. This always improves conversion rates.

Next, we'll explore another way to optimize your conversion rates, by removing leads that are unlikely to ever convert into sales.

LIST HYGIENE

It's important to cleanse your list at least every quarter.

Do you really need 500,000 people on your list, if only 2,000 ever open your emails? If a lot of people on your list aren't engaging, not only are you paying for them to be on your list, but your open rates and conversion rates aren't going to be very good. Sources confirm that at least 22.5% of your email list degrades every year. One of the quickest and simplest ways consultants increase conversion rates is to clear out the deadwood.

It's necessary to run reports on how many people haven't engaged in the last three months or so. Once these are removed, you'll get a better idea as to the effectiveness of your "open email" rates. It's a good idea to also check the numbers for opened, clicked and engaged. Different tools refer to these in different ways. And never just delete them; they're a good source of data.

For those leads who aren't engaging, you can create a campaign by sending them an email like this: "Hey, we noticed you haven't engaged in a while. We want to make sure you still see value in our conversations. If you want to stay on our list, please click here." If you don't hear from them, send one final email saying that if you don't click "Yes, I want to stay on the list" in the next 48 hours you'll be automatically removed.

After 48 hours remove them, because apps have subscriber limits and many don't sync well. You don't want to keep paying for leads who are not engaged with your content. Download their details into an Excel spreadsheet until you're ready to retarget them with a Facebook ad campaign. This will be your last attempt to get them back in your marketing funnel. Since your last approach didn't work with this audience, you'll need to mix up your message, image or offer to get their attention.

Contrary to popular opinion, ad blockers are a good thing for marketers. People who use ad blockers don't want to be your customer, and therefore having them opt out is good for your conversion numbers. Unsubscribing leads is a good



thing too. If you've invested a lot of time and money into generating a large list, eliminating subscribers can be frustrating. But a vanity list filled with unengaged subscribers is nothing but an ego rush and doesn't make good business sense. In business, there is nothing better than conversions.

IN CONCLUSION

To recap, the process for digital marketing is a lot more complicated than simply buying space on the web. Building an opt-in audience through lead magnets or content marketing is only the first step. Education, follow-up and nurturing are vital components of any complex buying decision. Your conversion odds are greatly improved by list segmentation and list cleansing, as they enable you to better focus on strong leads – those who are most likely to make a purchase.

In my opinion, if you're having trouble converting online sales, you should consider developing a fully integrated online marketing approach. At the very least, it will give you the best possible opportunity for success.

Any campaign outside this six-week period is going to show diminishing value.

Measure Everything

A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a white lab coat, is looking through a white and black microscope. The scene is set in a laboratory with a blue-tinted background.

At the heart of any effective advertising campaign are market research and consumer research. They used to be the domain of big brands with large budgets to spend on focus groups and testing. Today, there are plenty of quick and cost-effective ways to gather consumer-centric data, determine market sentiment and project potential returns. No digital marketing campaign should begin without doing proper research first.

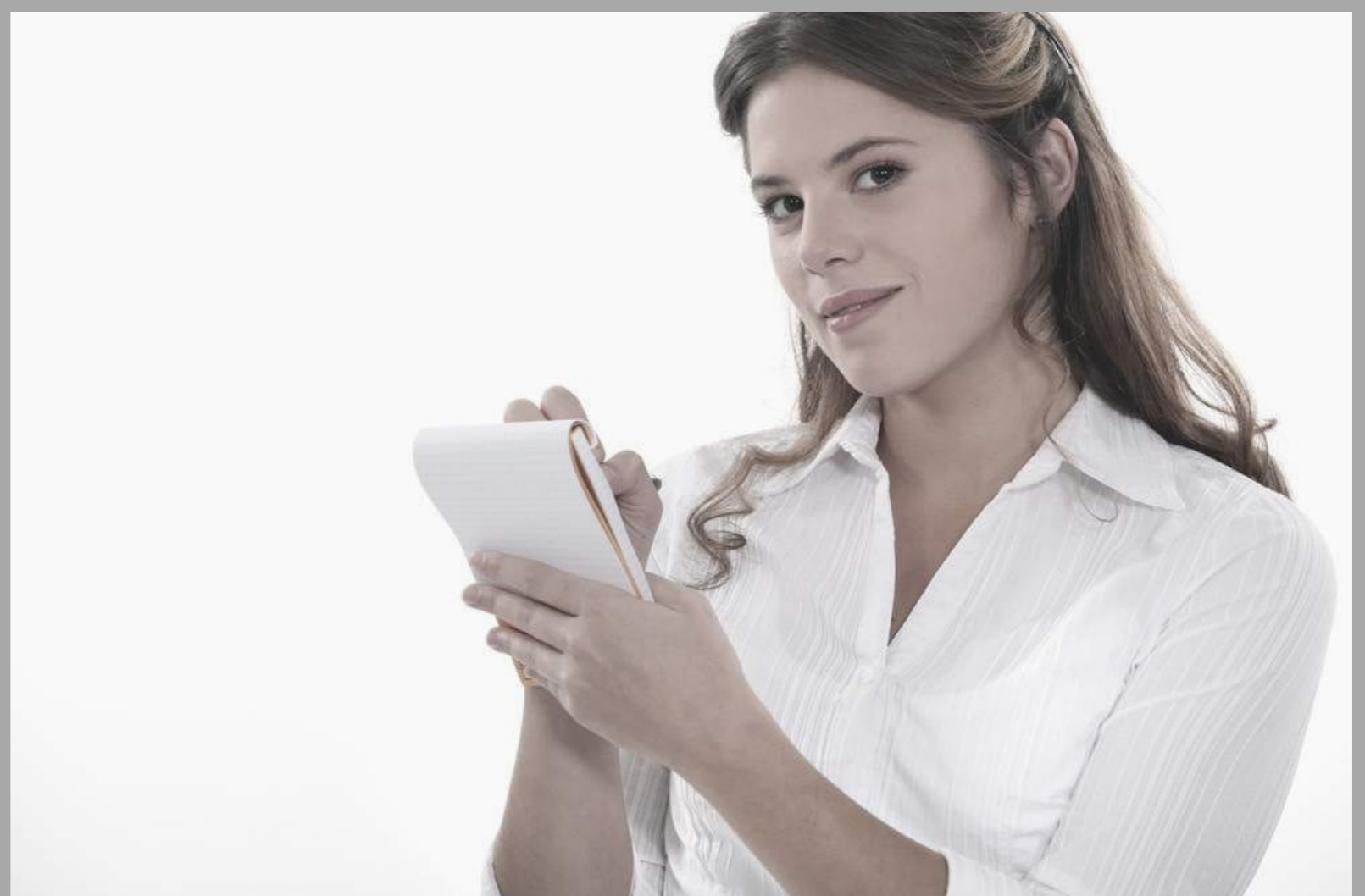
THE C-SUITE LOVES NUMBERS

Explaining the relevance of data points instills confidence in stakeholders.

- They want to know the money spent on any campaign isn't just someone's gut feeling or opinion, but that it's supported by data.
- They also want assurance that a campaign is based on insights gleaned from a sample set of potential customers.
- They want to know how the effectiveness of the campaign will be measured.

Establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) shows stakeholders what success looks like. Measuring strategic benchmarks, testing and optimizing campaigns are not luxuries. "Set It and Forget It" might be a clever slogan for the Ronco Showtime Rotisserie, but it's the last thing you want to do with an advertising campaign.

Advertising is a data-driven industry: Data leads to insights; insights lead to actionable plans and effective creative. So before you begin your next campaign, it's mandatory you do your homework. Research current market conditions, understand how the competition is reacting to the marketplace, evaluate your current assets and identify the challenges and opportunities before you. Research is more than numbers – information is power.



DEVELOPMENTAL RESEARCH

About six years ago, my agency onboarded a well-established retailer. At our first marketing meeting, the owner insisted he knew his best customers because he came face to face with them every day. He claimed they were 35-to-55-year-old men. His description was a little lacking in detail, so we suggested thorough audience segmentation and message testing, but he was adamant he knew best. We created television and radio campaigns for that audience. And when we measured who was coming into the stores, lo and behold, it proved to be the same audience we had targeted.

Our client was extremely pleased with himself for “calling” the right audience. He was satisfied that the campaign was generating a solid return on his investment, and therefore, there was nothing more to do. However, we knew he was missing out on so much more business.



THE COST OF NOT RESEARCHING

Unbeknownst to him, we were conducting developmental and evaluative research. This involved testing new audiences – similar to the audience the owner had originally identified – with different messages to see if anything resonated with them.

We overlaid census data with these new audiences and found that if we had targeted men 45 to 55 years old with a different message, we would have generated almost twice as much revenue. If we had used a different message that resonated with 35-to-45-year-old women, we would have reached almost as many people.

After showing him the data, our client became defensive and said we obviously needed a very broad message. Wrong. We needed three different messages. Later our client agreed to pay for the additional research we had done and adopted all the new strategies. Years later, he went on to sell his retail chain for tens of millions of dollars. The lesson learned:

“If you can't measure it, you can't improve it.” – Peter Drucker



THE TRUTH ABOUT TESTING

Large corporations test, test and then test some more. Contrary to the popular myth, Steve Jobs routinely used focus groups in the development of Apple products – a fact that emerged from one of the many Apple lawsuits. For the Super Bowl, Bud Light doesn't make one commercial. They make many. Then they test the different commercials so they know which ones are going to resonate best – running only the real winners. Today, everyone should be testing.

YOU'RE OUT OF EXCUSES

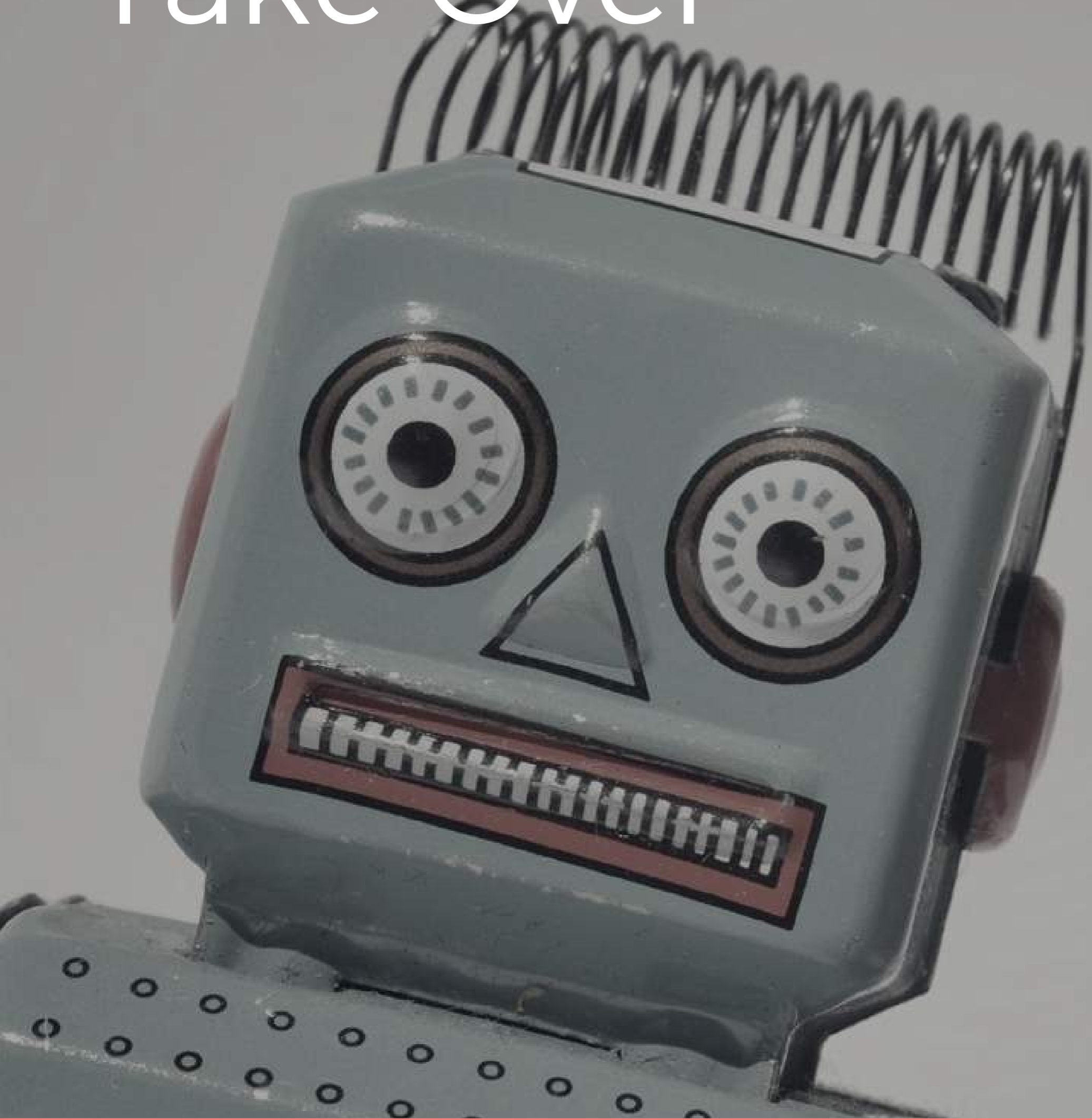
Audience segmentation and message testing have become so inexpensive, even the smallest brands need to take advantage of them. The cost of panel surveys is a fraction of the cost of doing focus groups, and much faster too. Facebook and AdWords surveys take more time but are extremely economical. Every day there are new services like Survey Monkey and Survata offering fast and cost-effective ways to survey the views of different audiences.

Once armed with a decent-size customer list, influencer list and IP addresses, you can cross-reference social data to get a pretty accurate picture of your customer. By exploring other audiences that have an affinity with your original list, you might uncover a larger audience or one more likely to buy your product or service. Through inexpensive surveys, you now have the ability to put a number of different messages in front of a number of different audiences. This helps you project how large your potential market might be, and – best of all – how you should be communicating with them.

Imagine not having to spend \$100,000 on media and production to prove you have a viable market for your product or service. Welcome to the future.



When Machines Take Over



You're shopping online for car mats from your cubicle at work, and you find a good price. Is it the same price you'll pay tomorrow, searching from home? More and more algorithms are determining what price you'll pay based on a variety of factors: seasonality, competitors' prices, where you're searching from, time of day, your online shopping history, etc. In fact, algorithms have not only changed online retail, but they have changed sports, medicine and real estate - even what you see on Facebook and Instagram. And algorithms are getting smarter every day.

Of course, this is going to change the world of advertising.

IT'S A WHOLE NEW BALLGAME

Algorithms have advanced to such an extent that now they're programmed to create new algorithms, which in turn solve for different and evolving criteria. This has given rise to well-known machine-learning computers like IBM's Watson and Google's RankBrain.

The information learned by RankBrain is already estimated to be the third most influential criterion in Google search results, impacting how webmasters produce positive search results for brands. Marketing has entered the age of machine learning, where you can't game the SEO system anymore because it's working 24/7 to evaluate content and gradually integrate new ranking factors all on its own. What evidence is there to support this?

Google already has the ability to interpret the intent of complex and ambiguously worded queries across unstructured databases all over the web. It has become very good at context and syntax – the heart of semantics. It's so good that you don't need to use the same word over and over again as a keyword to boost your search ranking – an old SEO tactic. Google understands the subtleties of similar words; therefore you should be thinking more about word groups and word clusters.

Moreover, the correlation between keywords and high search rankings has fallen over time. There is a completely new set of criteria for high search rankings in the age of machine learning, which is optimized for the human experience.

WHEN MACHINES DO OUR JOBS

Similar to the way they disrupted stock market trading, smarter and smarter algorithms are buying display ads, faster and at better prices than humans ever could do. They're also writing personalized content, and making real-time decisions about which "articles" you might want to read after finishing a blog post. They've made significant inroads into predictive content creation and programmatic buying. They're already better at creating audience segmentation than anything media buyers can create.



Given sufficient time, machine learning will be able to understand how to avoid the common mistakes made by humans, optimize revenues, reach more consumers and identify new opportunities. This technology has implications well beyond media buying and content creation. It's already writing songs and scripts, and eventually, it will be the guiding force behind marketing through the Internet of Things.

And you thought digital marketing was complicated now!

Last Thoughts



The internet has changed many things. It opened up the world of digital marketing, which on one hand has made things a lot more complicated.

But on the other hand, it's ended the era of some soothsayer telling a client to trust them, because they "know" what's going to work. Most campaigns simply dissolve away the instant they touch the internet, because they're based on hunches rather than letting the market decide. It's eliminated the need for gurus shooting from the hip. No more wise men explaining who our ideal customer is. No more experts spouting off about what consumers think is important. Today, we ask them. We test. We refine our messaging to meet their wants and needs.

We shouldn't fear the internet. It's making us better at doing our jobs.

Mike's worked with some of the biggest brands in the world, writing and directing for agencies and production companies. His background spans traditional marketing, digital marketing and business strategy.

Based in Seattle, his company, Family, uses a simple formula for success: They show people how their advertising can work better by combining smart data with irresistible creative.

Subscribe to his weekly blog [here](#).

Contact Mike Johnston at the links below with any questions. He's always available to discuss consulting, speaking engagements and new business.

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