

The SME Guide to Digital Marketing



Understanding website best practices and maximising your digital potential.

Introduction

Digital marketing is one of the more level playing fields businesses have ever been offered. With the right content, and with the technical know-how to unleash it on the world at the right time, you can reach millions of people, no matter who you are.

In reality, though, the most memorable and effective digital marketing campaigns tend to be for the biggest brands. They can rely on global recognition of their brand, a universal understanding of the basics of what they do, and a huge built-in audience, which means they can focus on more unique, creative ideas—with the budgets to make them happen.

Suddenly that level playing field doesn't look so level after all. But SMEs have plenty of opportunity to be creative with their marketing too—although a bit more work often needs to be done to establish that recognition, understanding and audience first. Particularly if they're relatively new businesses, or are operating in the typically less visible B2B space.

In this guide we'll take you through what you need to do to maximise your digital potential: checklists and tips for creating a website, and the fundamentals of digital marketing tools and practices for SMEs.

First things first, your company website—the first step to creating a digital presence.



SMEs have plenty of opportunity to be creative with their marketing, particularly if they're relatively new businesses, or are operating in the typically less visible B2B space.

What does an SME's website need to do?

A website is essentially a home base which supports everything else you do – both online and off. Whether a company needs one or not is no longer up for discussion.

Every website will have completely different needs, depending on a huge range of factors defined by audience, service and industry. Bigger brands in particular may be able to use their websites for completely different things, thanks to the full extent of their other resources taking some of the pressure off.

Smaller business, on the other hand, will need their website to do a bit more legwork. There are six key things that it will need to achieve.



1. Establish your brand

Your website needs to offer visitors a clear picture of who you are. More than any other space your business operates in, your own site provides complete control over how you position your company.

This positioning takes two key forms:

Aesthetic positioning – what your brand looks like. Colours, fonts, logos, styles of imagery. These need to be immediately apparent to users, and also need to be used consistently across all areas of the business, from social media accounts to business cards to van decals.

Message positioning – who you are, and what your company stands for. Your core values, your unique selling points. These messages need to be front and centre.

2. Establish your products or services

When it comes to the services you provide, and the things you sell, your website shouldn't leave anything to the imagination. Make sure there's plenty of detailed information about what you sell – and why you're the best person to supply it.

This can include:

- Written descriptions
- Technical specifications
- Photography and video
- Case studies and testimonials
- Frequently asked questions

3. Generate leads or sales

The information above is all in service of encouraging customers to click the “buy” button – or persuading potential clients to enquire for a quote.

Website visitors should have as few barriers as possible to initiating or completing these transactions – useful (even essential) features include:

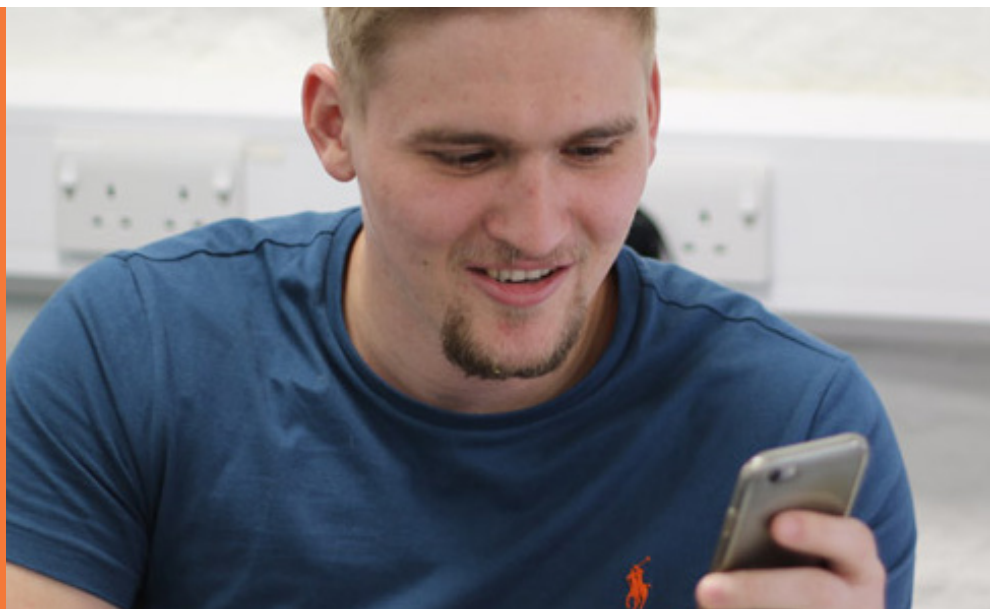
Sales-driven

- Online storefront
- Pricing information
- Customer baskets
- Secure payments

Lead-driven

- Automated quoting tools
- Targeted contact forms
- Clear contact information

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4. Appear in search results



About 79,600,000 results

A website is all-but-useless if no one can find it. Websites need to be designed and built in a way that search engines can read, index and serve up to people in search results – this is called search engine optimisation, or SEO.

There's no on/off switch for making a site appear at the top of Google – instead, it's a combination of a large number of factors, including (but not limited to):

- Identifying relevant search keywords that relate to your business
- Ensuring each page has a unique title, ideally using one of these keywords
- Writing enough unique, relevant content for each page to give a clear picture of what it's about
- Creating a logical site structure that bots can move through easily
- Making sure the site loads quickly, and is useable, on all devices
- Ensuring correct details are listed in Google Business
- Updating the site regularly so that Google recognises that it's an active business

You'll notice that many of the elements favoured by Google's bots are also incredibly useful to human users too.

Creating a site that is easier for people to use means they'll spend more time on it, rather than clicking the back button straight away.

These metrics of human behaviour are recorded and considered by Google, and the better your stats, the better you'll be able to rank. When SEO is done right, it's almost like a snowball effect.

5. Meet technology standards

Technology moves fast, and the internet in particular is always changing. A website that met every technical standard and best practice even two years ago could now be completely out of date.

These standards range from boxes to tick to pretty essential user functions, to legal requirements that can cause trouble if not met. Here are a few key requirements:

Responsive design

Responsive web design means that websites are designed and built to work effectively on a number of different devices (desktop, tablet, mobile), and in any browser window size.

If you make your browser window smaller, or look at your site on a smaller device, does it stay put, forcing people to scroll left and right to read anything, or shrink down until the text and images are illegible? Or does it adapt, subtly adjusting the layout to make sure everything remains readable, and on one screen?

The latter is called responsive web design, and it's increasingly becoming a factor that's valued by Google—as well as by users, as mobile web browsing overtakes use of desktops.

Speed

This one's fairly simple - no one likes a slow website. Human users are less likely to stick around and wait for your pages to load, and search engine bots may not be able to crawl through your entire site in the time allotted.

Technical considerations to improve page speed include finding the balance between high quality images and small file sizes, optimising code to be as efficient as possible and compressing certain files.



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Security

Protecting the privacy and integrity of the data your website handles is essential, particularly if the site allows people to make payments directly through it.

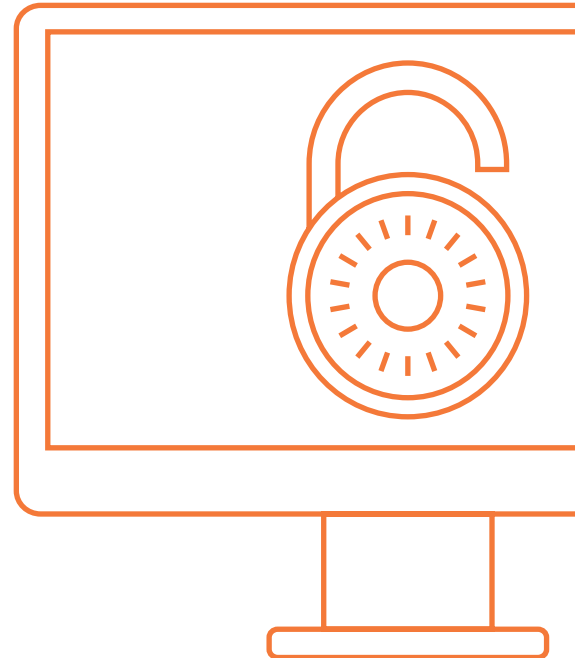
If your website runs on a certain type of software, such as WordPress, it needs to be kept up to date with the latest version, as security issues and new vulnerabilities will be fixed with each release.

Making sure your website uses HTTPS instead of HTTP as the method for which it transfers data is also essential – the secure version (hence the extra S) encrypts the data that your website sends around the web, protecting it from hacks. It also adds an essential badge of trust for consumers, who are increasingly keeping an eye out for the secure identifier on the websites they use to make purchases.

Data protection

If you have contact forms that collect data from users, you have a responsibility to make sure that data is actually relevant to your business, and is kept securely.

You may be aware of recent changes to the law, with the introduction of General Data Protection Regulation, or GDPR for short. This stipulates that you have to make your visitors completely aware of the data you're storing on them, as well as why and how you're storing it. You'll also have to go to greater lengths to get consent for storing this data.



6. Taking things further

Your website should give you room to grow. Once you have the basics covered, consider where you might want to take it next. For example:

- Integration with marketing activities (more on this in the next section)
- Personalisation for users
- Gated premium content for gathering leads
- Monitoring website performance to identify potential improvements



How should an SME approach digital marketing?

We've already talked about the search engine optimisation that takes place as part of website design and development – but this is by no means the end of what you'll need to do to make sure that your website (and, as a result, your business) is being found.

Here are the five steps to getting started with digital marketing:

1. Setting your goals

Don't charge in, digital guns blazing, without first figuring out what you want to achieve. Why are you wanting to step up your digital marketing? Is it to:

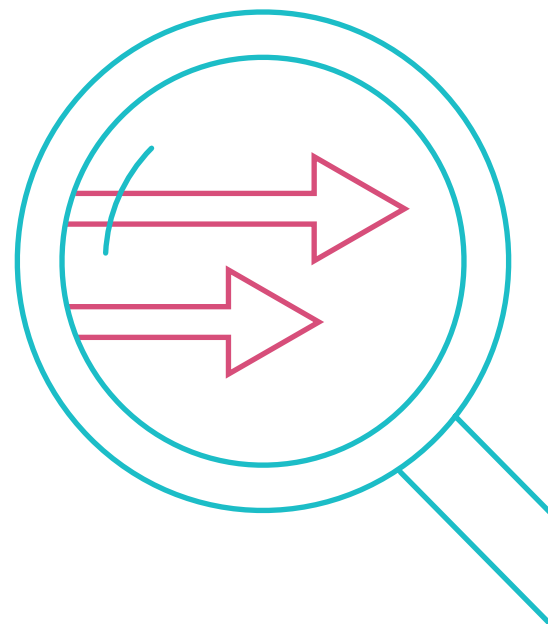
- Generate more leads
- Boost sales
- Improve brand recognition
- Increase the number of website visitors

Or something else?

While many of these goals may seem similar, identifying the specific things you want to do will help you to refine your approach.

2. Identifying the right channels

There are a number of different channels you can use to market your business online, and the right ones will depend on your goals.



SEO and content

SEO doesn't end with your website service and product pages—there's a lot more you can do to improve your search visibility and traffic.

Utilising your blog gives you the opportunity to target keywords that may not be appropriate elsewhere on your site, such as longer, query-based search terms (i.e. “which is the best...”, “how do I choose...”), or more general terms related to your industry.

Casting a wider keyword net in this way gives your site more chances to be seen. The content, meanwhile, can go a long way to establishing you as an industry voice and raising your profile, as well as generating leads through helping your site's visitors solve problems and make decisions.

PPC

PPC stands for pay-per-click advertising, a style of ads that are hosted on search results pages and websites for free, with the advertiser only paying when they are clicked on by a user.

PPC ads often work on a bid-based system, with the advertiser willing to pay the highest cost per click receiving the most prominent positioning.

The leading provider of PPC advertising is Google AdWords. AdWords allows advertisers to place ads in Google search results pages—often right at the top—with custom wording, giving a great deal of control over how they're presented.

Users can also specify the keywords the ads will appear for, as well as targeting by location, and even time of day. This makes AdWords very effective at targeting certain kinds of users at certain times to generate sales and leads.

Social media

Social media is becoming an essential tool for reaching out and engaging with audiences. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn are all powerful tools for finding new audiences and promoting your services.

Marketers are, to an extent, at the mercy of content algorithms—highlighting the importance of a website, and other channels, where you can control what is seen, and by who—but many social platforms also offer PPC advertising of their own.

3. Understanding your competitors

With so many businesses competing for space online, competitor research is an essential part of digital marketing. By understanding what your competitors are doing, you can identify opportunities where they're missing out, and where your budget can be spent most effectively.

There are a number of tools available online to support with this – Mangools' SERP Checker, for example, allows you to see how well certain websites (whether yours or your competitors) rank for certain search terms, while Screaming Frog allows you to more closely analyse the content of your competitors' websites.

On social, meanwhile, Facebook Insights can help you build a picture of your competitors' audiences – who they are, when they're online, and what they're interested in.



4. Measuring your activity

Marketing is an investment, so you'll need to continuously monitor your performance as you go to ensure you're actually getting a return on that investment. Digital marketers need to be able to adapt, changing course when things are going wrong, and replicating things that have been effective.

Again, there are plenty of tools available to help you do this, such as HubSpot and Google Analytics, which help you identify where your users are coming from, what they're doing while they're on your site, and which content or features they are engaging with the most.

5. Taking things further

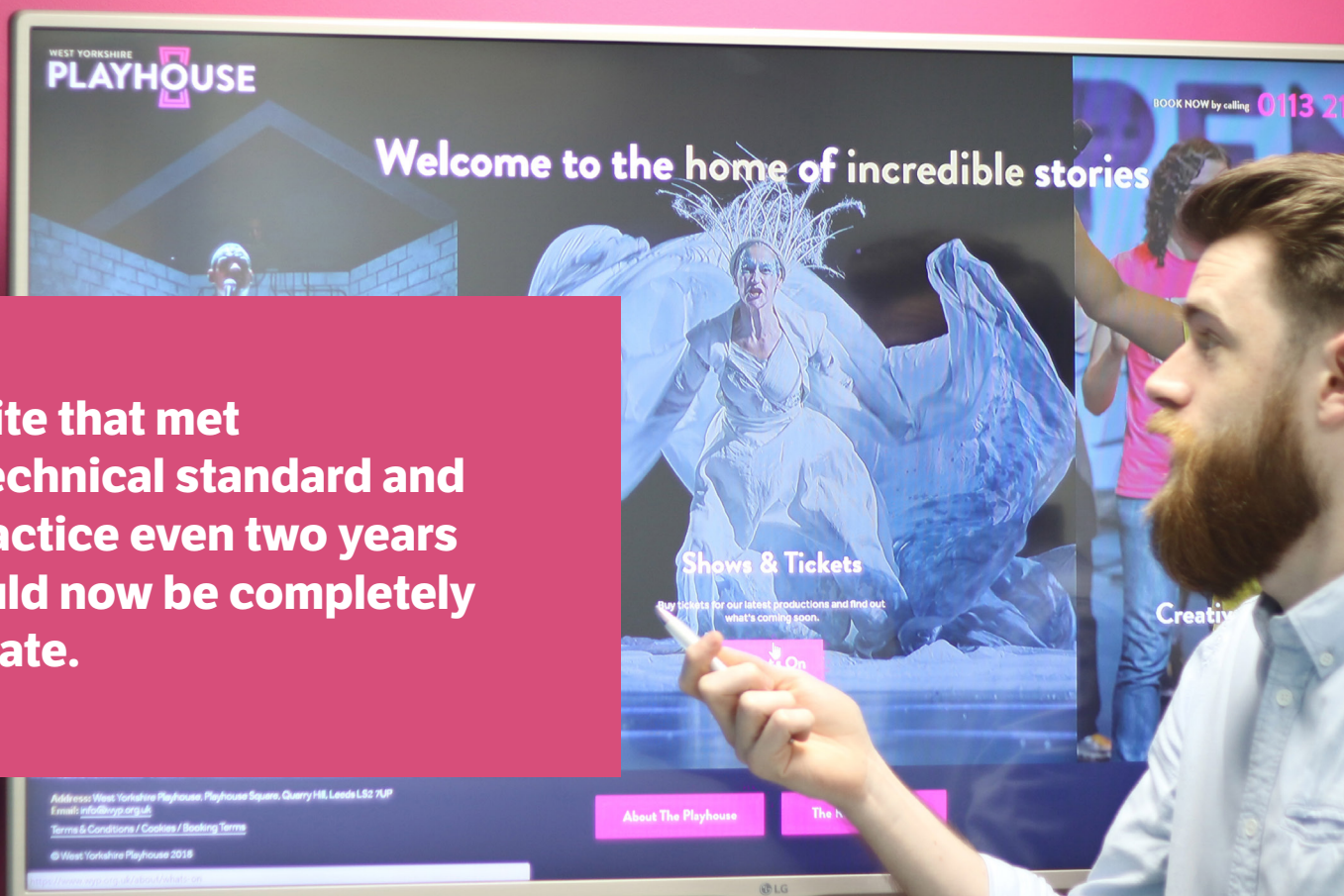
Following on from the points above, a marketer's work is never quite done – taking the results of your performance analysis and improving upon them is essential for continuing to grow and see a return on investment, and an improvement in sales or lead generation conversions.

Conversion rate optimisation (CRO) is the name given to this process. It might involve A/B tests of different page or ad versions to identify the most effective type, or heatmap tracking of website users to see the areas of your site they're drawn to.

Also, once you've begun to gather information from users visiting your site, you can begin to run email campaigns, directly reaching out to potential customers that have shown their interest with content and messaging tailored to pique their interest.

From there, there are any number of directions you can go, with plenty of opportunities for creative campaigns and content.

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How can we help?

With over ten years of experience helping businesses of all sizes develop their digital presence, we've guided hundreds of small businesses and startups through their first steps in web and digital marketing, or provided the support needed to take things up to the next level.

Splitpixel was founded around the core values of giving honest advice, providing value for money, and making digital accessible to all. Our team is made up of specialists in web design, development, content creation and all areas of digital marketing.

If you'd like to discuss a web or marketing project, we'd love to hear from you!

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