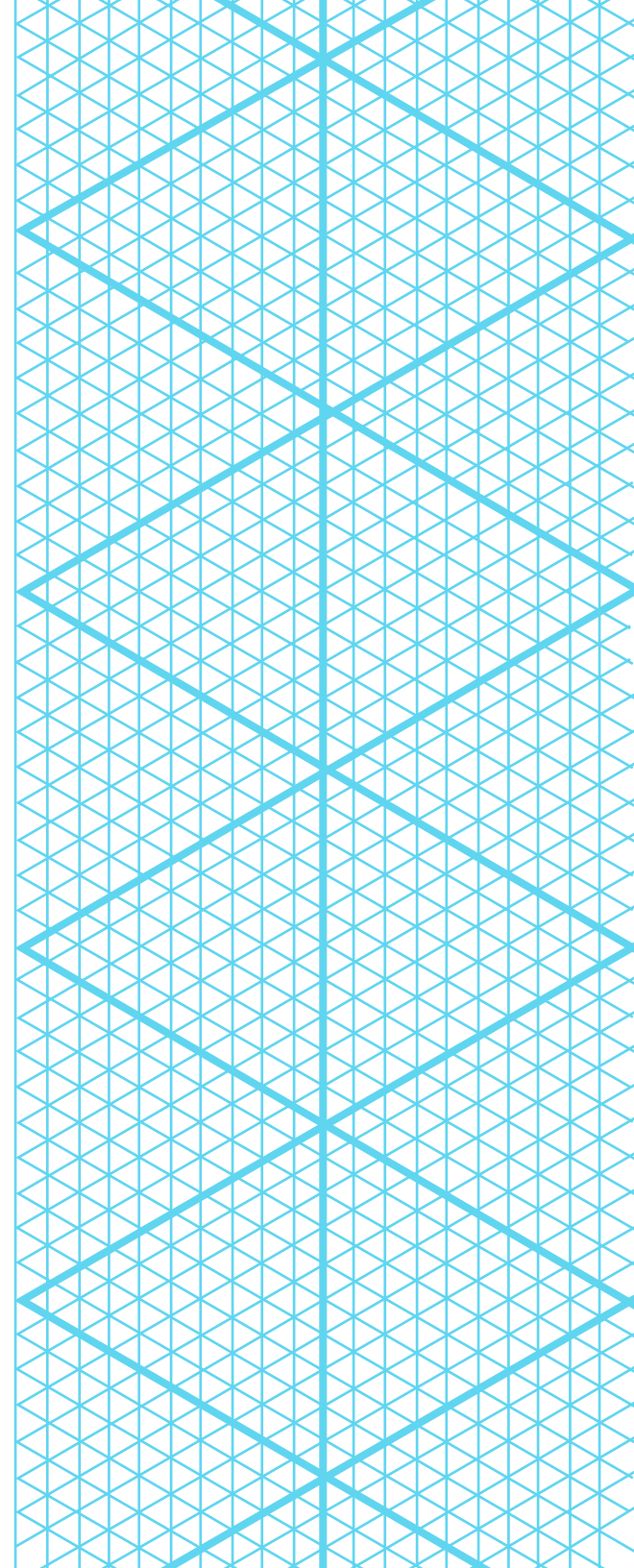


TACTICAL MARKETING



CHAPTER 7:

TACTICAL MARKETING

No matter what point in the lifecycle of your business you find yourself at, marketing is going to be pivotal to establishing success. Pivotal to developing a brand image, curating a following and attracting and retaining customers, marketing is the cornerstone upon which successful startups are built.

Regrettably, one of the easiest things to overlook when considering your marketing strategy is that it needs to be exactly that: strategic. Don't get us wrong, marketing certainly involves a great deal of creative energy and requires artistic acumen and the ability to read between the lines. That fact, though, doesn't negate the need for marketing professionals to be constantly thinking about how the needs of their business can be met by their marketing, and vice versa.

In an increasingly digital age, the vast majority of your marketing will be conducted through Internet-centric channels. With that in mind, we won't be spending much time in this chapter discussing guerilla marketing or print advertising techniques, but will instead focus on the ways in which digital marketing can enhance your business' productivity, profitability and success. Specifically, we're going to focus on three distinct arenas of tactical marketing, and how you can tailor your strategy in each sector for optimal performance. In no particular order, we'll be discussing:

Content strategy: Content strategy plans for the creation, publication and governance of useful, usable content.

In our content strategy segment, we'll talk about the ways you can develop a meaningful content marketing plan through the

creation of materials such as white papers, ebooks, blog posts, informational guides, advertorials, videos, animations and the like. Additionally, we'll consider how the ways in which you design your web presence affect the manner in which potential consumers perceive your marketing campaigns.

SEO: Search Engine Optimization refers to methods used to increase traffic to a website by increasing its search engine page rank.

In this segment, we'll touch on some of the basic fundamentals of search engine optimization, including on page SEO, off page SEO and meta tags. This section is in no way shape or form intended to be a crash course on SEO skills, but should enable you to speak intelligently about the concept and aid you in determining whether or not investing in SEO personnel is worth your resources.

Social Media Management: Managing outbound and incoming online interactions, along with other small business activities, in an efficient and productive manner.

In this segment, we'll discuss both the old and new schools of thought on social media management, as well as outline some helpful apps and softwares that your company can use to streamline the process of developing a meaningful social media presence.

All in all, this chapter will be dedicated to exploring the ways in which you can refine your startup's marketing processes to make them more tactical. Above all else, take the time to consider your actual marketing objectives as you read this chapter. Some

of this advice may seem overly general, but when applied to your business' specific goals, you'll find it can bolster the impact of your marketing presence over time.

I) CONTENT STRATEGY

Web Presence as Marketing Strategy

Before we get into the fine details of content strategy, it's critical that we address the more general concept of UX and UI, which we discussed much earlier on in this text. For better or for worse, the user interface and user experience that you develop for your product or website is going to have a great deal of impact on the way that people perceive your brand's image.

Indeed, one need not look much further than the websites or digital presences of several high-performing tech services companies to see this in action.

First, let's consider Wealthfront. For those of you unfamiliar with the company, Wealthfront provides robo-advising services to investors in the digital realm by constructing portfolios of ETFs and other funds that require very little maintenance. The portfolios are customizable by target amount, risk level and time period, and provide a hands-off approach for everyone from serious investors to casual newbies just trying to get their feet wet.

Next, we'll look at Betterment, which does more or less exactly the same thing. The companies have some differences in terms of pricing structure, but are similarly structured enough that we can say that their sales teams are in direct competition with one another. More importantly, we can say that they're both doing well in the robo-advising market, and are building highly sustainable

companies through their sales practices.

As we look through two examples, we'd encourage you to consider the importance of white space in the way that these two websites are laid out. Above all else, it's important to remember that a website that's too busy can scare consumers or users away as quickly as a blank page.

What you should notice here, from the red highlighting that we've (relatively artistically - apologies) inserted, is that of 6 of the 9 functionalities on the homepage for WEalthfront are not conversion-focused functions.

Wealthfront is using their website as a digital marketing vehicle to spread the message about their product. In other words, the company is focusing more on the top activities of the funnel (attract, engage, etc), instead of putting raw focus on conversion. This is a strategic move, and one that has nothing to do with chance.

Indeed, one need look no further than the website of Wealthfront's direct competitor, Betterment. You should take a look.

Again, here we see that the company has dedicated a large amount of the primary real estate on their website dedicated to non-conversion spaces. Betterment is focusing on branding themselves through digital marketing that attracts and engages customers, because they recognize that these top-funnel activities are every bit as important in reaching raw conversion as simple chasing the closing moment of a deal.

In short form, these brands have specific goals for their marketing initiatives, and they use the actual image presented by

their websites and applications to further those goals. With that concept addressed, let's move on to discussion of actual content strategy.

2] Content Strategy Deliverables

There are many ways to go about developing a meaningful content marketing presence. While none of them are necessarily better than the others, they all require a reasonably adept amount of deliverable content.

At the core of content marketing, particularly content marketing that is tactically applicable to your business, is the ability to produce meaningful work ahead of time which can then be put out through multiple channels when the time is right. Later on in this sub-section, we'll discuss the best ways to go about actually making those plans and knowing when to launch content. Prior to that, though, it's best that we give working definitions for some of the most common types of marketing content:

Whitepapers: An informational document issued by a company to to promote or highlight the features of a solution, product or service.

Whitepapers will be most appropriate as a tactical marketing piece when your underlying goal is to establish thought leadership in your business through publishing informational pieces on a given, relevant industry matter.

eBooks: The electronic counterpart of a printed book, which can be viewed on a desktop computer, laptop, smartphone, tablet, or e-book reader.

eBooks tend to be brand specific. On the agency side, eBooks

are often requested by clients as a means to convey information about a new product or offering that they have. As you may know, ebooks are also a popular means of distributing mainstream literature, but that isn't the sense in which we refer to them when discussing tactical content marketing.

Blog posts: A journalistic, informational or editorial posting that accompanies a website in order to provide its reader with specific pieces of information.

Having a dedicated hopper of blog posts is a great way to drum up interest in your business. Writing blog posts that are a mix of timely commentary on relevant industry issues and general wisdom regarding product offering and consumer behavior is a great way to maintain relevancy. With that said, it's important not to overdo it. Never publish a blog post where you don't actually have something to say.

Informational guides: Publications, either print or digital, that are used to provide the reader with instructions on how to engage in a given behavior or activity or how to use a product effectively.

Informational guides also present the opportunity for thought leadership, but they need not be product specific. It can be beneficial to your marketing process to offer guides on more general behaviors exhibited or engaged in by members of your industry community. For example, a car insurance company might do well to offer instruction guides on what to do when your car breaks down.

Advertorial / Sponsored Content: An article that appears to be editorial but is actually paid content that is written to promote a product or service.

Advertorial content is a dangerous game, because when poorly executed it can cause your brand to lose consumer confidence from a marketing standpoint. If done properly, though, it can be a great way to provide information about a given product or service without having to go into great detail, just enough to bait a potential consumer.

Video content: Video content can be a major distinguishing factor for your startup when it comes to overall content presentation. While busy consumers may not be willing to read an advertorial, blog post or whitepaper, they're likely willing to watch a brief video if they find it intriguing. This is evidenced, no doubt, by the transition of Facebook into a predominantly video-driven platform.

While there are many platforms on which you can distribute video content related to your startup, we encourage the use of Snapchat as a starting point. This is primarily due to the ease of use with which Snapchat postings can come. Consider posting Snapchat Stories regarding the day to day life of your business. These needs not be greatly informative (after all, each post only gives you 10 seconds). With that said, you're likely to be able to quickly build a follower base simply by documenting your commute, day to day activities and the like. In short, this is a cheap and quick way to build a social media video presence with minimal to no overhead.

Animations: Small, digitally rendered graphical files that can be used to illustrate a given product or action in motion. Usually intended either as informative content, entertainment, or both.

Relatively self explanatory, animations are usually shared as a tertiary piece of another form of tactical content marketing.

3) Content Strategy: Ideation, Personnel and Timing

Now that we're familiar on at least a baseline level with some of the basic deliverables of tactical content marketing, we can discuss some of the more logistic issues of implementing it as a regular part of your business.

As a startup, your margins are often going to be very low, so you don't necessarily have the opportunity to mess up and learn from it without causing real damage to the sustainability of your business. Your strategy should reflect that in every aspect of its execution. For example, consider the ideation of your content.

You have to start somewhere when it comes to content ideation, and the raw truth of the matter is something that a lot of startup owners will relish (though, admittedly, the more quantitative among you may hate this): just start.

If you're working through developing a tactical content marketing plan on your own, you're going to need convincing content if you want a shot in the marketplace. The first thing that you write (or have your staff write) will not be convincing. Neither will the second. Maybe, maybe, the third will be. Do you take our point? Simply put, the vast majority of content that anyone generates, even those paid specifically to do so, isn't worth posting. And that's where one of our key lessons comes in: you aren't costing yourself anything but opportunity by developing bad

content and not posting it. Developing bad content and posting it, however, is a waste of time. You need to ensure that your content marketing strategy values quality over quantity, but also accounts for market presence.

The bottom line for content ideation, in case it isn't entirely clear as of yet, is this: don't post anything that isn't ready. You can only do damage acting on that impulse. Relish the learning experience of developing strong content. It's difficult and it takes time, but it will create thought leadership among you, your employees, and your company as a whole. Best of all, you aren't causing any harm (short of, maybe, missed potential) by not posting.

Of course, establishing and ideating content worth sharing is only half the battle. Indeed, the real strategy comes into play when you begin to deal with personnel from a content standpoint. So what should you look for in terms of content-forward employees?

First and foremost, it's important to recognize that on a startup budget, you may not want to dedicate some of your resources to paying a full-time, salaried content strategist. At least not in the first year. Don't get us wrong, there's a great deal of value to be added through retaining someone like this, but it isn't the only option. With that in mind, we've gone ahead and outlined some of the most popular personell solutions when it comes to paying for content and content strategy:

Content marketing firms: Content marketing firms are a popular option among startups and enterprise level companies alike because they allow you to outsource duties surrounding both content creation and strategy without having the risk inherent of

actually making a full time hire. If you like the content that the firm is creating, you're often able to negotiate rates and deliverables along the way. Inherent risk here, however, is that there's always a chance that you'll end up with overrun writers who don't actually have industry expertise in your area. Though a low risk option, content marketing firms should be properly vetted before being signed to take on some of your valuable budgeting resources.

Advertising firms: In many ways, advertising firms work a great deal similarly to content marketing firms, but (in our experience, at least) they tend to work at a higher level than the alternative. What comes as a limitation though, here, is that advertising firms are often a bit reticent to exist solely in a content creation role. They're often more interested in gaining product ownership and brand trust through being allowed to direct more of your company's actual marketing strategy. In your early stages, finding an advertising firm who's willing to take on content generation duties is one of the most surefire methods to produce meaningful marketing materials. Remember, it's key that you don't get caught in either side of the mental trap with this one: you don't need the services of an advertising firm, but you aren't automatically better off without one.

Freelance networks: Personally, we've found a fair amount of success using freelance networks as a big part of our content generation model. What we mean by that is that bringing on independent contractors has allowed us to receive meaningful marketing materials and deliverables without having to assume risk for the actual employees creating the content. While this is a wonderful option for the risk averse who want meaningful content,

it's contingent on someone either within your organization or close to it having a network of strong writers and content generators that they can leverage. Remember, just because you know someone writes, it doesn't mean they're a good writer. Many content generation professionals worth hiring are already in the employ of advertising or content marketing firms, and with good reason.

Full-time staff: While this option comes with incredible benefits, it's not one where you can afford (literally) to overlook the drawbacks. Bringing on full time staff, as you know, costs more than the salary. You need to pay for training, benefits, and the like, and that cost doesn't even begin to account for the expense you might see if, for whatever reason, you had to let that individual go. Consider hiring full time content generation staff only if you have the money to do so once all your other marketing objectives and expense are met.

No matter what content strategy personnel solution you opt to go with, the biggest point to remember is that you don't ever want to fully hand over your content strategy in its entirety. It's important that you and your staff, at every level, keep their fingers on the pulse of the content that your company is putting out into the world. This matters because the content that you choose to push externally is the simplest and largest piece contributing to your external image and how consumers, potential clients and other companies in your space perceive you.

Ultimately, the importance of this fact lay in the belief that your content should constantly reflect the image that your executive team wants the company to project. While we certainly don't

advocate putting dishonest content out into the ether, we do encourage the belief that content strategy is an opportunity to market tactically, and to control the perception of your company in the market. We could write an entire chapter on the role that content strategy plays in the larger ecosystem of tactical marketing, but we've boiled our beliefs down to a few key tips:

1) Quantity and Quality: There are two basic schools of thought to content marketing, or at least you'd think there were if you were to observe the market with no preconceived notions. Some companies produce and put out as much content as they possible can, playing for market share and, in turn, brand recognition. Other companies only publish marketing content when they feel that they've written or produced something of the highest quality, playing for thought leadership.

It's best, in the early years of your company, to take a position between the two. Put out enough content to gain market share, but don't post just anything, for the risk of losing intellectual respect within your industry.

2) Thought Leadership: We've used this term at multiple points throughout this chapter (and this text as a whole), but we may not have offered a concrete definition. Thought leadership means putting forth ideas that are credible, sound and reasonably well-articulated. As it pertains to your content marketing strategy, you need not try to achieve thought leadership solely through new, innovative, breathtaking ideas. Rather, put your focus on speaking intelligently, even if the idea you're expressing has already been said.

3) Advanced Creation: At the core of any effective content

marketing strategy is the editorial calendar. If you want to receive meaningful return on your content marketing efforts, the key is to be planning in advance. Whether or not you elect to bring on a new employee in a full-time content creation role, it's pivotal that at least one of your staff members is working to forecast content needs at least one quarter ahead of time.

4) Present Creation: While we can't underscore the importance of the editorial calendar enough, we also feel the need to note that it's sometimes worth deviating from. Just be sure that you don't become so caught up in the content calendar method that you miss the opportunity to create new, timely content due to unexpected industry news or events.

Try to create a model in which you're constantly capturing the moment. At the very least, you should be posting something small – a Snapchat Story, a blog, a Tweet – every day. Just to let your followers know that you're still relevant. One of the best ways to go about doing this is to set up automated postings everyday at a given time.

5) Constant Refinement/Editing Staff: Much like we mentioned is the case with the content calendar method, it's important that you place a great deal of emphasis on editing your content thoroughly, regardless of whether that's done by a full time content hire or existing staff. Nothing takes away from the impressiveness and potential return of a given piece of content more quickly than careless typos or inaccurate, non factual information. Remember, the content you produce is directly tied to the way other members of your industry and potential consumers will see you. Don't let them see you as someone who doesn't take

the time to at least check their spelling.

Of course, you don't necessarily need editing staff to better your content presence, and the reality for many companies will be that these positions simply aren't in the budget. If you aren't going to bring on editing staff, be sure that you at least make Quality Assurance a top priority. It's worth the additional few minutes of fact checking to ensure that your content is relevant, timely, and most importantly, accurate.

Expansion vs. Archiving: As you move further and further into your business, you'll find that your content grows, both from a creation standpoint and from a perspective of need. In one sense, this doesn't present an issue at all, because you'll likely have more to say than you do in your company's earliest stages. Expansion is key to the success of your tactical marketing efforts from a content perspective, but it's important to understand the place of archiving. You simply can't have content from the entire lifespan of your company sitting on your website, your social media accounts, or anywhere else for that matter. While there's no universal timeframe by which it is appropriate to do away with old content, it's worth noting that content should be archived or removed from your web presence as soon as it's outlived its useful means.

In short, don't clutter up your site with old content, but make sure that all content is tagged and searchable. Evergreen content – content that will always be relevant to your business and mission – should be accessible but not on your front page. Moment ready, relevant content is what belongs there.

II) SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Search engine optimization, or SEO, is the series of processes by which you can gain traction and traffic for your website through ensuring that your page is 'ranked' highly. Effectively SEO employees work to ensure that a user querying any common search engine (for the most part, we'll think of one that rhymes with 'shmoogle') using terms relating to your company would end up being directed to your company.

Our discussion of SEO is in now way intended to be thought of as a definitive guide to the process. It is both an art and a science and requires a fair amount of time and dedication to become proficient within.

With that said, we'd be remiss not to at least briefly address search engine optimization in speaking about tactical marketing. For better or for worse, your company's value as a marketing entity will be at least partially defined by its visibility from a search perspective.

The ultimate decision regarding whether to hire an SEO consultant or employee is one to be determined by your company's leadership and resources, but we're going to briefly outline a few basic SEO concepts that all members of any startup should be familiar with.

In no particular order, you should be familiar with at least the following:

1) Meta tags: In short form, meta tags are basically just that: 'tags' in the upper or header section of the code that makes up the design of your webpage. For the sake of keeping this simple, we can think of this code as usually being some form of HTML. These tags serve as basic descriptors of the content specific to the page

and to the site hosting the page, and search engines scrape these terms in order to determine what they're looking at, how it fits into the broader atmosphere of the web, and how that page should be ranked in a given user's search results.

2) Keyword density: Content that is strong, from a perspective of both tactical marketing and SEO, is that which is rich in keywords. It isn't enough to write content that's informative, because the same search engine processes that scrape for meta tags also scrape for keyword density. While it might seem impossible that someone would create a well produced piece of content without filling it with keywords, this actually happens all the time. One of the advantages of working with content marketing firms is that this is one thing that they tend to do very well.

3) Social media "likes":

This is a slightly more complex issue, and one that we could dedicate a great deal more time to than we're going to here. As a baseline understanding, don't believe that social media "likes" have any bearing on the way a given piece of content appears in terms of rankings in a search engine. Nonetheless, striving to receive lots of likes, shares and reactions can benefit your SEO presence in other ways. First and foremost, if you have a piece that is shared and reacted to heavily, it may rank higher in search results within the specific social media platform it's being searched for on. As a secondary, these statistics can be valuable performance metrics for your company when contextualized properly.

4) Inbound linking: One of the most overlooked aspects of SEO

when it comes to marketing is inbound linking. This is particularly true if your company operates in the ecommerce space or any other arena where web traffic is directly related to conversion rates. Inbound linking involves burying URLs to your website or sales page in other marketing content that you distribute through multiple channels. Again, the key here is to ensure that you aren't being heavy handed with your linking. People reading or experiencing the content that you produce should be able to feel that they're arriving at your conversion page naturally, even if that isn't necessarily the case.

5) Friendly URL's: One of the easiest ways to get your content down ranked in a hurry by any reputable search engine is to settle for URL's that are simply convoluted and ridiculous. There's no reason that URL's to any content on your webpage need to be 200 characters long. While you may not stand to gain a ton by making short, reasonable URL's, you do stand to lose a fair amount of potential ranking by not doing so.

III) SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT

We've spoken a lot in this chapter about how to go about your marketing tactically. What you may have come to realize is that there's not any one way to go about it. The result that is correct for you, in terms of both content ideation and generation as well as search engine optimization, will depend exclusively on the needs and positioning of your business. In fact, there's really only one area of tactical marketing that we believe should be applicable to all businesses at this point in time, and that's social media management.

The manner in which you go about your social media management has a great deal to do with how companies and consumers in your field and the business world at large perceive you. Think about it: some of the world's most advanced companies can't seem to figure out how to appear as social media natives, despite the dominance of the media form across the past ten years or so. This causes younger consumers, clients and potential collaborators to gain the impression that these companies are inflexible and resistant to development or change.

Inversely, some companies that could also be described as large, time-tested and successful have gone to great lengths to create a meaningful social media presence, and it changes the manner in which other individuals see and perceive them for the better; they appear as flexible, forward-thinking companies that are appealing both to the youth and to the older generations. After all, everyone's on social media.

Think of it this way: your social media is one of the lowest-hanging fruits when it comes to establishing a meaningful marketing presence, but you have to be tactical about it. In our opinion, every startup trying to make a name for themselves should have a strong presence on social media. This serves multiple purposes. There's the obvious one, in which designing a meaningful social media presence can help you create a fun, accessible identity for your brand at very minimal cost.

Beyond that, though, it's important to recognize that social media can also be a means by which you distribute information about your company. It can present inbound linking opportunities, like the ones we discussed in the SEO section of this chapter. It

can create pathways to display your content marketing materials, as we mentioned earlier in our discussion about content ideation and distribution.

We've found that one of the best ways to determine your social media management strategy is to think critically about the purpose of each platform available to you and how you can leverage it for your own good. Once you've done that, you can divide your attack into what we'll refer to as the old guard and the new school, two groups of social media platforms that you'll find can serve perfectly different, but equally meaningful purposes to your company. First though, ensure that you're familiar with, at the very least.

THE OLD GUARD, AND HOW TO USE IT:

Facebook: The gold standard of old school social media, Facebook rallied past countless other platforms to become what we think of when we think of social platforms. While it may not be your first inclination, having a strong tactical marketing presence on facebook is an absolute must.

Of course, the odds are decent that you're already doing this. Ensure that you have a group page on facebook for your company, that you post relevant content regularly, and that you include it as a primary distribution channel. You may want to err away from using facebook as a primary communication platform, however.

Twitter: Another classic. Twitter brought microblogging to the big leagues when it debuted, and it continues to be a relevant social media power for both personal and professional use. One

of the best ways to use Twitter tactically for your business is as an inbound linking apparatus.

Protip - never tweet out a link that you wouldn't use for SEO purposes. If you need to shorten something quickly, Bitly is likely the way to go.

LinkedIn: While we don't tend to think of LinkedIn as a marketing powerhouse, it's the way to go when it comes to marketing tactically for one specific goal: attracting human capital. At the end of the day, your business needs the best people possible in order to run effectively, so LinkedIn is a social media platform you can't overlook. Ensure that you have ample information regarding the positioning, goals and recruiting contacts for your company. When you post a new position, tweet it, blog about it, post about it on Facebook, anything, just make sure that it comes back to your LinkedIn.

THE NEW SCHOOL, AND HOW TO USE IT:

Instagram: One of the best ways to leverage Instagram in terms of tactical marketing is to ensure that you're doing what you can to build your brand through imagery. This is a fine line, you don't want to appear as a social media try-hard, but you do want to display your given target image through photographs when possible. If you're feeling particularly social media savvy, you may want to consider Instagram takeovers to document live events your company might put on. Think hackathons, and the like.

Snapchat: It's not just for sending risque pictures anymore. In fact, SnapChat can be one of the most valuable marketing tools in your social media arsenal. It doesn't just have to be about sending

pictures or posting stories, either. For example, if you're hosting an event or know that a large group of people will be in one area for something like a sporting event or public function, consider designing a branded Geofilter. From there, consumers can go ahead and do your marketing for you on a trickle down basis.

You might be surprised at how far ahead of the curve this can put you. Consider this: Snapchat will likely IPO next year (or at least, all signs seem to be pointing to that), but an incredible amount of Fortune 1000 companies aren't using it at all.

We've spoken a lot here about three primary methods by which you can make your marketing more tactical. As a reiteration, the primary takeaway here is that whatever you choose to expel your marketing energy upon, make sure that it's goal oriented and measurable. The ability to track your progress, engagement and interaction as a marketer is worth more than a flashy campaign could ever be.

As we move into Chapter 8, we'll focus on data driven operations through observing conversion rate optimization, calls to action, analytic tracking, heat mapping softwares and monitoring behavior over traffic. Keep a close eye on the parallels to be drawn between these ideas and what we've discussed here regarding tactical marketing. The two are inextricably intertwined, and your knowledge of one will only bolster your skill in another.