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How Has Digital Marketing Progressed Over the Last 8 Years?

Part I



Angela Parra 5 min read · Mar 31, 2025



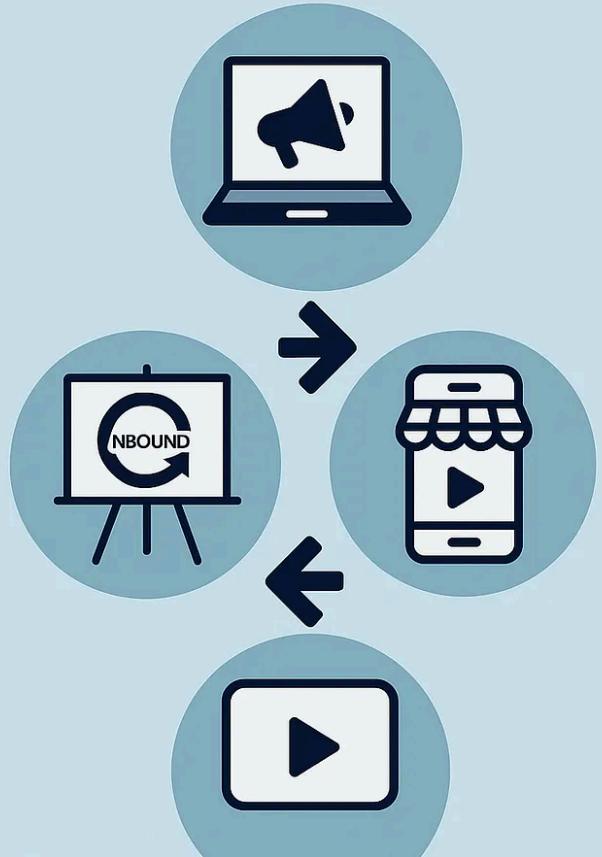
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HOW HAS DIGITAL MARKETING PROGRESSED OVER THE LAST 8 YEARS?

PART I



Introduction: A Personal Journey into Marketing

When I earned my bachelor's degree in International Business and later my master's in Business Management, I found myself at a crossroads. I wasn't entirely sure about my career path, so I applied for various job positions without an explicit specialization. Like many professionals, I faced uncertainty in choosing a niche.

After submitting over 100 applications across different industries and countries, I noticed a pattern: I kept advancing in marketing roles. My prior experience in marketing and design during an internship had shaped my career trajectory, even if I hadn't initially planned for it. In 2016, I landed a job in marketing and content for a startup in Brazil. During that time, the marketing landscape was undergoing significant changes — concepts like

inbound and outbound marketing dominated discussions in marketing teams. Let's explore the trends and transformations that marked this period.

Digital Marketing in 2016: A Turning Point

By 2016, digital marketing had become an essential component of business strategy, driven by increased internet accessibility and the rise of social media. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter became key tools for engaging consumers, prompting businesses to shift from traditional advertising to digital-first strategies. This transition expanded reach and introduced new ways to interact with consumers, reshaping how brands communicated their value (Dsouza & Panakaje, 2023).

The Rise of Inbound Marketing

By this time, inbound marketing had fully established itself as a dominant strategy for lead generation. According to HubSpot's State of Inbound 2016 report, 74% of marketers cited lead conversion as their top priority (HubSpot, 2016). Inbound strategies — content marketing, SEO, and social media engagement — gained traction due to their ability to attract and nurture leads at a 61%- 62% lower cost per lead than outbound methods (Invesp & Eloqua, 2016).

However, while inbound marketing was cost-effective, it came with challenges. Despite significant investment in ads, lead generation tools, and marketing funnels, conversion rates remained low — typically around 2%. This highlighted an ongoing frustration in marketing: generating leads was easier than closing deals.

Challenges in 2016: Content Saturation and Lead Generation Issues

Despite its effectiveness, inbound marketing faced a significant challenge: content saturation. Brands produced vast content, but consumers became overwhelmed and disengaged. BrightTALK (2015) found that 61% of B2B marketers cited a lack of resources (staff, funding, time) as their top obstacle to lead generation. Additionally, 49% of marketers struggled with acquiring enough leads (InsideSales, 2016). This meant that while inbound marketing was growing, businesses had to rethink engagement strategies to stand out.

2017–2018: The Video Marketing Boom and Multi-Channel Expansion

By 2017 and 2018, the digital marketing landscape evolved further. Instagram emerged as a dominant advertising platform, competing with Twitter and Facebook. This period saw a massive shift toward video content marketing, mobile-first strategies, and multi-channel engagement.

Video Marketing Becomes a Necessity

By 2018, video was no longer optional — it was essential. As part of our inbound marketing strategy, we integrated video content into lead generation funnels, and the results were clear: video increased engagement and conversions. Live video streaming also gained traction, though marketers were initially skeptical. However, combining pre-recorded and live video strategies proved to be an effective way to engage audiences dynamically.

Multi-Channel Marketing: A Game Changer

The shift toward multi-channel marketing was a direct response to evolving consumer behaviors. Previously, brands relied on a single-channel approach, focusing primarily on social media or email. However, as social

media usage diversified, marketers realized that engaging customers across multiple touchpoints was critical.

The multi-channel marketing concept originated from Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), a framework designed to create cohesive messaging across various platforms (Key & Czaplewski, 2017). Research from The Advertising Research Foundation revealed that by the mid-2010s, 60% of marketing campaigns still relied on only two or fewer marketing channels — a limitation that multi-channel marketing sought to overcome (Neff, 2016, as cited in Key & Czaplewski, 2017, p. 326).

At the time, I worked for an e-learning company that targeted teachers, institutions, and course creators. We adopted a multi-channel strategy to optimize engagement, leveraging Meta (Facebook & Instagram), LinkedIn, Google Ads, and webinars to provide deeper audience engagement.

Key Takeaways from Multi-Channel Strategy Implementation

Our findings revealed several key benefits of multi-channel marketing:

- ✓ Increased brand reach and engagement
- ✓ Higher ROI and conversion rates
- ✓ Better customer interactions across multiple platforms
- ✓ Improved message consistency and brand awareness



A yellow rectangular banner with a black border. Inside, there's a large white star with a black outline and a smaller one below it, both with motion trails. To the right is a dark blue rounded rectangle button with the white text "Upgrade now". On the left, the text "One subscription. Endless stories." is written in large, bold, black font. Below that, "Become a Medium member for unlimited reading." is in a smaller, regular black font.

However, we also identified challenges and areas for improvement:

- Ensuring message consistency across channels
- Optimizing resource allocation to prevent budget waste
- Using analytics tools to measure cross-channel performance accurately
- Personalizing content without causing message fatigue
- Selecting the right platforms based on audience behavior

2019: Integrating Online and Offline Marketing

By 2019, marketing strategies had expanded beyond digital-only tactics. As a digital marketing coordinator for an email marketing platform, I faced the challenge of integrating online and offline marketing efforts to maximize lead generation and sales outcomes.

According to Neslin (2022), mixing online and offline marketing is no longer optional but necessary. Consumers expect seamless interactions between digital and physical touchpoints, which enhances the overall customer experience (Neslin, 2022, p. 112).

Hybrid Marketing Approach: A Real-World Example

A simple yet effective hybrid marketing strategy involves:

- Attending offline events to capture leads.
- Following up with email marketing and digital content.
- Hosting webinars to nurture leads further.
- Converting engaged prospects into customers through personalized outreach.

The key to success in modern marketing is experimentation and measurement. At that time, we used Google Analytics, Excel, and Data Studio Dashboards to track performance and optimize campaigns. Data-driven decision-making proved invaluable in refining strategies.

Closing Thoughts & Future Outlook

This first part of my digital marketing journey reflects the industry's rapid evolution from 2016 to 2019. We witnessed the rise of inbound marketing, video content, multi-channel strategies, and online and offline marketing integration. However, the journey doesn't stop here. The pandemic, AI, and automation brought further disruptions, reshaping digital marketing in unprecedented ways. These topics will be explored in Part II.

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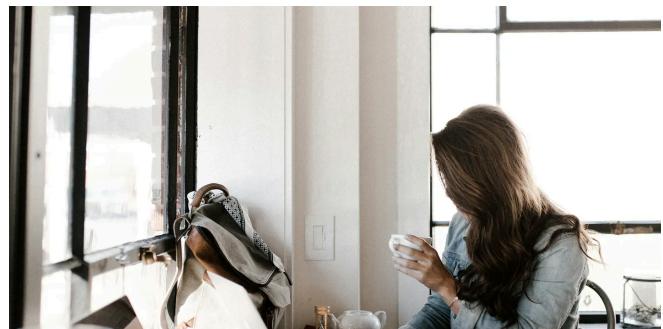
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