

Unit – I

Digital Marketing

Introduction to Digital Marketing, Traditional Vs Digital Marketing, Technology behind Digital Marketing, Characteristics of Digital Marketing, Digital Marketing Strategy, Understanding Digital Consumer.

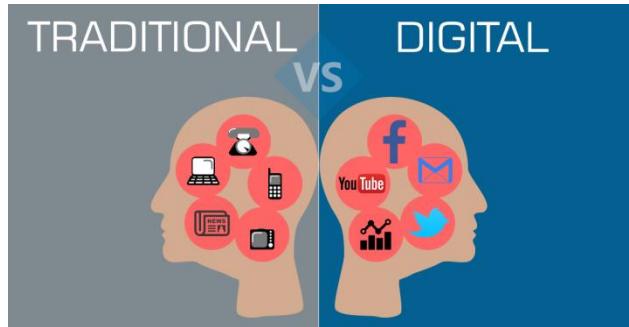
Introduction to Digital Marketing:

Today's time of Internet has opened the gateway of tremendous digital marketing opportunities for businesses. By utilizing different channels of digital marketing, businesses cannot just share their product and services online; additionally they can gain clients for their business, entice them and can convert them to boost their business profits. The speed and straightforwardness with which the digital media transmits data and support a business is astonishing.

The world is super-connected nowadays and all things considered, marketing and advertising are no more the same as they once were. This is particularly valid because of the ascent of online networking, which has changed how organizations speak with potential and existing customers. Essentially, it is an aggregate term, which is utilized where advertising and marketing meet web innovation and different types of online media platforms.

Traditional Marketing Vs Digital Marketing:

The debate continues as to whether digital marketing is overpowering and surpassing traditional marketing or not. Many think that for the most part, digital marketing has taken over and traditional marking barely exists, if at all. Recent occurrences such as the magazine giant, Newsweek switching to totally digital publications cause ripples throughout the marketing arena. Over the last year or so traditional marketing had fallen nearly 160% while in the same time frame expenses for digital marketing increased over 14%.



Traditional Marketing:

The traditional way of marketing lets businesses market their products or administrations on print media, radio and TV commercials, bill boards, business cards, and in numerous other comparable ways where Internet or web-based social networking sites were not utilized for promoting.

- However, traditional promoting approaches had constrained client reachability and extent of driving clients' purchasing conduct. In addition, traditional marketing methods were not quantifiable too.
- There are many facets of traditional marketing and examples might include tangible items such as business cards, print ads in newspapers or magazines. It can also include posters,

commercials on TV and radio, billboards and brochures. Traditional marketing is anything except digital means to brand your product or logo.

- Another overlooked means of traditional marketing is when people find a particular business through a referral or a network and eventually you build a rapport with them.
- Because of its longevity, people are accustomed to traditional marketing. Finding ads in magazines and newspapers, or reading billboards are still familiar activities and people still do them all the time.
- Most of the time, traditional marketing is reaching only a local audience even though it is not limited to one.
- There are some aspects where traditional marketing wins over the online advertising battle, which include Target Local Audience, Materials are for keeps, More personal and Simpler process.
- One of the primary disadvantages of traditional marketing is that the results are not easily measured, and in many cases cannot be measured at all.
- In most cases, traditional marketing is also more costly than digital marketing. And perhaps the biggest disadvantage today is that traditional marketing is static which means there is no way to interact with the audience. It's more like you are throwing information in front of people and hoping that they decide to take action.



Digital Marketing:

Digital Marketing can be understood as a well-targeted, conversion-oriented, quantifiable, and interactive marketing of products or services by utilizing digital innovation to achieve the customers, and transform them into clients in a sustainable fashion. The whole concept and functionalities of Digital Marketing are more competent, effective, result-oriented and measurable, which make it very different from traditional marketing.



- Digital or online marketing is the marketing mode of the global village. It is only obvious that the era of the internet will have its influence in every realm of life.
- The world of digital marketing continues to evolve and as long as technology continues to advance, digital marketing will as well.
- Examples of digital marketing include things like websites, social media mentions, YouTube videos, and banner ads. Specifically, digital marketing is similar to traditional advertising, but using digital devices.
- However, digital marketing is considered a form of inbound marketing and its goal is for people to find you. Businesses put content (or ads) out for individuals to find.
- People may conduct an organic online search, a paid search, find your business on a social network or by reading content that has been published online such as a blog or an article. The more they see you or your content, the more familiar they will become with your brand and they will eventually develop a trust and a rapport with you through this online presence.
- One benefit to using digital marketing is that the results are much easier to measure; and another is that a digital campaign can reach an infinite audience. It is also possible to tailor a digital campaign to reach a local audience but it can also be used on the web and reach the entire globe when appropriate.
- Digital marketing is also a very interactive means of reaching an audience since it makes use of social outlets. There can be plenty of direct contact between the audience and the business which means that the business can get some very valuable consumer feedback.
- Benefits of Digital Marketing over Traditional Marketing include reduced cost, real time result, brand Development, non-intrusive, higher exposure, higher engagement, Quicker publicity, Non interruptive, Good For All Stages Of Fields, Easy analytics and Strategy Refinement.
- One of the disadvantages to using digital media marketing strategies is that it can take some time to realize measurable success.

Differences between Traditional Marketing & Digital Marketing:

Traditional Marketing	Digital Marketing
1. Communication is unidirectional in traditional marketing, which means, an organization communicates about its services with its audiences.	1. Communication is bidirectional in Digital Marketing as businesses can communicate with customers and customers can ask queries or make suggestions to businesses as well.
2. Medium of communication in traditional marketing is generally phone calls, emails, and letters.	2. Medium of communication is more powerful and involves social media websites, chats, apps and Email.
3. Campaign in Traditional marketing takes more time as designing, preparing, and launching are involved.	3. Digital marketing campaigns can be developed quite rapidly and with digital tools, channelizing Digital Marketing campaigns is easier.
4. It is best for reaching local audience.	4. It is very effective for reaching global audiences.

5. It is almost impossible to measure the effectiveness of a traditional marketing campaign.	5. Digital Marketing lets you measure the effectiveness of a digital marketing campaign through analytics.
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Characteristics of Digital Marketing:

We are living in the digital age today. Outdated marketing won't help you get profits you desire for. Digital Marketing is a necessity today of almost every business. There is no way around it. The way you dedicated a lot of your time and effort to making your product, similarly it is important to invest in a complete digital strategy to launch and show your product or services to your targeted audience and continually improve your brand presence online.

Make sure that you evaluate all your options so you get aware of your digital marketing platforms and whether or not you're really boosting the potential of your marketing campaign. When done correctly, this can help you stand out from the crowd and get succeed.

Digital Marketing is a great way of increasing brand awareness, customer engagement and long-term loyalty and generating a short-term boost in sales, despite the fact that every digital marketing campaign is different in their own ways, the reality is that many of them are built on common basics and a few key elements. Successful Digital Marketing Campaign requires a lot of time following through analytics and data to find insights. But, as we have analyzed which characteristics successful campaigns share to help you.

1. Get a Quality Company Website:

What was a novelty a mere decade ago is a critical requirement today. A business website is a pseudo B2B portal, allowing businesses and customers from around the world to connect with you. A business website is similar to your Company brochure, available 24x7, and projects you as a professional outfit.

2. Social Media Presence:

The biggest achievement of this digital era has been the ease with which people have learnt to communicate- Social Media websites like Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, YouTube etc. are the latest methods to communicate across wide demographics of age, taste and culture. By actively promoting your company on these social media, you are getting the world to talk about you.

3. Blogging and Forums:

Here is a powerful axiom- 'Content is King'. Produce powerful, genuine and compelling content as part of your Company blog. Be a regular on relevant forums and discussion panels. Learn the art of connecting your business themes into the content that you produce. In time, your content will stand up to be the biggest promoter of your brand.

4. List your business on the three biggest listing services:

Register your business on 'Google Places'- this allows your business to feature on Google searches and be listed on Google Maps. Other business databases that you must be part of include 'Yahoo! Local' and Microsoft's 'Bing'. Joining these services is free; setting up an

account takes very limited time and the far reach of these services translates to free promotion for your business.

5. Email Marketing:

In recent times, bulk emailing isn't a very favored promotional concept. However, if done well, and with good intentions, email marketing could be a powerful tool in your Company's online promotional arsenal. Personalized emails speak directly to the target audience, helps you get an immediate response and can aid in the opening of a line of communication with your prospective customer base. It's free and fast promotion- with an impactful feedback.

6. A Dedicated Digital Marketing Expert:

If you aren't sure about pulling off a good promotional job individually, maybe it's a good idea to hire an innovative, enthusiastic Digital Marketing Consultant to handle your Company's online promotional strategy. This action will allow you to be on top of your promotional ideas while employing a professional to implement concepts that drive towards your expected results.

Technology behind Digital Marketing:

Developments in technology and the evolution of marketing are inextricably intertwined. Technology has underpinned major milestones in the history of marketing since its inception. The process tends to go something like this:

- New technology emerges and is initially the preserve of technologists and early adopters.
- The technology gains a firmer foothold in the market and starts to become more popular, putting it on the marketing radar.
- Innovative marketers jump in to explore ways they can harness the power of this emerging technology to connect with their target audience.
- The technology migrates to the mainstream and is adopted into standard marketing practice.

The printing press, radio, television and now the internet are all examples of major breakthroughs in technology that ultimately altered the relationships between marketers and consumers for ever, and did so on a global scale.

But, of course, marketing isn't about technology; it's about people: technology is only interesting, from a marketing perspective, when it connects people with other people more effectively. There are plenty of examples of technology through the ages having a significant impact on various markets – technology that may seem obscure, even irrelevant today. The mainstream adoption of digital technology – the internet, the software applications that run on it, and the devices that allow people to connect both to the network and to each other whenever, wherever and however they want to – promises to dwarf all that has come before it.

The first global communications network: ‘the highway of thought’

To understand the explosive growth of the internet we need to look back at how early communications technology evolved into the global network of interconnected computers that

today we call the internet. The story of electronic communication begins with the wired telegraph – a network that grew explosively to cover the globe, connected people across vast distances in a way that seemed almost magical, and changed the world for ever.

Early Networks:

The internet story really starts in 1957, with the USSR's launch of the Sputnik satellite. It signalled that the United States was falling behind the Soviet Union in the technology stakes, prompting the US government to invest heavily in science and technology. In 1958, the US Department of Defense set up the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), a specialist agency established with a specific remit: to make sure the United States stayed ahead of its Cold War nemesis in the accelerating technology race.

You've got mail E-mail, which is still often described as the internet's 'killer application', began life in the early 1960s as a facility that allowed users of mainframe computers to send simple text-based messages to another user's mailbox on the same computer. But it wasn't until the advent of ARPANET that anyone considered sending electronic mail from one user to another across a network.

In 1971 Ray Tomlinson, an engineer working on ARPANET, wrote the first program capable of sending mail from a user on one host computer to another user's mailbox on another host computer. As an identifier to distinguish network mail from local mail Tomlinson decided to append the host name of the user's computer to the user login name. To separate the two names he chose the @ symbol.

E-mail, one of the Internet's most widely used applications, and one of the most critical for internet marketers, began life as a programmer's afterthought. The ARPANET was a solution looking for a problem.

From ARPANET to Internet :

The term 'internet' was first used in 1974 by US computer scientist Vinton Cerf (commonly referred to as the 'father of the internet', and now a senior executive and internet evangelist with Google). Cerf was working with Robert Khan at DARPA on a way to standardize the way different host computers communicated both across the growing ARPANET and between the ARPANET and other emerging computer networks. The Transmission Control Program (TCP) network protocol they defined evolved to become the Transmission Control Program/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) protocol suite that's still used to pass packets of information backwards and forwards across the internet to this day.

In 1983 the ARPANET started using the TCP/IP protocol – a move that many consider to signal the true 'birth' of the internet as we know it. That year, too, the system of domain names (.com, .net, etc) was invented. By 1984 the number of 'nodes' on the still fledgling network passed 1,000 and began climbing rapidly. By 1989 there were more than 100,000 hosts connected to the internet, and the growth continued.

Making Connections – 'birth of the Web'

It was in 1989 that Tim Berners-Lee, a British developer working at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, proposed a system of information cross-referencing, access and retrieval across the rapidly growing internet based on 'hypertext' links. The concept of a hypertext information architecture was nothing new, and was already being used in individual programs running on individual computers around the world. The idea of linking documents stored on different computers across the rapidly growing internet, though, was

nothing short of revolutionary. The building blocks for the world wide web were already in place – but it was Tim Berners-Lee’s vision that brought them together.

The first web page on the internet was built at CERN, and went online on 6 August 1991. It contained information about the new world wide web, how to get a web browser and how to set up a web server. Over time it also became the first ever web directory, as Berners-Lee maintained a list of links to other websites on the page as they appeared.

The World Wide Web – A New Frontier

Up to this point, the internet had been the realm of technologists and scientists at research institutions. But the advent of the web changed the landscape, making online information accessible to a much broader audience. What happened next was explosive. Between 1991 and 1997 the web grew at an astonishing 850 per cent per annum, eclipsing all expectations. With more websites and more people joining the online party every day, it was only a matter of time before innovative tech-savvy marketers started to notice the web’s potential as an avenue for the marketing message.

In August 1995 there were 18,957 websites online; by August 1996 there were 342,081 ('Fifteen Years of the Web', Internet timeline, www.bbc.co.uk). It was an era that saw the birth of some of today's most well-known online brands: sites like Amazon, Yahoo!, eBay and, in September 1998, Google Inc.

Boom, Boom... Bang!

For a time it seemed as though the halcyon days of the late 1990s would continue forever and that the dot.com bubble was impervious to bursting. Fuelled by speculative investment and high-profile high-tech IPOs, the Nasdaq Composite stock index continued to rocket upwards. Each new dot.com success fuelled the fervour for technology stocks, blowing the bubble up a little more. On 10 March 2000 the Nasdaq index hit an intraday high of 5,132.52 before settling to an all-time closing high of 5,046 points.

Enough Technology – let's talk about people

One of the key things to remember is this: digital marketing isn't actually about technology at all; it's all about people. In that sense it's similar to traditional marketing: it's about people (marketers) connecting with other people (consumers) to build relationships and ultimately drive sales.

Technology merely affords you, the marketer, new and exciting platforms that allow you to connect with people in increasingly diverse and relevant ways. Digital marketing is not about understanding the underlying technology, but rather about understanding people, how they're using that technology, and how you can leverage that to engage with them more effectively. Yes, you have to learn to use the tools at your disposal – but understanding people is the real key to unlocking the potential of digital marketing.

A huge and growing market

Although internet companies suffered bruised finances and a tarnished public image in the wake of the dot.com crash, the internet itself never stopped growing, in terms both of the number of websites online and, crucially from a marketing perspective, of the number of people with internet access.

In March 2000, when the dot.com bubble burst, there were an estimated 304 million people in the world with internet access. By March 2003 that figure had doubled to 608 million, and in December 2005 the global online population passed 1 billion. As of December 2007 the figure sat at around 1.3 billion people. That's 20 per cent of the world's population – and climbing (Internet World Stats, www.internetworldstats.com). As global and local online populations have spiralled upwards, so too have the levels of broadband penetration, which

means that not only are there more people online but they're also online more often, for much longer periods of time and can do much more with that time.

All of this means the market penetration of digital channels is growing rapidly. As the potential audience grows, so too does the allure of digital marketing. Marketers around the world are sitting up and taking notice, and big name brands are starting to take the internet and other digital marketing channels seriously: loosening the purse strings and redistributing their advertising spend.

Introducing Consumer 2.0

Web 2.0 is not a revolution in technology; it's an evolution in the way people are using technology. It's about harnessing the distributed collaborative potential of the internet to connect and communicate with other like-minded people wherever they are: creating communities, and sharing knowledge, thoughts, ideas and dreams. If you've ever shared photos on Flickr, read and commented on a blog, looked for friends on Facebook or MySpace, watched a video clip on YouTube, tried to find your house on Google Maps, video-called friends or family abroad using Skype or looked up an article on Wikipedia, then you've used Web 2.0 technologies.

Analysts at Jupiter Research identified **seven key ways** in which the increasingly widespread adoption of **technology is influencing consumer behavior**:

- **Inter-connectivity:** Networked digital technology is enabling consumers to connect with each other more readily, be it through e-mail, instant messaging (IM), mobile messaging, or web-based social networking platforms such as Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn – or more likely a combination of all of these platforms. Consumers are interacting with like-minded people around the world, paying scant regard to trifling concerns like time zones or geography. Peer-to-peer interaction is reinforcing social networks and building new virtual communities.
- **Technology is leveling the information playing field:** With digital technology content can be created, published, accessed and consumed quickly and easily. As a result the scope of news, opinion and information available to consumers is broader and deeper than ever. Consumers can conduct their own unbiased research, comparing and contrasting products and services before they buy. Knowledge is power, and digital technology is shifting the balance of power in favour of the consumer.
- **Relevance filtering is increasing:** With such a glut of information available to them, digital consumers are, through necessity, learning to filter out items relevant to them and to ignore anything they perceive as irrelevant. Increasingly digital consumers look to have their information aggregated, categorized and delivered (whether through e-mail or RSS feeds). They use personalization features to block out irrelevant content and increasingly employ software solutions to exclude unsolicited commercial messages.
- **Niche aggregation is growing:** The abundance and diversity of online content allow consumers to participate in and indulge their specialist interests and hobbies. Aggregations of like-minded individuals congregate online; the homogeneous mass consumer population is fragmenting into ever-smaller niche groups, with increasingly individual requirements.

- **Micropublishing of personal content is blossoming:** Digital media's interactive and interconnected nature allows consumers to express themselves online. Publishing your own content costs little more than a bit of time and imagination, whether through discussion forums, message boards, feedback forms, voting platforms, personal photo galleries, or blogs. Users are posting their opinions online for all to see and are consulting the opinion of their online peers before making purchasing decisions. How often do you check an online review before booking a table at an unknown restaurant or a weekend break at a hotel, or even buying a new car?
- **Rise of the ‘prosumer’:** Online consumers are getting increasingly involved in the creation of the products and services they purchase, shifting the balance of power from producer to consumer. They're letting producers know what they want in no uncertain terms: the level of interaction between producer and consumer is unprecedented. Individuals are more involved in specifying, creating and customizing products to suit their requirements, and are able to shape and mould the experiences and communications they receive from producers. Traditional mass-production and mass-marketing concepts are rapidly becoming a thing of the past.
- **On demand; any time, any place, anywhere:** As digital technology becomes more ubiquitous in people's lives, the corresponding acceleration of business processes means that consumers can satisfy their needs more quickly, more easily and with fewer barriers. In the digital economy, trifling concerns like time, geography, location and physical store space are becoming irrelevant. It's a world of almost instant gratification, and the more consumers get of it the more they want it – now, now, now!

Digital Marketing Strategy:

Why you need a digital marketing strategy?

The simple answer: because without one you'll miss opportunities and lose business. Formulating a digital marketing strategy will help you to make informed decisions about your venture into the digital marketing arena and ensure that your efforts are focused on the elements of digital marketing that are most relevant to your business. It's a crucial first step towards understanding how the constantly evolving digital marketplace relates to you and how it affects the relationship between your business or brand and your customers and prospects.

- It doesn't matter what business you're in; it's a fairly safe bet that an increasing number of your target market rely on digital technology every day to research, evaluate and purchase the products and services they consume.
- Without a coherent strategy of engagement and retention through digital channels your business is at best missing a golden opportunity and at worst could be left behind, watching your competitors pull away across an ever-widening digital divide.
- Unlike conventional forms of mass media marketing, the internet is unique in its capacity to both broaden the scope of your marketing reach and narrow its focus at the same time.
- Using digital channels you can transcend traditional constraints like geography and time zones to connect with a much wider audience. At the same time, digital technology allows you to hone your marketing message with laser-like precision to target very specific niche segments within that wider market. Implemented effectively, it can be an incredibly powerful combination.

- It's often stated that the internet puts consumers in control as never before. But it's also important to remember that the internet also delivers an unprecedented suite of tools, techniques and tactics that allow marketers to reach out and engage with those same consumers. The marketing landscape has never been more challenging, dynamic and diverse.
- And therein lies the crux of our need for a cohesive digital marketing strategy. If you're going to harness the power of digital marketing to drive your online business to dizzying new heights, you need a thorough understanding of your market, how your customers are using digital technology, and how your business can best utilize that same technology to build enduring and mutually rewarding relationships with them.
- As digital channels continue to broaden the scope available to us as marketers, so they add to the potential complexity of any digital marketing campaign. Having a clearly defined strategy will help to keep you focused, ensure that your marketing activities are always aligned with your business goals and, crucially, ensure that you're targeting the right people.

Defining your Digital Marketing Strategy:

Once you've decided that you do, in fact, need to pursue some form of digital marketing, the next step is actually to sit down and define your strategy. Unfortunately there is no 'one size fits all' strategic panacea here. We don't have a magic recipe to ensure your digital marketing success, and neither does anybody else. Basically every business needs to 'bake' its own unique strategy based on its own particular set of circumstances. While the available ingredients are the same, the resulting strategies can be radically different.

If you sell apples to local grocers by the truckload, your strategy will bear little resemblance to that of a company selling downloadable e-books and reports on financial trading, which will in turn be very different to the strategy adopted by a sports clothing manufacturer who wants to cut out the retailer and sell directly to consumers over the web. Different products, different markets, different needs – different solutions. What it ultimately boils down to is this: the best people to define your digital marketing strategy, curiously enough, are the people who best know your business.

Laying strong digital foundations:

The good news is that you've almost certainly already started the process of defining your digital marketing strategy. Probably been thinking about digital marketing in the context of your business, about what your competitors are doing online and why, about how your customers and prospects are integrating digital technology into their lives, and about how you can best exploit these new and exciting digital channels to foster longer, more productive relationships with them. These are the components that will form the foundation of your digital marketing strategy:

- **Know your business:** Is your business ready to embrace digital marketing? Are your products or services suited to online promotion? Do you have the right technology, skills and infrastructure in place? How will digital marketing fit into your existing business processes, do those processes need to change, and are you and your staff ready to accommodate those changes?
- **Know the competition:** Who are your main competitors in the digital marketplace? Are they the same as your offline competitors? What are they doing right (emulate them),

what are they doing wrong (learn from them), what aren't they doing at all (is there an opportunity there for you?) and how can you differentiate your online offering from theirs? Remember, competition in the digital world can come from just around the corner or from right around the globe. The same technologies that allow you to reach out to a broader geographical market also allow others to reach into your local market. When you venture online you're entering a global game, so don't limit your analysis to local competition.

- **Know your customers:** Who are your customers and what do they want from you? Are you going to be servicing the same customer base online, or are you fishing for business from a completely new demographic? How do the customers you're targeting use digital technology, and how can you harness that knowledge to engage in a productive and ongoing relationship with them?
- **Know what you want to achieve:** If you don't know where you're going, there's a pretty fair chance you'll never get there. What do you want to get out of digital marketing? Setting clear, measurable and achievable goals is a key part of your digital marketing strategy. Are you looking to generate online sales, create a source of targeted sales leads, improve your brand awareness among online communities, all of the above or perhaps something completely different? Your goals are the yardsticks against which you can measure the progress of your digital marketing campaigns.
- **Know how you're doing:** The beauty of digital marketing is that, compared to many forms of advertising, results are so much more measurable. You can track everything that happens online and compare your progress against predefined goals and key performance indicators (KPIs). How is your digital campaign progressing? Are certain digital channels delivering more traffic than others? Why is that? What about conversion rates? How much of that increased traffic results in tangible value to your business? Measure, tweak, refine, re-measure. Digital marketing is an ongoing and iterative process.

The process of formally defining your digital marketing strategy forces you to sit down and analyze the market in which you're operating with a critical eye, and to really think about the different components of your business and how digital marketing can help you to achieve your business goals. Don't get down in the technical details – remember, digital marketing is about people communicating with other people; the technology is just the bit in the middle that helps it to happen. Your strategy should provide you with a high-level framework – a bird's-eye view of the digital marketing landscape with your business centre stage; the details will come later.

Understanding Digital Consumers:

There is a notion that pervades marketing circles today, a notion of mysterious ethereal creatures who exist in a hyper-connected, multifaceted cyber-world of their own. They are an enigma: they speak a different language, communicate in ways we don't understand, and they're turning the world of marketing on its head. These are the ephemeral, wraithlike 'digital consumers', who slip effortlessly through the marketer's grasp. Digital consumers are different, we're told – but are they really?

The Digital Consumer revealed

The first thing to realize about digital consumers is that there's basically no such thing. The customers and prospects you encounter online are the very same people who walk into your store every day, call you on the telephone, or order something from your mail-order catalogue. There's nothing dark, sinister or mysterious about them. They're people – like everybody else. 'There is no great mystery about how [digital consumers] think and what they want', maintains interactive marketing expert.

These consumers are doing exactly what people have been doing for thousands of years – communicating with each other. The fact that technology is enabling them to communicate with each other faster, over distance, over mobiles and in 3D worlds is being perceived as something dangerous, unique and extraordinary, something that needs to be controlled and pinned down. People talk to each other – they always have.

Making the Web their own

Consumers, whatever their 'flavour', don't care about the way marketers define what they do. Concepts like above the line, through the line, below the line, digital, traditional, experiential, linear, analogue, mobile, direct, indirect or any other 'box' we care to slip our marketing endeavours into are completely meaningless to them.

All consumers care about is the experience – how the marketing available to them can enhance the experience and help them to make more informed decisions. People are the single most important element in any form of marketing. That's just as true in the digital space as it is in any other sphere of the discipline. As a marketer you need to understand people and their behaviour – and here's where the notion of the digital consumer does carry some weight, because consumer behaviour is changing, and it's changing because of the pervasive, evocative and enabling nature of digital technology.

Digital marketing allows us to build uniquely tailored ongoing relationships with individual customers. Marketing in the digital age has been transformed into a process of dialogue, as much about listening as it is about telling.

I don't know you and you don't know me

Perceived anonymity is another online trait that can have a profound effect on consumer behaviour. It liberates consumers from the social shackles that bind them in the real world; online they are free to do and say as they please with scant regard for the social propriety that holds sway in 'real life'. In a bricks-and-mortar store shoppers will wait patiently for service, and will often endure a less-than-flawless shopping experience to get what they want. Online they won't; they demand instant gratification and a flawless customer experience. You have to deliver, first time, every time. If you fail to engage, retain and fulfill their expectations on demand, they're gone, vanishing into the ether of cyberspace as quickly as they came, the only trace a fleeting, solitary record left on your web server's log file.

Key traits of the Online Consumer

Well, there's something about the immediacy and anonymity of the digital experience that has a similar effect on people. It's always risky to generalize and make assumptions about people – especially in a field as dynamic and fast moving as this one. The only real way to know your market intimately is to conduct original research within your particular target group. That said, a lot of research work has been done (and continues to be done) on the behavioural traits of online

consumers, and a broad consensus has emerged around the key characteristics that epitomize digital consumers:

Digital consumers are increasingly comfortable with the medium: Many online consumers have been using the internet for several years at this stage – and, while the user demographic is still skewed in favour of younger people, even older users are becoming increasingly web savvy. As people become more comfortable with the medium they use it more efficiently and effectively, which means they don't hang around for long: your content needs to deliver what they want, and it needs to deliver quickly.

They want it all, and they want it now: In the digital world, where everything happens at a million miles per hour, consumers have grown accustomed to getting their information on demand from multiple sources simultaneously. Their time is a precious commodity, so they want information in a format that they can scan for relevance before investing time in examining the detail. Designers and marketers need to accommodate this desire for ‘scannability’ and instant gratification when constructing their online offering.

They're in control: The web is no passive medium. Users are in control – in the Web 2.0 world more than ever before. Fail to grasp that simple fact and your target audience won't just fail to engage with you, but they will actively disengage. We need to tailor our marketing to be user-centric, elective or permission based, and offer a real value proposition to the consumer to garner positive results.

They're fickle: The transparency and immediacy of the internet don't eradicate the concept of brand or vendor loyalty, but they do erode it. Building trust in a brand is still a crucial element of digital marketing, but today's consumers have the power to compare and contrast competing brands literally at their fingertips. How does your value proposition stack up against the competition around the country and across the globe? Your brand identity may be valuable, but if your *overall* value proposition doesn't stack up you'll lose out.

They're vocal: Online consumers talk to each other – a lot. Through peer reviews, blogs, social networks, online forums and communities they're telling each other about their positive online experiences – and the negative ones. From a marketing perspective this is something of a double-edged sword – harness the positive aspects and you have incredible viral potential to propagate your message; get it wrong, and you could just as easily be on the receiving end of an uncomfortable online backlash.

Using influencers to help spread the word

There is one particular category of users online that warrants a special mention when it comes to defining your digital marketing strategy. Dubbed ‘influencers’, these early adopters are the online opinion leaders. Through blogs, podcasts, forums and social networks they harness the power of the web to extol the virtues of products and brands that they like, and equally to denigrate those they find unsatisfactory.

Why are influencers important to you as a marketer? Because they have the virtual ear of the online masses. People read and listen to what they have to say; they value their opinion and trust their judgment. These online influencers have already won the pivotal battle for the hearts

and minds of online consumers. Engage positively with them, and you essentially recruit a team of powerful online advocates who can have a potentially massive impact on a much wider group of consumers.

This is the online equivalent of ‘word-of-mouth’ marketing, on steroids. Of course, give them a negative experience and, well, you can guess the rest. But how exactly will you recognize these online influencers? A December 2006 report by DoubleClick (‘Influencing the Influencers: how online advertising and media impact word of mouth’) defined influencers as people who ‘strongly agreed’ to three or more of the following statements:

- They consider themselves expert in certain areas (such as their work, hobbies or interests).
- People often ask their advice about purchases in areas where they are knowledgeable.
- When they encounter a new product they like they tend to recommend it to friends.
- They have a large social circle and often refer people to one another based on their interests.
- They are active online, using blogs, social networking sites, e-mail, discussion groups, online community boards, etc to connect with their peers.

Identifying the influencers within your market sector, analyzing their behavior and tailoring part of your digital campaign to target this small but influential group can result in disproportionate knock-on benefits. Don’t neglect your core market, of course – but certainly consider targeting influencers as part of your overall digital marketing strategy.