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# 9

**Things You Should  
Do Before Hiring a  
Digital Marketing Agency**













Running a business is difficult and time consuming. Not only are you busy with finances, employees, and actually doing the work or providing services, you also have to think about how to market your business to continue to grow.

Whether you're a small business, large business, or simply trying to develop your own personal brand, hiring a digital marketing agency may be on your to-do list. If it's not, it should be. While marketing of all forms is important in building your brand, generating new customers, and retaining existing ones, digital marketing is especially key in the ever-changing world of technology.

### What can a digital marketing agency do?

A digital marketing agency focuses on marketing your business, developing your brand, and generating leads, specifically through digital tactics, including, but not limited to:

-  Search engine optimization (SEO)
-  Search engine marketing (SEM)
-  Social media marketing
-  Online reputation management
-  Digital ads (such as Google Adwords)
-  Email marketing
-  Content marketing
-  Website presence
-  Affiliate marketing
-  Mobile marketing

### Do I need to hire a digital marketing agency?

A digital marketing agency can help market your business, products, or services online, in the right place, to the right people, at the right time. By using strategic digital tactics, digital marketing professionals can help you attract and engage with your target audience and existing customers in ways they want to interact with you using forms of messaging that will resonate with them.

Most agencies will start by evaluating your website and web traffic, existing social media, blog, email, or other digital tactics, in order to determine the best online platforms for you to invest in and advertise through. They can provide you with recommendations for advertising and marketing in ways that will be more efficient and effective for your business, as well as potentially save you money. They can even help you execute these tactics.

The digital space, including digital marketing, is an ever-changing environment. It can be difficult, time consuming, and expensive, to attempt to handle all of the appropriate digital marketing tactics on your own. Sometimes, the workload can be more than your in-house marketing team can handle. Hiring a digital marketing agency can free up your time and money and ensure you're using the appropriate and most effective marketing to reach your consumers.

## How to Choose a Digital Marketing Agency

Once you decide you could benefit from hiring a digital marketing agency, the next step is selecting one. There are a lot of options out there; how do you know which agency is right for you and your business? Here are a few tips to help you decide:



**Assess your specific needs.** What do you want to achieve through your digital marketing efforts? What is the role you want a digital agency to play? Having a vision for both you and the agency can help make a smooth partnership. It's important to be able to identify specific reasons you need help or areas that need attention. For example, perhaps you're introducing a new product, or you simply want to grow your brand's reach and positive sentiment. A digital marketing agency can help you achieve your goals.



**Determine your budget.** If you don't have money in your budget to hire a digital agency and fund digital marketing efforts, now may not be the right time to hire. Some agencies offer a free consultation, so if you aren't sure what kind of budget you may need, take advantage of these and ask the agency what they recommend. Be sure to ask how the agency bills, and about their service fees.

Most agencies can work with whatever marketing budget you have available. While some budgets may be larger than others for tactics like social media and SEM, a good agency will be able to provide recommendations for various budgets.



**Understand the time commitment.** Do you have the availability in your schedule to invest in a partnership? Communication and collaboration are key to a successful relationship, so if you don't have time to have regular meetings or consultations with the agency, you may run into challenges down the road. Particularly at the beginning of the relationship, you must be committed to working together to develop open channels of communication.



**Identify existing skills.** If you have an in-house marketing team already, they likely have some skills you can either keep in-house, or collaborate with an agency towards developing. If you have a killer content writer, you probably don't need the agency to generate content for your blog. Or, if you have a social media team, you may not need assistance in that area. On the other hand, you may have one content writer who can create content, but needs help keeping up with demand, that's where an agency can help fill the gaps.



**Do your homework.** Research digital marketing agencies. Spend some time on their websites and social media channels. Read reviews from other customers or news articles published about them.


Also, if your industry is particular or has a specific niche, look for an agency that has experience in that or a similar niche. For example, if you are operating a dental office, look for an agency that has worked with professionals. While many digital marketing strategies and tactics can work regardless of industry, what works for one business may not work for another.



**Pay attention to style.** Not all digital marketing agencies are created equal. Pay attention to how the agency markets itself. Does it have a nice, easy-to-navigate website? What type of content do they post on social media? You want to make sure the agency fits with the culture of your company and how you prefer to do business. If

you have a laid back, casual environment and light brand, you may not mesh as well with a stricter, professional, corporate agency.

Don't disregard your instincts when you talk with or meet the agency. Choose one that not only suits your style, but with whom you enjoy working.

 **Don't rush.** Throwing money at a digital marketing agency and letting them take control doesn't mean you will have an effective campaign or see return on investment. The partnership should be strategic and build your business, and should be viewed as a long-term

relationship. While choosing the right agency may take some time, it will prevent you from wasting time or money on the wrong agency.



**Look at the value, not the price.** While cost can be a consideration, don't go with the cheapest option. In most cases, you get what you pay for. If you partner with the cheapest agency, you may not get the best value or highest level of work or effort. Understand what your money is being used for, and keep an open mind when it comes to making a final decision.

# 9 Things You Should Do Before Hiring a Digital Marketing Agency

Once you make the decision to hire a digital marketing agency to help you with your marketing and branding, there are a few actions you should take. These steps can help save you time and money, as well as ensure your chosen agency has everything they need to help you succeed.

- 1** Update your business plan.
- 2** Define your top competitors.
- 3** Develop customer personas.
- 4** Figure out what works in your industry.
- 5** Gain control of your properties.
- 6** Fix up the About Us section of your website.
- 7** Educate yourself.
- 8** Identify search phrases through which you want your business to be found.
- 9** Determine your level of involvement.

# 1

## Update Your Business Plan



If you haven't already, create a mission and elevator pitch for your business. You should be able to explain what your business is and why you're different in just a few sentences. Having a succinct and precise pitch will help the digital marketing agency quickly understand your business and brand.

Having an up-to-date business plan to share with your digital marketing agency will help you both identify goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) for your marketing campaigns. By setting goals and KPIs prior to campaigns, you can easily track and see how the campaign is performing and make optimizations to ensure the best performance.

For example, do you want to increase your business revenue by 20% in the next two years? What kind of return on investment (ROI) do you need from your digital marketing campaigns? Understanding these goals will help the agency set realistic expectations, and also know which tactics and how much budget is needed to meet the expectations.

# 2

## Define Your Top Competitors



Part of developing a business plan should include an analysis on your top competitors.

First, identify your biggest competitors. Be sure to look on both a large and small scale. For example, if you're a boutique pet supply store, you should be aware of competitors like PetSmart and Pet Supplies Plus, as well as the small pet supply and grooming business out of the neighbor's home down the street.

Also, identify both direct and indirect competition. **Direct competition** refers to businesses who sell or market the same products you do, while **indirect competition**

refers to businesses that don't sell the same products, but are in competition with your business digitally. For example, they may write the same type of content as you and may be competing for the same SEM keywords even if their product isn't exactly the same.

While your digital marketing agency will identify your online competitors through research, they won't know your industry the way you do. Have a list of 5-10 competitors ready for them to help kick off their research and identify which digital marketing tactics you should take part in.

If you aren't sure how to find your competitors, there are a few techniques to help you identify them.

- Take a look at the market for your product or service and make a note of other companies or businesses who are selling the same product, or a similar product that would compete with yours.
- Once a customer purchases from you, ask them which other businesses they were evaluating. You can even ask prospective customers which other businesses they are currently considering.

- Evaluate online communities or social media forums. People often solicit advice or recommendations on social media platforms or community forums. Search for those asking about products your business provides, and study the comments to find which companies or products others are recommending.
- Complete keyword research. You can do this through [Google](#), or other free (or paid) platforms. Learn what terms people are searching for related to your product or service, and see what other businesses appear as search results.

## 3 Develop Personas



Have you identified your ideal customers? Do you know their age range, interests, income, education, buying habits, etc.? Knowing this information will help your agency fully understand your target audience, which in turn will help them develop the best and most effective marketing for your business.

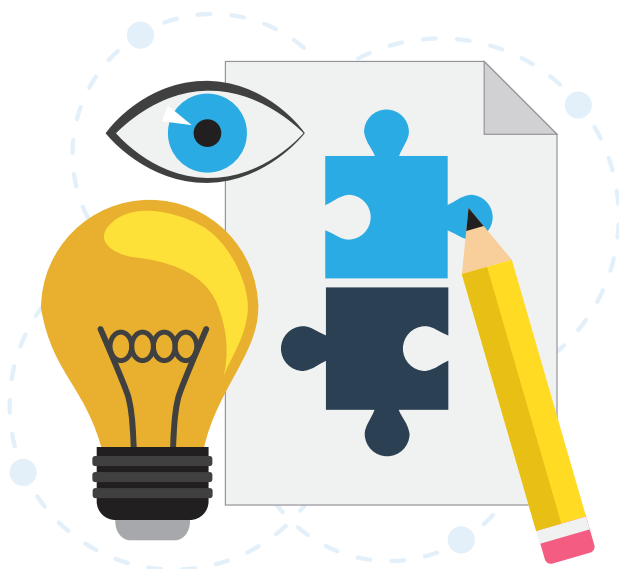
For example, if you're a boutique home goods store, your target audience is likely women ages 35-55, with a household income more than \$100,000. If you're a hardware store, your audience may be men ages 30-50, who are interested in home improvement or

construction. Audience personas can be as detailed or generic as you want them to be, but the more detailed they are, the more targeted your marketing can be.

If you aren't sure who your ideal customer is, one way you can find out is by conducting a survey. You can survey your existing customers via [Survey Monkey](#) to understand the types of people and customers your business is already attracting. You can also post a poll on social media to understand attributes of customers who are interested in your products or brand.

# 4

## Figure Out What Works in Your Industry



While it's the responsibility of your digital marketing agency to have some idea about what types of marketing and messaging work in your industry, you know your industry and business best. Not only should you have the most in-depth understanding of your products and services, you should also know how to communicate effectively with your customers.

You can also look at what competitors are doing in the market and determine what you like and don't like. For example, perhaps one of your competitors has a really great, robust blog, and you'd like to have something similar. Maybe one has an engaging Facebook page that consistently gets a lot of comments and shares, and you'd like to model your page after that. Alternately, perhaps a competitor has a Twitter account but doesn't have many followers or engagements, so you don't think Twitter is the best platform for you.

Doing this preliminary research and understanding at a high-level what type of marketing and communication works in your industry gives you an answer when your agency asks "what aspects of digital marketing do you want us to focus on?"

# 5

## Gain Control of Your Properties



Gather up all of your logins and make sure you control all properties. By doing this first, you can save time and money. Examples of properties you may have include:

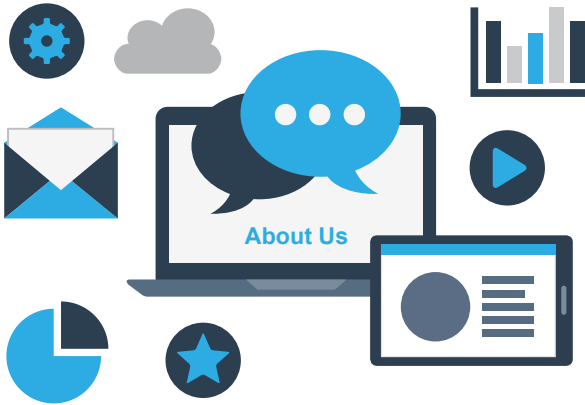
- Website
- Google Analytics
- Google Ads
- Dynamic Call Tracking
- YouTube Channel
- Social Media Accounts
- Email Marketing Platform

Be sure to have the account information, logins, and passwords for each account readily available for your agency.

It may also be helpful to have all of your other assets such as videos, images, content, or other marketing materials filed in one place. Having access to all of these will allow your marketing agency to use them without having to develop new ones, and will also help them keep your branding consistent.

# 6

## Fix Up the About Us Section of Your Website



Reworking the About Us page on your website can help you take a close look at your business and brand. What makes your company different? What is your value proposition? If you don't have one, now is a great time to define it. Understand your ideal customers and clients. Why did you start the business? What's important to you? This exercise will help you enter your digital marketing engagement with a fresh, clear understanding of your business and how you want to present it to others.

### What makes a good About Us page?

Your About Us page is one of the most important pages on your website. The information you put here can make or break a sale or turn a prospect into a customer. Here are a few tips for making your About Us page stand out among competitors.

- **Tell a story.** You started your business for a reason. Perhaps you have a great story about how your product or service was built to change lives or make life easier. Maybe something happened in your personal life that encouraged you to start the business and ignited your passion for the product or service. Telling a good story humanizes your brand, gives meaning to your business, and provides a way for customers to connect with you.
- **Be human.** You don't have to be formal and stuffy to be credible and trustworthy. Don't make your About Us page sound like a robot wrote it. By injecting some human perspective, while also being professional, you can make your company stand out as one that really cares about customers. Don't be afraid to be personal and showcase your business's brand and personality, but do remain professional.
- **Avoid industry jargon.** Using too much industry terminology can confuse or turn customers off of your business. Your website visitor should be able to easily identify who you are and what you do, and how or why they need what you're offering.
- **Show your value.** Don't just tell your website visitors what you do, but also why you do it. Express your value as a business and the reasons your product or service is better than the rest.
- **Drive with data.** Depending on your industry, you should know whether or not your customers will be persuaded with data. This can be especially helpful if you're selling a service. Proving your value through data can help show prospects how and why what you provide is necessary, and why you're better than competitors.
- **Know your audience.** Even if you have a big brand that's well known to your audience, make it clear you know them as well. By showcasing what's important to you, you prove you know what's important to them and why you belong in their lives.



# 7

## Educate Yourself



A good digital marketing agency will educate and communicate with you every step of the way about what they are doing and why. Still, it's best to have a foundation of digital marketing knowledge prior to working with them.

A quick search on the internet can provide videos, webinars, e-books, articles, and guides on digital marketing tactics, including:

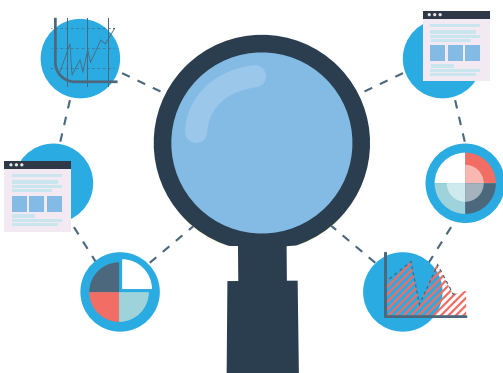
- [Content marketing](#)
- [Social media management](#)
- [Search engine marketing](#)
- [Paid digital advertising](#)

While your agency doesn't expect you to be a digital marketing expert - after all, you hired them because they're the experts - it can be helpful to both of you if you have some knowledge of your digital marketing options.

However, it's important to keep an open mind and be receptive to the agency's recommendations. For example, you may want a Pinterest account because you like using it personally, but that doesn't mean it's the best option for your business and ROI.

# 8

## Identify Phases for Which You'd Like Your Business to be Found



Search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) are important elements of digital marketing. **SEO** is the process of increasing the quality and quantity of website traffic by increasing the visibility of a website or webpage to search engines, like Google. **SEM** promotes your website through the purchasing of ad space on search engines.

Your digital marketing agency will benefit from some guidance regarding the search phrases through which you'd like to be found online. Spend some time talking with your sales reps and marketing team to determine which words and/or phrases current customers

or clients use to find your business, products, or services. Since you know your customers best, also consider terminology they may use to find you that may not be obvious to your agency.

You can also do this through keyword and phrase research, either through Google ([Google Keyword Planner](#)), or other platforms, such as [Keywordtool.io](#).

Put together 20-30 phrases for your agency, preferable two or more words long. This will give your agency a great starting point for marketing your business online.

# 9

## Determine Your Level of Involvement



Are you a one-person shop that will be dealing directly with the digital marketing agency? Or are you a marketing manager for a larger organization? You should be able to quickly establish your involvement and the kind of role both you and the agency should take on.

In most instances, a partnership, where both sides work together towards a single goal, is best.

Understanding this will help establish a good relationship with the agency. Ideally, you'll want one or two representatives from your organization to keep in touch with the agency, because in some cases, more involvement can mean more confusion and muddled objectives.

Also, be clear with the agency how much you want to be involved from both a strategic and tactical level. Do you trust the agency to develop the strategy and present a recommendation, or would you prefer to be involved every step of the way? Do you want to approve all social copy before it's posted? Or do you want the agency to develop the copy and run the page with less supervision? Perhaps you have a specific way you want the digital ads to run? Be sure to be clear about expectations up front so the agency knows how to develop the contract and statement of work, and execute the tactics.

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## Bottom Line

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Hiring a digital marketing agency can be extremely beneficial when it comes to marketing your products or services efficiently and effectively. Hiring an agency can help save you time, money, and effort by allowing experts to do the work for you and maximize your ROI.

If you aren't sure if a digital marketing agency is right for your business, ask. Read their websites, do some research online, and take advantage of any free consultations the agency provides to get to know the people and understand what they can offer your business.

If you decide to hire an agency, work your way through the steps listed above to ensure a smooth start and a positive working relationship.

