

Digital Advertising Planning & Budgeting: Everything You Need To Know To Get Started

Advertising is an essential part of any business that can help you reach new customers and grow your business. However, if you don't plan your ad campaigns correctly, costs can spiral out of control and results will be lackluster.

So, where should you get started, and how can you ensure your budget won't be blown on bad choices?

That's where this guide comes in. We've decoded the murky world of digital advertising into a series of concrete steps anyone can take to take control of their digital campaigns, reach new customers, and grow their business (while keeping costs in check).

YOUR DIGITAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN IN SIXTY SECONDS

Successful digital campaigns follow a repeatable pattern. This pattern holds true no matter what you are selling or whom you are selling it to.

1. Establish Goals

What are you hoping to achieve? Your marketing goals should reflect the needs of your business and will inform other campaign-level decisions.

2. Select Your Customer Avatar

A well-defined customer avatar helps you craft a compelling message that connects with your target market.

3. Keyword and Competitor Research

Gather keywords that reflect the search intent of your target market and see what your competitors are doing in the same space.

4. Select Your Channels and Budgets

Not all marketing channels are appropriate for all goals and different digital marketing channels have different budgeting considerations.

5. Design Creatives and Content Assets

Creatives are the visual elements of ads and content assets represent the content you will be sharing with your audience.

6. Gather Results from Campaign Pilots

Start small and gather data with a reduced budget to get an idea of what works and what doesn't without risking your entire budget.

7. Collect Performance Data

Continuously collect and track performance data. Focus on key performance indicators that correspond to business, marketing, and campaign goals.

8. Optimize

Armed with performance data, put it into action and optimize for better results.

Let's dive in.

ESTABLISH GOALS

Marketing is a business activity, and all business activities need a “why.” The first step to any marketing campaign—digital or otherwise—starts with a goalsetting phase. For many new marketers, attempting to set a goal can result in a “paralysis by analysis” situation.

Resist the urge to try to do accomplish every possible goal with every campaign. The most effective campaigns pick a single goal and optimize to get really good at converting for that one thing. Campaigns that try to accomplish too many things at once will see lackluster performance.

Specialization is the name of the game.

Some common marketing goals include growing your email list, finding more leads, setting more appointments, increasing sales, or raising awareness about a new product.

Once you know what you want to accomplish, use the SMART framework to make it a firm goal. SMART goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound.



This campaign will attempt to double the number of inbound leads we receive through our website through the end of the year.

SELECT YOUR CUSTOMER AVATAR

If you already have a robust customer avatar you're in a good position to move forward. If you haven't taken this step yet, you need to backtrack and take some time to clearly define exactly who your ideal customer is.

If you have multiple avatars or buyer personas, select the one that is most relevant to your marketing goals. It's a good practice to segment your customers based on distinct characteristics such as demographics, purchasing history, brand familiarity and more.

Detailing exactly who you are going to be speaking means your marketing messages resonate with the problem they are facing and ensures that they are in the best possible place to be receptive to the solution your product or service provides.

KEYWORD AND MARKET RESEARCH

With a goal and a target customer defined you can narrow down relevant keywords for your campaign. If you have a record of campaigns you have completed in the past, that data can help you sift through what keywords have worked for you in the past and which ones might be duds.

If this is your first campaign, you won't have a lot of data to go on. That's okay. Google's [Keyword Planner](#) is an excellent resource to get started. Ad platforms themselves will often suggest keywords as well and be sure to check out other research tools like [Google Trends](#), [Answer the Public](#), or use paid tools like [SEMRush](#).



Whether this campaign is your first or you have the experience of several completed campaigns under your belt, a history of campaign performance along with keywords used, their cost, and their general performance is a really helpful resource. Not only is a record of what worked and what didn't instructive for future campaigns but a general keyword list that gets updated on a campaign-by-campaign basis simplifies this part of the campaign creation process.

Even if you're planning on running your campaign on channels that don't place a high premium on keywords (like social platforms that rely on audience targeting data) it's still a good practice to get into. If you change your mind in the future while the campaign is still running and want to augment your social channel with PPC advertising, for example, you will already have a keyword pool to select from.

COMPETITOR RESEARCH

In addition to keyword research, take some time to peek at what your competitors are doing in the same spaces. How are they framing their offers? What kinds of discounts and sales are they running? What do their ad creatives look like? What is popular right now?

A lay of the land that includes your competitors and their current marketing activities can act as inspiration for your own efforts. If other marketers have been running similar ads over a long period it's a safe bet that those ads are performing well for that brand. Competitor research can also serve as an inspiration of what *not* to do if you want to stand out in a crowded marketplace and catch your audience's eye.

SELECT YOUR CHANNELS AND BUDGETS

In the same way that a campaign that tries to accomplish too many goals will struggle to achieve any goals, trying run a digital marketing campaign across too many channels will also yield poor results. Focus on a channel you know inside and out like social or PPC advertising and ensure that the goal you have selected is a good fit for that channel. A helpful top-level categorization of the most common digital channels includes PPC advertising, email marketing, social media, content marketing, and SEO.



A quick note on the distinction between channels and platforms. A platform is discrete online space. Facebook is a platform, as is Google AdWords, Pinterest, Quora, etc. A channel is a method of connecting with people. A social channel would include platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Insight from your competitor research can be helpful here too. What channels are your competitors using? Which platforms are they active on? What kind of creatives or messaging are they using?

When it comes to budgeting, different channels have different considerations.

PPC

PPC channels are an excellent choice for goals that involve sending traffic to your website. Pricing depends on the scope of your campaign. More keywords mean more clicks and more cost on a daily basis. PPC platforms are based on a blind bidding system. The more you bid on a keyword, the more often your ad is displayed as long as you can beat the bids of other advertisers for the same keyword.

In addition to your per-keyword bids, advertising platforms generally also allow you to adjust your overall budget on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Try to set aside enough money to maintain your PPC campaigns for at least a month, ideally two.

You can adjust your budget within that sixty-day period, drop keywords that aren't performing, and add in new keyword as needed, but you will need several weeks of data to understand your PPC performance.

EMAIL MARKETING

The vast majority of the cost associated with email marketing comes from growing your list. It doesn't take much to write an email, craft a compelling subject line, and press send but if your list is tiny, don't expect any results.

The money is in the list as the saying goes and that means that you should make collecting contact info from your customers and audience a priority. Implement opt-ins on your site, run content marketing campaigns to earn subscribers, and if you want to grow your list quickly(at a price), run PPC campaigns to send traffic to opt-in landing pages.

Email marketing has the potential to provide an excellent return on investment (ROI), but it will take time and/or money to grow your list to the point where it will start to generate revenue.



What's the minimum list required to start seeing consistent revenue from email marketing activities? The answer, as it so often is, is that it depends. Conversions— when a subscriber opens a marketing email, clicks through, and takes the desired action—are the events tied to revenue generation from an email list. A large list plays a numbers game. If 30% of the people on your list open and 10% of those people click through, increasing the size of your list means increasing your conversions. On the other hand, a modestly sized list that is made up of highly engaged subscribers can regularly produce revenue.

A best practice in this area is to always work to grow your list, but also to ensure that your list is populated with quality subscribers who remain engaged. Prune the dead wood often by removing contacts who don't open messages, don't engage, and don't convert.

Email marketing is a good fit for follow up campaigns, lead nurturing, and building customer loyalty.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media marketing is best used to reach new audiences, keeping existing customers engaged, and for remarketing campaigns that follow

visitors to your site around social media and encourage them to return and convert.

Social channels rely on a mix of organic and paid tactics, the costs of which vary from social platform to social platform. It doesn't take much effort, for example, to fire off a quick post on Facebook. Cutting corners on Instagram, however, could mean lower engagement. The highly visual nature of the platform rewards brands and creators who speak its language via images.

Social posts or shares represent organic interaction or engagement that does not cost money. Organic engagement is great for the obvious reason that it doesn't directly incur cost, but it is also limited in scope. To truly maximize your reach and meet business objectives, a mix of paid and organic methods are required.

CONTENT MARKETING

Content marketing consists of producing content in the form of posts, articles, or video that answers a question or solves a problem your audience has. Content marketing is a form of inbound marketing designed to draw traffic to your site. Once traffic is on your site, you can present them with opt-in offers, sales offers, or target them with a retargeting campaign.

Producing content incurs cost, but that's generally a onetime cost. A popular form of content marketing involves creating really sophisticated and valuable content asset like a whitepaper or a study that uses on-the-ground data to explore a problem the industry or the market is facing. Once completed, this content is the subject of a PPC or social campaign to increase brand awareness and concretely cast your brand as a thought leader in the space.

SEO

Search engine optimization uses a mix of technical, on-page, and off-page methods to demonstrate to search engines that the content on your site is valuable and provides a good solution to people's queries.

It can take a while before SEO efforts have the intended effect of boosting your content in the SERPs (search engine result pages) but once your content gets onto the first page of results for relevant searches, you will see a massive increase in traffic to your site.

DESIGN CREATIVES AND CONTENT ASSETS

Creatives are the visual portion of ads and content assets represent the content you will be sharing with your audience. Your specific creative and content needs will vary from campaign to campaign based on the marketing channels you have selected.

PPC campaigns not only need creatives for the ads that will be run—but you will also need creatives for the landing pages those ads will point to. Creating

a content marketing plan? You will need blog posts or educational articles that provide value to your audience.

It's a best practice to have a centralized list of all of the creatives and assets you will need for your campaign along with their completion status. In the case of content assets, once completed, there won't be many changes to their content. Advertising creatives, on the other hand, should be changed as often as the data warrants.

Monitor ad performance closely and experiment with different combinations of copy and creative with each audience you target. Let the data be your guide and regularly replace underperforming ad creatives while emulating the success of the winners.

GATHER RESULTS CAMPAIGN PILOTS

With any untested digital campaign, it's a good idea to dip your toes in the water in the form of a pilot campaign to see if you're on the right track without blowing your entire budget. Pilot campaigns are campaigns that test the fitness of your creatives and content assets for your audience.

It can be tough to strike the right balance between committing enough of a budget and letting your ads run long enough to produce robust, actionable data. A small daily budget of \$10-\$20 for an entire month should provide you with enough data to make a decision from, but this time period could be even shorter depending on the size of your audience.

Pilot campaigns are the perfect proving ground for your creative and copy hypotheses. Does an ad that features the product alone, or an ad that features the product and text work best? General marketing best practices tell us that human faces help sell products so that's a good place to start. Through pilot campaign testing, however, you may find that creatives that don't include faces perform better for your product or audience.

Once your pilot campaigns have produced clear winners, commit to larger budgets that use variations on the creatives and copy that got positive results.

COLLECT PERFORMANCE DATA

Data collection and analysis doesn't end once your pilot campaign has concluded. Digital marketing revolves around data, testing, and optimization. Focus on metrics that are tied to your business and marketing goals. Start with high level questions to orient yourself, then work toward a more granular analysis.

Which ads saw the most conversions?

Did my new blog post see an increase in traffic or a decrease?

Have conversions on my landing page increased or decreased?

After answering higher level questions related to campaign performance, dive into the story the data is telling you. If you have an ad that is doing its job and generating conversions but you're not seeing a commensurate rate of click through on the associated landing page, there's something on the page that's turning people off.

Any platform you will be advertising in will provide a wealth of data. Real time information is interesting, but often the best way to assess the performance of a campaign is over time. Take time to establish benchmarks to measure ad performance against past efforts and to get a sense of the direction your marketing efforts are headed.

OPTIMIZE

Campaign optimization boils down to capitalizing on what you have determined gets results and discarding methods that don't perform. Optimization is more than just collecting and acting on data, however. Without a testing and experimentation, you might miss the next thing that unlocks a new level of performance.

Optimization doesn't just happen through careful consideration of campaign results, however. Harnessing the power of automation, maximizing your own productivity, and using tools that help you do more in less time are all ways you can optimize your digital marketing efforts by improving your workflow.