

# **Where should digital marketing sit in a company structure?**

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**Daniel Rowles, Digital Marketing lecturer for the MSc in Strategic Marketing at Imperial Business School, highlights the most effective ways to fit digital marketing staff into an organisation**

As a lecturer of the Digital Marketing element of the [MSc in Strategic Marketing](#) here at Imperial Business School, I'm focused on making sure that students are fully prepared for the fast changing roles they will find themselves in, and have the appropriate skills and knowledge to succeed.

According to [the Tech Nation 2016](#) report, the UK's digital marketing sector was worth £3.9bn in 2015, up 13.4% on the previous year. It's clear that even the most antiquated of British businesses are awakening to the opportunities afforded by digital marketing – but for some companies, smoothly incorporating a digital specialist or department remains a work-in-progress.

Over the course of two blogs, we'll take a look at some of the most effective ways to slot digital marketing staff into a company structure, from recruiting a single

specialist to influencing how digital marketers interact with other departments in a large organisation.

## **Build digital marketing specialists into your existing marketing team**

Let's start off with a very basic principle: digital marketing should be at least partially incorporated within your organisation, preferably as part of an existing marketing team. Yes, you can use freelancers or agencies to carry out certain specialist tasks, but you will need members of your team to have ownership of your digital marketing. Fully outsourcing would leave digital marketing divorced from the working life of your organisation, when as a matter of fact you should be moving in the opposite direction, towards a closer integration that will encourage efficiencies, cost savings and cross-departmental opportunities.

Slotting digital marketing into your existing marketing team can provide a number of benefits:

- Fluid collaboration across platforms, e.g. listing appropriate digital details like web links and social media details on printed marketing materials.
- Keeps digital marketing focused and in-step with the master marketing plan.
- Simplifies the task of maintaining consistency in tone-of-voice.
- Encourages beneficial exchange of classic marketing principles and new approaches from digital marketing.

## **Start out with a multiskilled digital marketing manager**

Maintaining a digital marketing presence within your organisation is important, but for SMEs engaging in digital marketing for the first time, hiring just one digital marketing expert to act as the lynchpin of your digital marketing campaigns may be the most efficient and cost-effective strategy.

Hire one digital manager to oversee every aspect of your digital marketing, and provide this person with the budget and the authority to engage more highly specialised freelancers (e.g. graphic designers or SEO experts) to work alongside on a project-by-project basis. Here's how this approach might work step-by-step:

- You hire a Marketing Manager/Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) with deep experience and a selection of digital marketing skills.
- This person plans and manages your digital marketing projects.
- Freelancers are commissioned to carry out tasks which cannot be performed satisfactorily by the Marketing Manager.
- Provision is made for the Marketing Manager to train on-the-job (an important aspect of any staff member's continuing professional development). This will ultimately enable the Marketing Manager to execute a larger proportion of the tasks required in your digital marketing projects.
- The Marketing Manager delivers the organisation's marketing campaigns and reports to senior company management. Campaign performance is measured against KPIs agreed between the Marketing Manager and senior management during campaign planning.

This setup offers a number of advantages. Concentrating your wage budget (excluding freelancer payments) on a highly experienced marketing manager will help you to attract candidates with a deep knowledge of how to establish a digital marketing operation within a company. And by supplementing that Marketing Manager's skills with carefully chosen freelancers, you can put intermediate or advanced skills at your disposal immediately, without making any long-term staffing commitments. It goes without saying that the process of hiring a Marketing Manager should be conducted very carefully!

## **Bigger companies should split up strategy and execution**

There's very little cause to presume a talented digital marketing strategist will also possess a flair for the more hands-on skills within the field. Consider the skills of graphic design, copywriting, and product photography, and compare them with the vital aspects of digital marketing planning, which include identifying and measuring KPIs, competitor analysis, keyword planning, project and budget management. There's not a great deal of overlap in skills between the two sets of activities.

You will encounter 'T-shaped' professionals who possess both a deep knowledge of a single specialism and proficiencies in others (the perfect people to employ if your team is small), but in order to get the most out of your digital marketing you'll need one to have one group of team members focused primarily on strategy, and a second group focused mainly on execution – you might loosely call the former 'Marketing' and the latter 'Creative'. Individual team members may perform tasks

across the strategy/execution boundary, especially in smaller teams.

The flow of work from the strategy team to the execution team should be simple – the strategists plan campaigns and set tasks for the execution team; the execution team delivers the work and any feedback; the strategy team signs off the work and gathers performance insights to inform the next cycle of work.

Splitting up strategy and execution allows team members to concentrate on doing what they do best but there does need to be strong communication between the two groups in order for this approach to succeed. We recommend daily progress meetings to encourage collaborative problem solving and more generally; a unity of direction.

## **Agile upskilling for small teams**

Digital marketing is changing at such a pace that HR people are struggling to secure the talent their companies require for optimal growth. This means that for digital marketers, learning new skills on the job is absolutely central to their continuing professional development. Put simply, you may find it easier to train your existing staff in certain digital marketing skills than recruit a new digital marketing department with all the skills you need. Now some of you may have heard of the agile methodology, a smart approach to work that helps teams to be flexible and respond quickly to change. We're not necessarily suggesting you use agile to train your team but what we do suggest is that you borrow aspects of the philosophy and apply it to how you upskill your workforce.

Agile teaches us to focus on the tasks that will deliver the best ROI for your company. That's exactly what we recommend you do in choosing digital marketing skills to add to your team through training. Estimate the costs of training and implementation for each digital marketing area you are interested in (e.g. YouTube, SEO, PPC, content writing) and weigh those against a projection of the revenue you stand to gain through the activity (which will always involve a bit of guesswork).

Now you have identified the digital marketing activities that you believe will deliver the best results for your company, your next step is to choose a member/members of staff who will be trained in the relevant disciplines. Digital marketing role candidates can be sourced from all over your organisation, provided the workers in question can spare some time from their working week. Perhaps you employ a sales

assistant with a great instinct for Instagram, a visitor experience executive who writes well and could be trained in digital publishing, a data analyst who is just a few steps away from being a Google AdWords wizard, etc. In the average SME, each area of digital marketing will generally be a part-time role at first, so there's really no need to hire a full-time specialist.

This approach does come with a caveat; the people you choose to train to cover digital marketing roles should be trustworthy, reliable and likely to commit to your company in the long-term. The good news for employers who give their staff access to enriching training and opportunities is that by doing so they will increase the likelihood of retaining those employees in the long-term. As Nick Russell, associate director at the Work Foundation puts it, "Training is a key retention tool. It is part of the employee's psychological contract of employment – ensuring that they get the opportunity to develop and improve their skills."

## **Encourage lively interaction between digital marketing and other departments**

If your digital marketers are to communicate your organisation's selling points to the best of their ability, they will need to live and breathe it just as your workers 'on the shop floor' do. Keep digital marketing closely in-touch with other departments by setting up regular site visits and group team-building activities. This approach provides abundant opportunities for digital marketers tasked with creating the organisation's B2C content.

Digital marketing may also feed productively into the way staff from other departments conduct themselves online, especially on social media. Most organisations now enforce an employee social media policy, governing how employees are allowed to behave on Facebook, Twitter and other social channels. If your company doesn't have one yet, it may be worth your while to consider making one

The digital marketing team plays a key role in formulating this policy, using its social media knowledge to warn against new potential issues. They may also create constructive points on how employees should present themselves and their relationship with the company online – for example, stipulating how to sign off posts on professional forums.

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**Share****About Daniel Rowles**

Daniel Rowles has been working in Digital Marketing with extensive experience working both client side and within the agency environment.