

FEATURE

Be specific: Failte Ireland, for example, use consumer insights to package Ireland to particular types of visitors, depending on their interests

# DIGITAL MARKETING

## *To Inspire You and Your Customers*



As her new book is published, **Rachel Killeen** lays down the five rules of digital marketing that will drive your business.

**C**ongratulations! The hospitality industry is the earliest and most progressive adopter of digital marketing, of all sectors, and you keep on innovating. From hotels to restaurants, bars to venues, event managers to food delivery – your industry is at the forefront of online marketing.

As you know, digital marketing works because it works for customers. People can book a seat, a bed or a meal online from a New York cab, from the top of a double decker bus or from a fast ferry in Sydney Harbour. Your patrons can book virtually anything, from virtually anywhere – virtually.

### COMPETITION IS INTENSE

So the industry as a sector is doing great – but how are hospitality businesses doing individually? You're operating in a fast-paced, highly competitive and expensive marketing world – how do you keep up? It's difficult to differentiate, to get ahead, to stay up to date – how do you stand out? Maintaining the marketing budget is also a

critical element – more money!

### INSPIRATION IS VALUABLE

Over the past few months, I have come across some really innovative digital marketing opportunities for businesses in the hospitality industry and I'd like to share them with you.

Here are five ideas to inspire you and your customers and to help you use digital marketing in a delightful way – without the huge outlay.

### 1. START WITH CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

'Customer insights' is an umbrella term used to describe the process of researching the needs, motivations and desires of customers. Used in this context, the main aim is to gather enough information to help you to deliver services, products, experiences and online content that customers would like but are not already getting.

In your business, you want your marketing to deliver calm reassurance and

to develop loyalty. Return customers are the least expensive in marketing terms after all.

Fáilte Ireland has successfully used customer insights to package Ireland for domestic and international travellers. They worked out the exact personality types that were likely to come to Ireland – then they devised a detailed online brief to appeal to each of those types of travellers – whether they wanted culture, social life, nature trails or pampering. Have a look at the Fáilte Ireland website for details of exactly how they used customer insights to frame the Ireland story.

When you know exactly who you are appealing to: surfer students, luxury lovers, family fun, for example, then you can adapt what you offer to attract those people. It must fit with the objectives for your business and what you can realistically deliver for customers.

Once you have the insights – then you can move on to appeal exactly to those people using the right digital marketing tools.

## 2. MAP THE JOURNEY

So which digital marketing tools will you use?

Every patron of every hospitality business takes a journey to get to you. They might begin with a desire to travel, to eat, to find a room, to get a drink. Where do you meet them on that journey?

Customer touch points are your brand's point of contact with your customers, before, during and after they make a purchase. They are not always obvious and may span quite diverse areas of your business. You have to be accessible to the customer when they are considering their options, when they make a choice and when they turn up.

Map the journey and find ways to meet your prospective customers at every touch point possible:

- When people look up your town, make sure you are on all the relevant websites and directories for your town.
- When people look up Google, make sure your free Google Business Profile is up to date, complete with reviews, opening hours, website address, phone detail and well thought out pictures as well.
- When the type of people you want to attract use keywords to find what they want, make sure you are top of mind for those keywords on Google, e.g. surfing, West of Ireland or pizza – Dublin 3.
- Establish a connection with other local amenities that appeal to your target market, e.g. family friendly events if you want to appeal to families.
- Blog about topics that appeal to your target market – guest blog for publications, if you can. People are

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always looking for fresh articles and articulate content. You can write about topics that the people you want to attract are interested in. For example, historical places to visit in Howth.

- Get independent evaluations such as reviews, testimonials, write-ups and awards, and encourage as much positive feedback as you can because self-praise is no praise.
- Use well-chosen imagery to illustrate your business – the award-winning Dunowen House in Clonakilty uses enticing images of food and the stunning local scenery to attract guests on facebook.

## 3. MAKE YOUR BRAND APPEALING

Digital marketing can be used to create a genuine personality for your brand. It is often your shop-window to the world. While most websites will neither be radical nor ingenious, it is still important to convey a creative and energetic personality for your business online.

The Joie de Vivre hotels in the US are known for their devotion to joy – through staff recruitment and training, customer communications and through their involvement in the local community. The Joie de Vivre movement is about to have its moment as people realise that customers want a joyful experience as they interact with the hospitality industry.

“We’re big in food, we’re big in booze, we’re big in art, architecture, music, design, festivals. Whatever it is, that’s where you get that authenticity.... We want to make the website more personal more than anything, so we want to provide as much personal content as possible,” says Scott Williams, EVP/chief creative officer of Commune Hotels & Resorts, parent company of Joie de Vivre.

When you set up a website, make sure you put a web analytics package in place to track the performance of your website. Tracking gives you insights into the behaviour of online customers and will help you to focus and drive your content, design and service priorities into the future.

## 4. GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT

Hotel de Nemours in France sends a welcome email to guests before the trip, asking them to provide details of what they need while they are in town. A pre-trip survey makes so much more sense for guests rather than a post-trip survey. It starts the conversation; it creates a thoughtful impression; and it allows the hotel or venue to interact with the customer, so they don’t arrive cold. I asked for parking information and received a courteous response from a named lady. She included a map, driving directions and her personal contact details in case I got lost and I was impressed.

Use your digital marketing – whether it be e-mail, social media or your website – to provide patrons with what they need. Customers respond best when you consider their needs. They respond less favourably when bombarded with marketing and sales messages that don’t necessarily fit with their requirements.

Surfing enthusiasts need to know about surf shops, surf schools, weather conditions and the best waves. Families need to know about events, playgrounds, outdoor sports and family-friendly eateries. International travellers want local information, heritage sites, language translations, currency and a great welcome. Use your website, Instagram, e-mail and newsletters, for example, to keep your particular type of customer informed and relaxed.

## 5. SIMPLICITY IS KEY

I mentioned that customers don’t want to be overwhelmed with information. They get too much already. Keep it simple.

Make your digital marketing simple, easy to follow and beautiful. Never be afraid of white space in a newsletter or an e-mail or on a website homepage. A small number of beautiful images and well-chosen words work far better than albums and essays. Aim to be relevant, useful, humorous and insightful whenever you can. Inject simple joy into your online marketing.

Encourage your guests and those who visit your venues to share their images and memories of their visit. Provide an easy way for customers to share on your website.

There are a number of inexpensive, off-the-shelf booking and reservation packages available for the hospitality industry. Make sure that your online booking facility is up-to-date and very easy to use. Customers give up easily if your system is too complicated.

*Rachel Killeen’s new book, Digital Marketing, is published by Chartered Accountants Ireland and is available from bookstores nationwide or directly from Chartered Accountants Ireland at [www.charteredaccountants.ie](http://www.charteredaccountants.ie)*