

Transforming the Future of Digital Marketing for Engineering and Other Professional Companies

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Thirty years ago, in 1989, there was no internet or email. Computers were rudimentary and almost everything was in hard copy. By the time I had finished getting three degrees in Civil Engineering and became the Chairman and Managing Director of my own Civil Engineering company, the world had been transformed. Just take a look at the website www.multispectraconsultants.com and the massive changes in marketing are evident. Digital marketing has come of age and continues to evolve posing new challenges and also new opportunities.

Reviewing the full stack of publications and methods of publicity, peer-reviewed international journal publications, international conference publications, keynote speeches at international conferences, white papers, articles in general publications, blogs, social media; engineering companies are doing them all in a bid to gain competitive advantage in a highly competitive market. Digital marketing is vital for the business success of these companies.

Gone are the days when bound journal volumes in libraries were studied meticulously for information. While hard copies are still present, soft copies of publications have become very important because of the ease of their dissemination. The best engineering firms are innovative and engage in thought-leadership marketing to project their innovative technologies in the best possible way. Creating content in various formats is crucial. Take an engineering innovation as an example. Photographs and videos uploaded to Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, YouTube and Vimeo, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn marketing, Pinterest, sharing published papers on Facebook and LinkedIn, sharing PowerPoint presentations on Slideshare and Slideboom, atomising the content of an international journal paper into white papers and blog posts - these are among the methods being tried. By and large, other professional companies in possession of specialised knowledge like engineering companies behave in much the same manner as engineering companies. Inbound marketing is employed along with all that it implies including content marketing.

But amplification of the content is what has become de rigueur. It is simply not enough to publish a paper in a professional journal anymore. The soft copy of the published paper has to be spread by digital media including social media so as to have more eyeballs on the publication.

The digital space is a crowded space where gaining an audience is as much of an art as it is a science. It is a foregone conclusion that every company will have a website. Design of the website is important in itself. Well designed landing pages are vital. More traffic can be directed to the website of a company by Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). This requires a careful and judicious design of the website as well as inbound links. Social media shares and follows, strategically placed on the website, are also very important. It is to be noted, at this point, that in this paper, we are discussing free or organic strategies only leaving paid strategies to be dealt with in a later paper.

Among free services, I would recommend Google Drive, Yandex Disk, OneDrive and Dropbox for cloud storage, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr and Flickr for social media, WordPress, Google Blogger, Medium and LinkedIn for blogging, SoundCloud for audio, YouTube and Vimeo for video and Slideshare and Slideboom for presentations. Social media management software like Hootsuite and Buffer are generally paid but both have a very limited free plan and they can be used together. A presentation may be transformed into a video and thus another piece of content created.

Now, where does all this fit in with the ultimate objective of client acquisition. Generally speaking, a marketing funnel is thought of. The top of the funnel consists of developing among the public an awareness that the company exists and has a particular bouquet of products and services. As leads are acquired, the mid-funnel activity consists in converting leads into clients. At the bottom of the funnel, the specific needs of the clients are addressed and customised solutions for the clients prepared.

Updating and repurposing content is very important. It is most likely that older engineering publications will exist in hard copy format only. Indeed that is the case for the earliest of my engineering publications. In that case, scanning the publications to produce soft copies is required for the circulation and spread of those publications by digital methods. Also, as any profession progresses, older research becomes obsolete and the company has to continuously engage in research so as to maintain its competitive edge. A company that does not have a continuous innovation programme in place is bound for oblivion. Repurposing older content in a different way is another excellent option for projecting expertise and professional excellence.

It is important to let the client communicate by any means that he chooses. Communication methods like e-mail, WhatsApp, Telegram and so on need to be inbuilt in the website itself so that a lead or a client can choose a method that is most suitable for him.

Embedded interactive elements make a website heavy and, potentially, slow to load but they are necessary in order that the user can leave comments and feedback both on the

website itself as well as on the embedded Facebook and LinkedIn pages of the company. Slow loading speed increases the possibility of visitors bouncing off the website and so this must be addressed. Technological proficiency is required so that any engineer, not just computer experts, are able to write HTML fluently. I do not outsource my website design; I do it myself. That way, I remain in control of my website to the fullest possible extent.

E-mail marketing will always remain very important for the simple reason that e-mail marketing spans the full funnel. Also, after a lead has come in via social media marketing, follow-up in a more focused manner may have to be done by e-mail. E-mail remains a major item in digital marketing.

Voice communication is not passé yet but, given the fact that in professional communication documentation plays a major role, it is rapidly subsuming itself to written modes of communication.

All businesses need to focus on financial management. One cardinal principle that must be followed is that a penny saved is a penny earned. That is the reason why a productivity suite like LibreOffice and an image processing software like GIMP are thriving. A company has to make the utmost use of free resources before it goes to paid ones.

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