Growing Your Digital Marketing Agency

How To Attract And Convert Small Business Clients

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Knowing how to stand out from the crowd in order to **attract** and **convert** new clients is an inevitable challenge for all **B2B organizations**, but the digital marketing industry has become fiercely competitive and is feeling this challenge more than most.

Whether you specialize in web design, SEO, social media, email, PPC or content marketing, you'll have new competitors popping up left, right and center. At the same time, there are a growing number of clients that are leaving agencies and choosing to bring aspects of their marketing in-house, and many others that are now using agencies for short-term projects rather than building longer-term relationships.

To help tackle this challenge, Our Social Times and Constant Contact have joined forces to develop content on the theme of '**Growing your digital marketing agency**'.

This white paper will explore some of the key challenges facing **digital marketing** agencies and consultants; covering everything from how to position your agency and attract leads, to how to **go the extra mile** to impress prospects and convert them into long-term customers.

Our Panel of Experts

Dave Chaffey

Dave Chaffey is editor of digital marketing advice website, **Smart Insights**, as well as a bestselling author, consultant and speaker who enjoys sharing tips, tools and techniques on all things digital, but especially those most influential in driving awareness, leads and sales. That's SEO, PPC, Social Media, Email Marketing, Site Design and Analytics!

Tamsin Fox-Davies

Tamsin Fox-Davies is Senior Development Manager at Constant Contact UK. She spends her time travelling and delivering free marketing education and training for small businesses. As the only all-in-one online marketing platform for small businesses, **Constant Contact** works with more than 650,000 small businesses worldwide.

Kathy Ennis

As a mentor, business consultant and trainer Kathy Ennis uses the concepts of engagement marketing and brand development as methods of business creation and growth strategies. She helps people start and expand their business and embeds growth-building systems and processes into their company through effective business planning.

Luke Brynley-Jones

Luke Brynley-Jones is one of the UK's most experienced and best known social media consultants. A passionate advocate of the "socialization" of business and the need for online customer engagement, Luke combines a clear, strategic approach to marketing with a wealth of first-hand experience.

Standing out from the crowd

In order to fill the top end of the funnel your agency needs to be easy to find and distinct from competitors. This involves a mixture of marketing techniques, branding, and ensuring you have a specific niche that separates you from a sea of other marketing consultants that are out there.

Finding a niche

It can be quite hard to establish what separates one agency from another, with websites often containing very generic sections about "who we are" and "what we do" that all contain the same old buzz words and phrases.

In order to really demonstrate what makes you different, Dave at Smart Insight suggests a very focused approach to content marketing:

> *"Agencies need to cut through the crowd by using a different approach to their competitors. I think content marketing that surrounds your area of expertise is a great way to achieve that."*
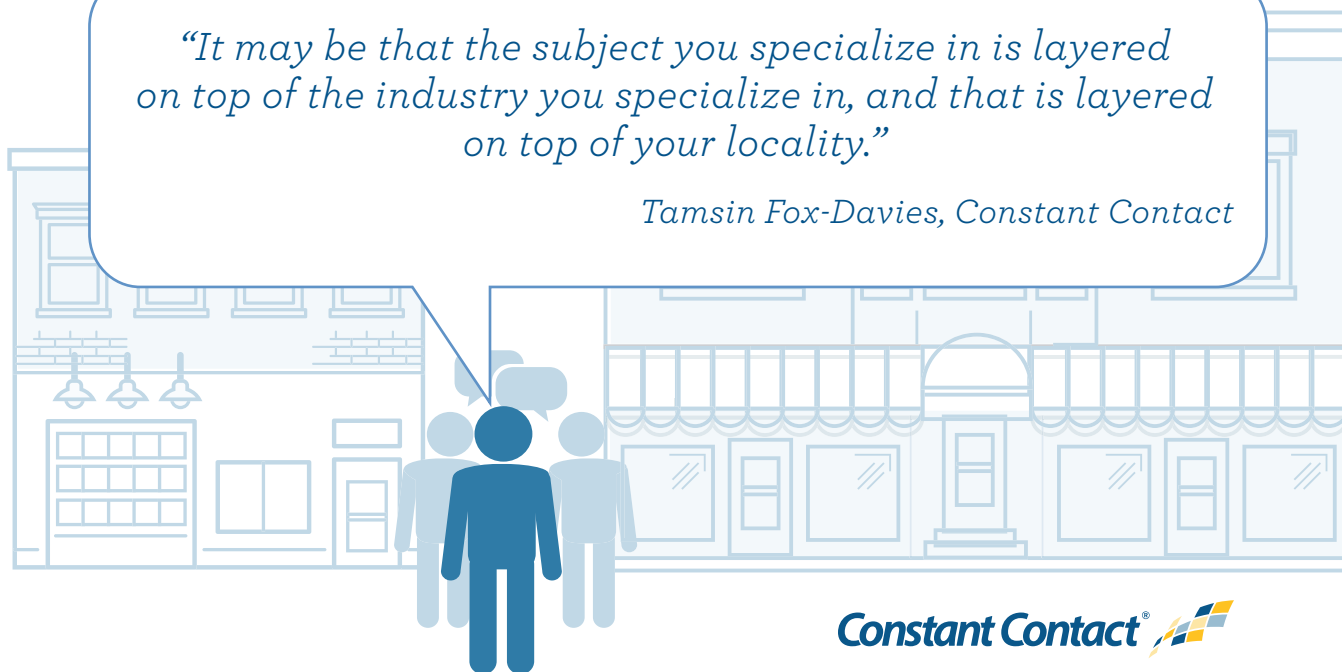>
> *Dave Chaffey, Smart Insight*

Rather than using your blog to write about the same tips or industry news as every other digital agency, think about what content you could produce that people just can't get anywhere else.

Even if you specialize in a similar vertical to other agencies, Tamsin urges us to think about how niches can be layered:

> *"It may be that the subject you specialize in is layered on top of the industry you specialize in, and that is layered on top of your locality."*
>
> *Tamsin Fox-Davies, Constant Contact*

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Even though you have a similar niche to other agencies, you're doing it for a different industry or for a different size of organization and in a different location. This can be enough of a distinction to ensure you (and your content) stand out.

Even if you offer broader services or are a full-service digital agency, look at your niche services when producing content.

Credibility

Of course it isn't only the services offered that separate agencies from other competitors, there's also the matter of credibility – 'what makes you an expert in this field?'

Different clients will look for different qualities. Some may want to know what awards you've won, others will want to know who your existing clients are and whether you've worked with organizations like them. Others will be more interested in what qualifications and certifications you have and your industry experience. If you put all of that together, you end up with a clear picture of what's unique about you and what you can offer.

Branding

Branding offers another opportunity to distinguish yourself from others in your industry. As small business consultant, Kathy Ennis, explains:

"The branding of the organization needs to be the first point of contact. It is the process of creating that differentiation point between you and somebody who does something very similar to what you do".

Kathy Ennis, Business Consultant

In many respects, it is the values and identity of your organization that you're marketing to potential customers. This goes far beyond your color palette and logos. In fact, the people working for the business are usually the differentiation point – and that needs to be incorporated for your prospects to see on the website, in your social media personas and content marketing.

Are you presenting a compelling and consistent story to potential customers?

The most successful methods for acquiring new clients

Many marketing agencies are great when it comes to building and maintaining relationships with existing clients, but attracting new business opportunities is often a tougher challenge.

Often this is due to a lack of a dedicated new business professional, and so the responsibility falls to employees who have other areas of focus. This means that the marketing of the agency itself becomes something extra that staff have to do rather than being embedded within the marketing process. Often, it slips down the priority list as employees are focused on their own clients and don't have time to spare.

So where do our clients come from?

According to Dave Chaffey, it's recommendations from our existing connections that tend to deliver most results:
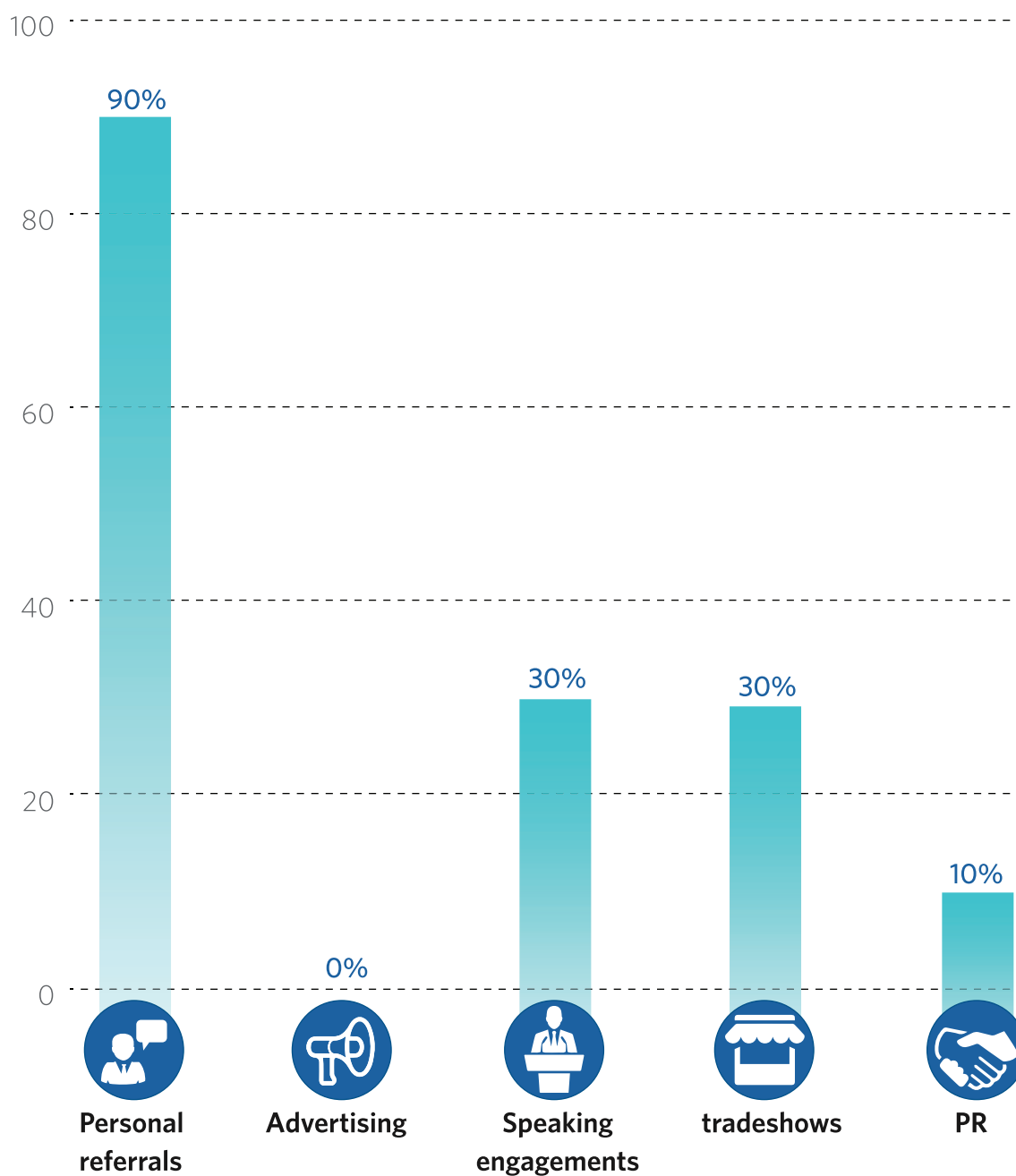
> *"One of the best ways to win business is through previous customers. If you can connect your prospects with people you've done a good job for in the past, that sort of personal recommendation is the best form of credibility."*
>
> *Dave Chaffey, Smart Insights*

Dave's suggestion is in-keeping with a quick, rather un-scientific, poll taken during a recent webinar, in which we asked agencies which channels their existing clients came from (the questions were split between offline and online).

When it comes to offline channels recommendations were the clear winner with **90% of agencies having gained clients** through personal referrals, followed by **30% for both speaking engagements and tradeshows**.

Which of these offline channels do your existing clients come from?

- 90% — Personal referrals
- 0% — Advertising
- 30% — Speaking engagements
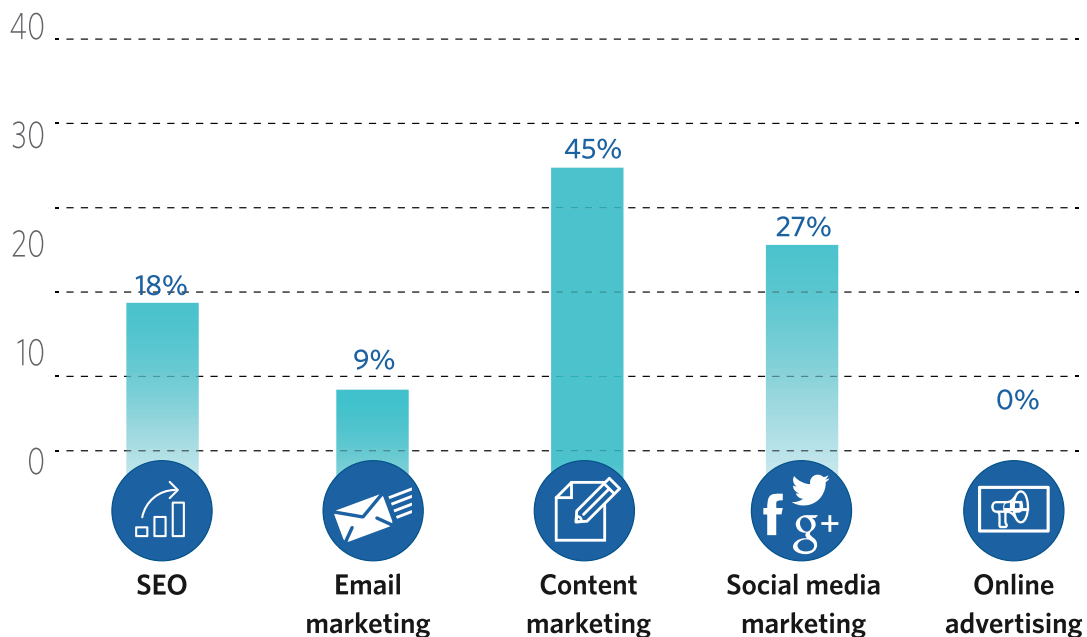- 30% — tradeshows
- 10% — PR

When it comes to online channels, social media seems to be leading the way. This is particularly interesting as, to most commentators, social media wouldn't normally be viewed as a lead generation activity, but better suited to relationship building and awareness.

What social media is good at, however, is reaching new audiences and, as Luke Brynley-Jones suggests, building the credibility of the business:

> *"The interesting thing that we find in social media or in particular, our blog, is the credibility that it gives us."*
>
> *Luke Brynley-Jones, Social Media Times*

Which of these online channels do your existing clients come from?

	SEO	Email marketing	Content marketing	Social media marketing	Online advertising
	18%	9%	45%	27%	0%

This analysis is backed up by other (rather more scientific) studies, which indicate the rate at which social media is becoming such an essential element of the marketing mix is gaining momentum. According to the CRM vendor, Salesforce, **66% of marketers now rate social media as core to their business strategy in 2015. This is up from 24% in 2014**.
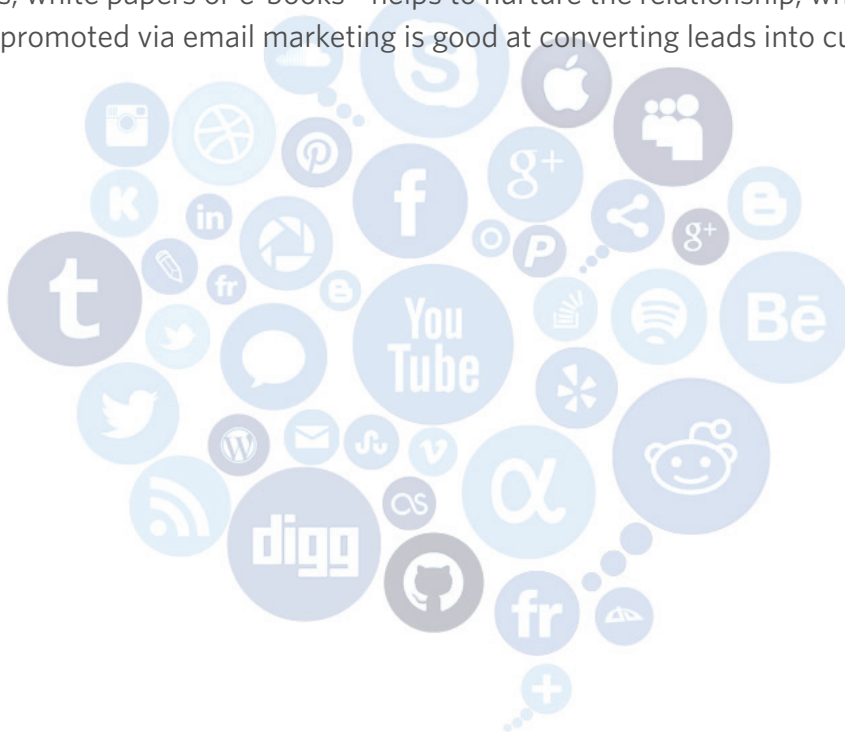
It should be noted, however, that leads generated through social media generally don't convert as quickly as personal recommendations. Social media allows you to build relationships and develop trust, but it's at that stage that email marketing will often play a role in converting those leads.

As Tamsin points out, where you get your leads from and where you convert them are not always the same:

"Where you get leads from and where you convert your customers are two very different things. We see with our customers and partners that email is their primary source of conversions, but how do you get them on that list in the first place? Often, it's a content play or a social play."

Tamsin Fox-Davies, Constant Contact

What this aptly demonstrates is the need for an integrated approach to inbound marketing - a term often used alongside content marketing and social media marketing. A common scenario is that social media or blog posts can fill the top of the marketing funnel, before mid-funnel content marketing – such as webinars, white papers or e-books - helps to nurture the relationship, while sales content promoted via email marketing is good at converting leads into customers.

See below a graphic developed by Our Social Times to describe this content marketing funnel.

THE CONTENT MARKETING FUNNEL

TOP

Content designed to create brand awareness and drive web traffic.

E.g. Blog posts, social publishing, infographics and articles on other websites.

MIDDLE

High-value, in-depth content designed to strengthen the relationship between the vendor and the buyer.

E.g. Webinars, ebooks, newsletters, worksheets, and white papers

END

This is where sales content takes over, letting buyer know why your business is night for them.

E.g. Case studies, email, testimonials, user guides and product videos

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Email seemed to lose favor with many marketers following the rapid rise of social media and content marketing. However, it seems that email newsletters have seen a recent resurgence and many companies are starting to use them as part of an integrated marketing strategy.

As Tamsin suggests:

"Email is still the most effective way to get sales through a digital channel – and I think that's been true for a very long time. I think the story got boring for a while and people got distracted with all the new technology available and, particularly, with all the changes in social media."

Tamsin Fox-Davies, Constant Contact

So why the resurgence? As we've grown used to social media, we've also started to understand its strengths and weaknesses. It's great for awareness, relationship building and lead generation, but email remains the king of conversion.

On top of this, we should also consider the ever-present popularity of email. If you ask a room of potential clients how many of them check their email every day, you will have 100% of them saying that they do.

However Dave Chaffey reiterates the point that recently email is still noticing a small decline in open and click-through rates, so an integrated approach between email and social media is best:

"If you look at the open and click rates of email, they are declining a little, and you certainly won't get a full response and people become inactive. What I'd advise is to use a blended approach of email and social media marketing, because some people do prefer to get their updates via social media today".

Dave Chaffey, Smart Insights

How to get local results

Getting local results is particularly important for smaller agencies and marketing consultants. If you're looking to target audiences in specific geographic locations, one of the first steps is to optimize your website for local searches. For example, tools such as Google My Business will make sure that you have a local presence and people can find you on Google+.

As well as including your location in your website's SEO keywords, SEO strategies can also be complimented by geo-tagging on social media channels such as Facebook or Google+, and once a location is on there, it will also be on Google Maps. All of this will help ensure you pick up local search results, which is vital when you consider that **33% of organic search clicks go to the first result**.

Another method of using digital marketing to get local results is to register your website on Yelp or other similar listing sites. Not only does this index your page further, but it gives local residents the chance to leave testimonials for other locals to peruse.

However, Tamsin Fox-Davies argues that the best way you can get your business recognized locally is on a 'face to face' level:

"Local marketing is really important if you are a locally based agency. Face to face is always where you want to get to, because if somebody's looking for someone local to them, it's going to be because they feel better about working with someone that they can get in the same room as."

Tamsin Fox-Davies, Constant Contact

Proactively reaching out to customers at local events is a great way to expand your customer list and also to collaborate with local businesses who, once on friendly terms, could produce referrals and recommendations for you.
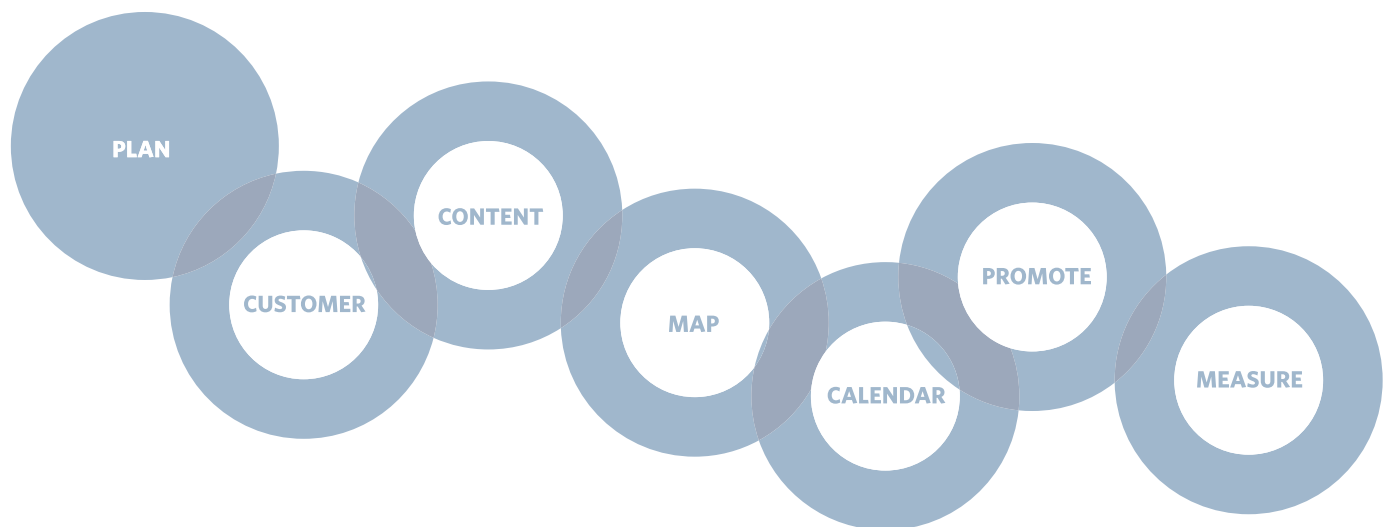
Not only does it connect you with potential customers, but speaking engagements also have great impact when it comes to creating a credibility platform.

To maximize the impact of these events, it helps to 'warm' contacts through digital channels prior to the event taking place, and use social channels to connect with them and build relationships after the event has finished.

As budget is going to make paid strategies such as a PPC less accessible to smaller agencies, using a combination of networking events and social media in this way will help to build your local presence cost effectively.

Creating a marketing framework

We've talked about the channels that can be used to attract new clients, the next step is to establish exactly which channels are most effective for your agency. One beneficial technique is to carry out a gap analysis, which analyses what you're doing now to reach your audience and comparing this to what your competitors are doing in order to spark new ideas.

PLAN

CUSTOMER

CONTENT

MAP

CALENDAR

PROMOTE

MEASURE

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This Bullseye Framework (below) was created by **Gabe Weinberg**, who co-authored Traction – A Startup Guide to Getting Customers

The Bullseye Framework
For finding the best traction channels

Affiliate marketing

Email marketing

Offline ads

Public Relations (PR)

1. ----------------

Existing platforms

Unconventional

Offline events

2. ------------

1. ....

6. ------------

Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

2. ....

Social and display ads

Engineering as marketing

3. ....

Businnes Development

3. ------------

5. ------------

Speaking engagements

Target marketing blogs

4. ------------

Tradeshows

Content marketing

Sales

Community building

Viral marketing

1 Read "Traction" by Gabiel Weinberg & Justin Mares

→

2 Select your top 3 & write them in the center

→

3 Write your next 6 in the middle layer

→

4 Cross out the ones you've used

→

5 Redo after testing

*Method and content creat by **Gabriel Weinberg**-Founer & CEO of DuckDuckGo, Co-author of Traction & Angel Investor*

*This page designed by **Deven Nemer** - Founder of Power Portal, A Smarter Web Browser that save you 4 hours per week or more by helping you do more in less clicks.*

The idea is a very simple one, all of the main online and offline channels are around the edge and you simply identify which of those channels are most effective for your organization. The three most effective channels are placed in the center, and the next 6 go in the middle layer. You can then cross out the channels you've identified and look for new opportunities.

It's an easy review technique that does a nice job of blending the online and offline.

Converting leads into new clients

Only **5% to 10% of qualified leads** actually convert for the majority of marketers, so it's important to keep track of their progress through your sales process. Agencies and consultants are usually faced with quite long buying cycles and, on average, it can take **84 days** to convert a lead into a sales opportunity.

We've already discussed the role that content marketing can play in filling the top and middle sections of the funnel, but it can also play a very significant role in converting clients. Sales content is an opportunity to demonstrate exactly why an agency is the right fit for a certain client, so ensuring the website has compelling case studies and testimonials is essential.

Tamsin Fox-Davies believes that when it comes to actually closing a deal, it's the simple things that people often forget:

> *"Most people forget to actually ask for the sale. Be ready to close and don't leave it up to them to get back in touch. Have a process in place and follow up asking for feedback – 'so do you like what you hear?'; 'are you ready to take the next step?'*
>
> *Tamsin Fox-Davies, Constant Contact*

As part of this process, it's important to consider the sticking points that prevent new clients from signing up and, in the experience of our speakers, **the most common sticking point is budget**.

As Kathy Ennis suggests, one way to overcome this challenge is to have various entry points. Clients will often want to dip a toe in the water and test something out in order to see what impact it has before committing to a large budget. Once the agency has demonstrated the value they can offer, it becomes much easier to offer some value added extras and upsell the client.

> *"If you can provide people with a variety of price points to bring them on board initially and then embed within those some added value extras, chances are that you are going to convert somebody into a higher level of expenditure along the line."*
>
> *Kathy Ennis, Business Consultant*

Conclusion

The challenge for digital marketing agencies isn't necessarily that they lack the skills to attract new clients, it tends to be that they don't devote the same attention to marketing themselves as they do for their clients. Ideally there would be internal resource dedicated to business development, but for smaller agencies and consultants this isn't always possible. Instead, a clear strategy is needed to ensure that the skills contained within the organization are utilized effectively for increasing sale.

This involves a mixture of online and offline channels, and knowing how each of these can be used to complement each other at different stages of the marketing funnel.

Budgetary restrictions also mean that paid advertising won't be an option for many agencies, but the opportunities presented by social media and content marketing can be a great equalizer. If an agency successfully finds a niche, it can use its expertise in that specific area to generate unique and insightful content. In turn this will result in credibility and, ultimately, attract clients.

But attracting leads is only the first part of the challenge. Converting those leads into clients is, perhaps, an even bigger one.

In order to increase conversion rates, marketing agencies and consultants sometimes need to view the situation from the perspective of the client. Think about what it is that they would want to see rather than what you want to deliver. The client doesn't know what effect this work will ultimately have on their business until it's been tried and tested, so the initial focus should be establishing credibility and building trust.

Looking for more ways to add to your client base?

At Constant Contact we love helping businesses attract new customers, and that applies to our partners too. Designed to provide support from business development to marketing, our partner program has been developed with marketing consultants and agencies in mind. **Learn more about how we can help your business too.**
Call us at 866-504-0304.