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# E-Marketing More for less



it can play a role in a company's green energy policy. Yet despite increasingly digitized markets, online ads and social media tools are not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, conventional marketing tools.

### HOW IT WORKS

Companies intending to engage in online marketing campaigns should first approach a digital marketing agency and explain how they plan to use traditional marketing methods. The agency then presents a proposal for a parallel 'e-campaign' in the online market, along with a forecast of its potential market reach, such as Twitter followers and re-tweets, YouTube views, and Facebook 'likes' and 'shares'. After a budget is set, implementation can begin. Companies can choose between going for a comprehensive A-Z online marketing campaign which includes web banners (online advertisements) on different social media pages, or only managing a single Facebook page. "The content should be varied and relevant to current events and trends in order to make it viral," said *Michel Haber*, General Manager at PubliScreen Online, a digital media agency. A 'viral' advertisement is one that spreads rapidly from person to person through online channels. The costs for such services vary. The management of a social media platform, which includes interacting with clients, answering questions, generating content, and coordinating with the company's management, can cost between \$500 and \$5,000. The cost of a full-fledged online campaign, which includes booking advertisement spaces on high-visibility websites, sending mass e-mail shots, and managing multiple social networking platforms, can reach a much higher figure, depending on the client's intended objectives.

**L**ocal companies increased their spending on Internet advertising from two percent of their marketing budget in 2008 to 13 percent in 2012, according to Eastline marketing, an online marketing agency. Across the Arab world online marketing investment jumped from \$56 million in 2009 to \$200 million in 2013. With more than 1.5 million local Facebook users and 80,000 Twitter users, e-marketing tools allow companies to maintain a direct, two-way communication channel with clients and potential clients. "One online ad's impact can be exponential," said *Alan Maksoud*, Account Manager at Digital ITS, a web development company that provides e-commerce and e-mail marketing solutions. "You can refer it easily and spread it to a wider audience." E-marketing also cuts costs and waste so

### COST-EFFECTIVE REACH

E-marketing methods give marketers greater reach with less spending. They allow the same amount of advertising material to be sent to the same number of potential clients for a fraction of the cost. For example, a traditional promotion method that involves printing and distributing 130,000 brochures is costly on both the budget and the environment. By comparison, a single e-marketing advertisement inserted into 130,000 e-mails costs no more than \$100. E-marketing content is also dynamic. It can include multiple links that redirect readers to different places: A website, an online catalogue, or a downloadable document. A consumer may not feel at ease saving stacks of printed brochures and circulating them. In contrast, the e-marketing process offers an easier and customer-friendly alternative. It is important, however, to make sure such e-mails and web notifications are not seen as a form of unwelcome advertisement, or spam. "We send ads to our e-mail contacts with their consent, and they have the option of unsubscribing at any time," said Maksoud. The company has an average of 130,000 verified e-mail contacts and has been in the business for eight years: "The online platform can allow a company to build trust with its clients. This brings them back for more services." While traditional marketing may reach a large audience, it does not allow much, if any, room for interaction with the end user.

### MEASURING SUCCESS

Measuring the impact of a marketing campaign is critical to assessing its success. "By measuring the return on investment, companies are able to see if every penny they spent on marketing brought back as much as they paid," said *Marc Dfouni*, CEO and Managing Partner of Eastline Marketing, a provider of e-marketing solutions. For this reason, e-marketing methods provide measuring tools which enable companies to measure the impact of their engagement on social media channels. One example is the Tigerlily Platform, which allows brands to manage conversations and run effective campaigns across social media platforms. It includes options that allow marketers to make an advertising message visible to fans within certain countries and in different languages. This allows them to target the most influential users in their campaigns at the time of their choice. Other online tools such as Google Analytics provide marketers with data about their online customers' behavior, such as the type of clients that visit their website and the time they spend on it. This combination of detailed reporting allows companies to make more accurate decisions based on factual data. "It helps companies analyze every aspect of the customer response to campaigns in real time," said Dfouni. This user-centric approach allows companies to better understand the preferences of each user segment. Reaching this objective would require much more time and resources, and generate much more waste,

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An online platform can allow a company to build trust with its clients

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if using conventional marketing methods. "A typical FMCG [fast-moving consumer goods] company would need to set up stands, employ people, interview consumers passing by, then filter the results," said Dfouni.

### SAVING TIME

Any television or print commercial will stay in the public domain for a limited time then disappear, but e-marketing methods allow companies to create

a long-lasting online presence that keeps clients coming back. A standard online campaign on a social networking platform can create benefits for marketers in two ways: First, as an incentive to potential customers, and second, as a source of much needed consumer preference information. This allows building a marketing database that can be used for future purposes. Traditional methods of collecting such information would require heavy stacks of questionnaires, several field visits, and long hours spent extracting and analyzing the results. With the e-marketing approach, all that is needed is a computer with Internet access and an online marketing campaign manager.

### BIGGER PLANS

The scope of e-marketing tools also encourages growth. Bank of Beirut (BoB), which started its e-marketing campaign in September 2011, first turned to LinkedIn for the purposes of recruitment and corporate promotion. It then moved to Facebook and Twitter, launching the 'Young Achievers Program', a long-term socially responsible initiative targeting youth. E-marketing made the creation and execution of promotional campaigns quicker and more



# COVER STORY

## E-everything

effective. It also provided access to specific market segments which the bank wished to target. “We recorded highly engaged traffic from the young people who were involved in the program. Exactly the right people for us,” said *Paul Boulos*, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communication at BoB. The bank established its Facebook page in September 2012, and reached more than 20,000 fans in four months. “We have more than 150,000 customers at the bank. We intend to match that number and exceed it online,” said Boulos. With around five percent additional marketing budget expenses, the bank’s objective for 2013 is to become the market leader in terms of the number of online channels used and the level of user engagement with its e-marketing platforms. “The challenge is to decide what to sell to online customers, how to make them relate to the products, and then segment them into groups,” said Boulos. To that end, a digital media agency was hired and the bank recruited a media manager to handle content generation and interaction with users. “We get to answer complaints in real time, which gives the organization a closer proximity with the clients,” said Boulos. Across sectors, e-marketing services are receiving more business. “60 percent of our large clients are returning clients and the client base is expanding by 40 percent annually,” said Dfouni. Digital marketing agency PubliScreen saw a 25 percent growth in its client base during the last year and a 15 percent increase in client spending on online media tools.

### BEYOND BUSINESS

E-marketing tools can also cut down on costs for institutions’ corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. BLOM Bank utilized its social networking platforms to raise awareness for the ‘Let’s help de-mine Lebanon’ campaign. It attracted more than 1,400 members, targeting them with awareness messages about the presence and the danger of landmines. In parallel, it launched the ‘BLOM Giving Cards’ campaign, aimed at donating funds to the Lebanese Mine Action Center. “The social networking platforms have helped in expanding our brand image, but also in educating the public about the history of BLOM Bank, its major highlights, along with all the products and services we offer,” said an official in the bank’s Retail Department. He said that the bank decided to increase its budget for such tools during the past three years. This underlines the productivity and viability of e-marketing tools in becoming a must-have component in an organization’s communication strategy.

### DIGITAL CHALLENGES

The promise of e-marketing is that more can be done to reach and serve customers with less resources and more accurate results. The savings in human resources expenses, time, and waste – all of which are byproducts of traditional marketing campaigns – establish the validity of e-marketing as a green option. “Online marketing is now an essential part of the media mix which has to be available to ensure a complete 360 degree approach,” said PubliScreen’s Haber. The sophisticated reporting of results which online marketing provides



allows businesses to measure where they stand through live content generated by their own clients. Companies intending to engage in e-marketing activities should allocate a long-term budget on a strategic basis, not for a one-time temporary marketing campaign. On average, a company will need a five to ten percent increase in its annual budget to fund its e-marketing campaigns. With today’s growing competition for consumer attention, companies need to be meticulous and creative in their ads. “It is best for companies to change their ad every ten days or so, or run the same ad but in a different layout and text,” said Dfouni. Patience is key when planning to invest in social platforms, as the results are mostly reaped in the long run. With traditional marketing still ingrained in the ad culture of local customers, companies should not take e-marketing methods for granted. “E-marketing can complement traditional marketing but it does not replace it,” said Boulos. E-marketing activities and traditional media should run in coordination with each other in order to maximize reach. Companies should also consider that the digital market is constantly changing, and ensure a continuous optimization of their plans to adapt to changes in the digital sphere. This serves the company’s long-term strategic objectives. According to Dfouni: “Once you go digital, you cannot come back.”

*Reported by Nader Houella*

### ON OUR WEBSITE

More information is available by typing the numbers below into the **Reference Finder** on our home page

- ▶ [L1113-91](#) Market Insights
- ▶ [L1113-92](#) E-marketing: The way forward
- ▶ [L1113-93](#) How to develop an interactive marketing strategy
- ▶ [L1113-94](#) Effective e-mail marketing techniques
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