



NEXT MARKETING
AGENCY

— 10 —

WAYS TO USE DATA
IN YOUR **ONLINE**
MARKETING

INTRODUCTION

The era of data is upon us with marketers and SMEs already making use of data to improve their targeting, exceed their customer expectations and streamline their marketing processes across different platforms. 2015 is the year that those who are still relying on gut instinct to make marketing decisions are likely to fall behind as the marketers who use data start to leap ahead.

The digital marketer's path hasn't always been smooth and there have been issues facing digital marketers comparability across multiple platforms. In fact, a recent survey conducted by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) revealed that the inability to measure mobile data was nominated as the single biggest issue facing digital marketers in 2014.

This looks set to end very soon after a recent announcement by ratings giant Nielsen that it's going to be measuring online ratings from January 2015 onwards. This means that for the first time ever, we will be able to gather and compare data across multiple channels including mobile, tablet, websites and television.

When it comes to data there will be nothing holding us back in 2015. The only problem that remains is how to use all the information that's available to us. In spite of the amount of data readily available now, few business owners and marketers are actually making use of it and in many cases it's because they just don't know what to do with it.

If you're feeling a bit daunted by data, or not sure exactly how it can help your business, this guide is for you. We've put together 10 straightforward ways you can use data to improve your online marketing strategy in 2015 and beyond.



Improve an average area of your marketing

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When it comes to using data for your marketing, finding the right information is half the battle. Many marketers make the mistake of accumulating as much data as possible on absolutely everything and end up buried under a pile of graphs and charts unable to dig their way out. Don't go there!

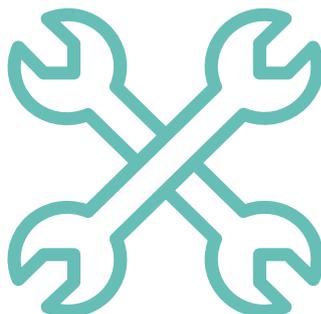
When you're just getting started with data, it's best to ease yourself into it until you get comfortable. Think of one area of your business you'd like to improve and isolate the data you need for that. If you're not sure where to start, here are some common areas that small businesses often struggle with:

- Low website conversion rates
- Not attracting the right kind of leads
- Lack of engagement with social media content
- Low open and click through rates on email marketing campaigns
- Lack of blog or email subscribers

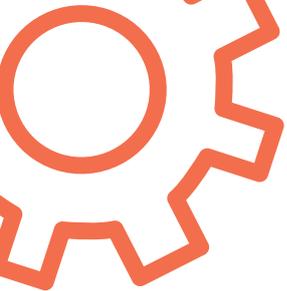
Once you have figured out one or two areas, think about what information would be useful to you and put aside the rest (for now!).

For example, if you're looking to turn more leads into conversions, you will need to collect information on what makes your leads become customers. This may include data about where your leads came from, how long it took them to decide to purchase and what you did in between to nurture them and guide them down the marketing funnel.

Often it only takes a few small adjustments to turn an underperforming area of your marketing into a successful one. Data gives you insight into what's really going on and what changes you need to make.



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MAKE INFORMED MARKETING DECISIONS

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So you're working out your marketing budget for 2015 and you have to decide whether to put your resources into email marketing, content creation for your blog or paid advertising. You're also being bombarded with other difficult questions, like is it worth investing more in mobile marketing, or would that be a giant waste of time?

You might decide to look over previous figures to show where your leads are coming from, combined with your personal gut feeling and a couple of recent blog posts you read about marketing strategy and piece together a plan out of that, but if you dig down into the data you could gain a deeper insight that may give you a completely different idea of what's going on.

CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

Data lets you put simple statistics into context. If you're trying to work out whether to put your resources into email marketing or paid advertising, the first thing you're likely to do is look at which platform is generating the most leads.

Using data lets you go one step further and work out not only where your leads are coming from, but whether they are quality leads or not. Without context and analysis, you only get half the picture and this can lead to poor marketing decisions.

For example, your site might get 100 visitors from Facebook advertising and 70 from marketing emails. If that's the only information you have, you would probably decide that Facebook is the best platform for you but what if out of those 100 visitors only 20 convert (20%), while 35 of your email referrals go on to become customers (50%)? That information tells you that it would be a good idea to focus on generating more leads through email marketing as that's likely to bring you better results in the long term.

It also tells you that you could possibly benefit from looking more closely at your Facebook marketing strategy to make sure you're targeting the right people and nurturing your leads adequately.

You still have a decision to make, but once you have the data you can ensure that it's an informed one and once you do decide, you already have a solid idea of the approach you need to take.





IMPROVE YOUR CONVERSION RATES

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Say you've looked at your data and you can see that you really need to improve your conversion rate from your Facebook advertising, how can gathering more data help you do that?

Drilling deeper into the data you have can show you the demographics of your Facebook visitors and work out whether your social media strategy is successfully targeting the right people. It can give you valuable insights that you can use to analyse the path your audience takes from viewer to customer and figure out how to improve it.

If you want to boost up your conversion rates, the best data driven strategies involve micro-targeting, especially the use of dynamic content.

WHAT IS DYNAMIC CONTENT?

Have you ever been on an e-commerce site like Amazon and added an item to your shopping cart because it appeared in the suggested items sidebar? This is dynamic content and it displays certain items because of the data that the site has gathered from your previous interactions and your demographics. Plenty of e-commerce sites from supermarket chains to high end retailers use this simple trick to encourage you to buy, and buy more from them and it works as long as it's done well.

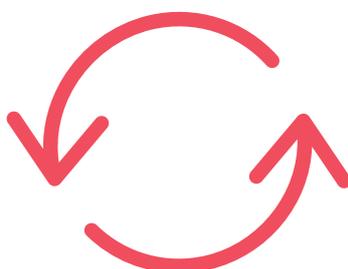
DYNAMIC CONTENT IS NOT JUST FOR E-COMMERCE BUSINESSES

Dynamic content and suggestive selling aren't just for e-commerce sites. When you are running a service based business, conversion often starts by encouraging your audience to stay on your site and browse around for longer.

If you want to encourage your readers to stick around you can use dynamic content to suggest other articles and content that might interest them. By the time they've read five or six there's a good chance you will be fixed in their minds as a reputable source of information and they are more likely to return in the future.

This dynamic content your audience sees is based on their demographics, previous pages they might have visited and what other visitors like them have bought or viewed in the past. Dynamic content personalises each website visitor's experience and can be a very powerful conversion tool.

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BUILD PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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The goal of any savvy marketer is to build ongoing relationships with their audience. Creating a warm and fuzzy vibe helps to foster loyalty and ensure repeat business and referrals and believe it or not data can be used to do this.

On first glance, data might seem a bit cold and impersonal and at complete odds with the softer skills of customer engagement but the insights you get from looking at your data can help you improve your relationships with the people behind it.

LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR CUSTOMERS THROUGH DATA

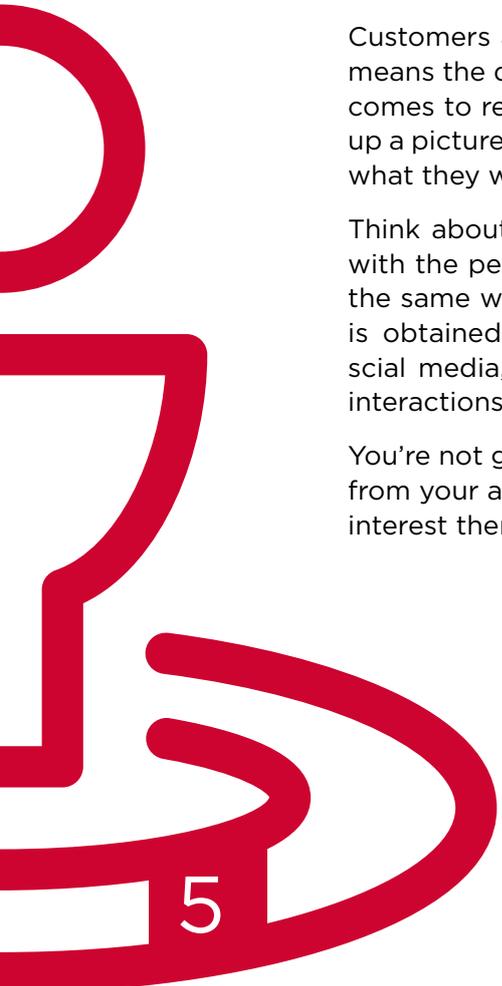
Once you know your customers' personal preferences you can suggest products and services to them and help streamline your systems to anticipate their needs. By making their experience a positive one, you can build a relationship with them and make it more likely they will use you in the future.

USE DATA TO BETTER MEET THEIR NEEDS

Customers are increasingly turning to mobile apps to interact with brands, which means the data collected from these apps is in turn becoming more crucial when it comes to relationship building. The data gathered from apps can be used to build up a picture of each customer as a whole and help you ensure you are offering them what they want, when they want it to better meet their needs.

Think about the personal relationships in your life. Chances are your interactions with the people you know are based on a myriad of different experiences and it's the same with your customers' online experiences. Their impression of your brand is obtained through the different interactions they have with you over mobile, social media, your website and in store. The more streamlined and positive these interactions are, the better your relationship will be.

You're not going to learn absolutely everything about a person by the data you get from your analytics but you should be able to deduce enough to know what might interest them and find a way to provide it to them.



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IMPROVE YOUR EMAIL MARKETING RESULTS

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Even after years, email marketing is still an effective form of marketing and now data can be used to make it even better.

HOW CAN DATA BE USED TO IMPROVE MY EMAIL MARKETING?

The traditional model of email marketing is based largely on the idea of gathering leads from your website, blog or by other means, usually by using an incentive, and then sending them regular email blasts with news and special offers.

Although this can be reasonably effective, a one size fits all approach means that although you hit the mark with some of your recipients, you also miss the mark with others. When it comes to email marketing in 2015, personalisation is the key.

Data can be used to personalise your emails, not only the content, but also the day and time you send them and even the subject lines and format. This form of intense personalisation can make a big difference to the overall outcome of your email marketing as it allows you to tailor your emails to each individual recipient instead of taking a mass approach.

EMAIL MARKETING WITH DATA - THREE WAYS

If you aren't sure where to start, here are three ways you can improve your email marketing using data:

1. Track previous purchases and use dynamic content to display other products that your recipients might be interested in within the email. If the recipient hasn't purchased anything from you yet, use the space to display items others like them have been interested in.
2. Integrate data from online and offline purchases. For businesses with a physical location like retail stores and restaurants, data gives you a great opportunity to take information from your customers' in store purchases and sell to them via email.
3. Personalise emails according to habits. Airlines and travel businesses often do this. For example, if you own a pizza delivery restaurant, and you have a customer who orders three pizzas every Friday night, it makes sense to target them on a Friday afternoon with discounts for their favourite pizza, or a special offer for a dessert they may have looked at previously but not purchased.

The more personalised and relevant your emails are, the more likely they will be successful and data can provide you with a wealth of ways you can personalise and target your email marketing for even better results.

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GET BETTER RESULTS FROM YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

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For many SMEs and marketers the sheer volume of data that's available from social media is overwhelming. From shares, likes, followers and more, it's hard to know where to start when you're trying to improve your social media strategy.

Data can really come in handy for social media marketing if you know what to focus on. When it comes to your social media strategy, the right data can help you:

- Improve your reach across different platforms.
- Increase the number of referrals from social media sites to your website.
- Understand your target audience better.
- Maximise the number of shares and likes, retweets and +1s your posts get.
- Improve your conversion rates from social media.
- Keep an eye on what your competitors are doing on social media.

The data you look at and the approach you take depends on what you want to achieve. Here are three ways you can use your own data to help your business achieve its social media marketing goals.

1. Analyse the people who are currently following you. What is their age, gender, location and are they the type of people who will be the most profitable customers for you? There are a number of different tools available that can help you do this including Followerwonk, Twitonomy and Circloscope.
2. Find out your conversion rates. Having a huge number of followers may seem impressive but it's pointless if none of them turn into paying customers or clients. By looking at how many of your followers are converting you can see whether or not your social media marketing is achieving its aims.
3. Check what types of posts perform well on social media. Most social media analytics platforms let you determine how many likes or shares each post has. This is indispensable when it comes to planning your social media strategy for the future as you can avoid wasting time on content that doesn't interest your audience and spend more time writing content that will get shares and likes.

Social media data also lets you follow your competitors' social media activity and keep up with industry trends so you can refine your overall approach and make sure you're keeping up to date.

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GET IDEAS FOR CONTENT MARKETING TOPICS

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Content marketing may be a buzzword at the moment but no matter how much content you produce, if nobody is interested in reading it, your strategy is going to fall flat very quickly.

So without a crystal ball just how can you know what your audience wants to read? It may not enable you to literally see into your readers' minds, but data can help you gain an understanding of your audience and what issues are relevant and useful for them.

By developing an understanding of who is reading your blog and social media posts, you can help get a better idea of what they might be interested in. You can also use data to determine over time which posts and topics are the most popular with your readers.

Data from tools like Google Analytics can tell you a number of things about your content:

- How many people viewed each post
- How much social engagement there was with each post. Social engagement can cover likes, shares and comments. As a rule, the more engagement there is, the more interested your audience is.
- Which content led to conversions and which didn't.
- What your competitors are writing about and which topics were popular for them.

Armed with this information, you can develop a content marketing strategy that focuses on producing more of the content that gets results and wastes less time on content, which isn't likely to perform well.



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FIND OUT WHAT YOUR COMPETITORS ARE DOING

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When it comes to marketing, knowledge is power especially when it comes to getting the edge over or even just keeping up with the competition.

Although it may sound sneaky, if you want your business to survive you need to have some awareness of what your competitors are up to and to make it easier, there are some great tools around which can let you take a look at your competitors data and compare it to your own.

FIND OUT WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT THE COMPETITION

With tools like Google Alerts and Social Mention you can keep an eye on what people are saying about your competition and receive notifications whenever they are mentioned online. This can give you an insight into any shortcomings, new product releases and customer feedback and is a very valuable way to identify new opportunities for your business.

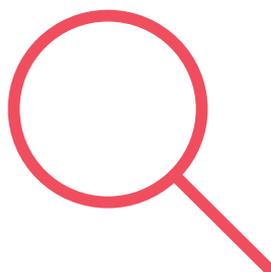
MONITOR COMPETITORS' BACKLINKS

Other tools like Ahrefs and Open Site Explorer allow you to monitor your competitors' backlinks and the quality of the domains that link to them. You can also tell whether the links are do follow or do not follow to build up a good picture of their strategy. Checking out your competitors' backlinks can also let you see possible opportunities you might have missed when building your own backlinks.

ANALYSE THEIR KEYWORD STRATEGY

With tools like SEMRush you can type in a competitor's website and immediately get information about their organic keywords, rank and their Adwords activity including keywords and traffic. This is a great use of competitor data as it lets you analyse their keyword activity and search engine results and learn from them.

Don't let your competitors get the edge over you. With so many tools available you can not only analyse your own marketing strategy but also that of your competition and stay one step ahead.



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FIND OUT WHAT'S ACTUALLY WORKING

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It's all very well to have a marketing plan and put regular effort into it, but how do you know what is actually working?

You have two choices when it comes to evaluating the results of your online marketing. You can create a campaign, run it for a certain length of time and then evaluate the results, or you can test along the way and tweak as you go. Testing as you go means you can identify problems early on and track how your campaign is performing at every turn. This lets you make changes as you go and has the potential to save your business a lot of time and money.

With so many benefits to testing as you go, it's surprising how many businesses don't do it and wait until a campaign is over to analyse whether or not it was successful.

Most social media platforms and email marketing providers let you A/B test as you go so you can get real time feedback and be sure you are getting the most out of your marketing.

HOW DOES A/B TESTING WORK?

A/B testing is very simple. It's most commonly used for email marketing, but can be used for online advertising and other forms of marketing as well. The way it works is that you create two pieces of content that are slightly different, for instance two identical marketing emails with separate subject lines.

You send emails with subject line A to half the people on your list and emails with subject line B to the rest and track the results. Often there can be big differences in the results from seemingly insignificant details like using certain words or phrases. Through A/B testing you can compare and learn about what works best for your particular audience.

Online advertising is another way you can use A/B testing. Most ad platforms let you nominate different headlines or even content for ads and then alternate when they are displayed. By keeping an eye on the performance of each, you will be able to tell very quickly what is the most effective and use this knowledge to improve your campaigns in the future.

A/B testing lets you see what's working as you do it, instead of having to wait for the results of a campaign. By getting in there quickly you can save wasted time and effort and get the most out of each and every campaign as well as gathering valuable information about your audience and what works for future campaigns.



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PREDICTING THE FUTURE

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Data can not only be used to see what's worked in the past and what's working now, these days you can also use predictive analytics to work out how a particular campaign might work in the future.

WHAT IS PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS?

Predictive analytics are used by organisations of all sizes, from huge multinationals to small family run businesses. With increasingly sophisticated technology and predictive tools now becoming available to everyone, it's likely that predictive analytics will play a big role in future business performance.

Predictive analytics goes one step further than just collecting data, it interprets it in a meaningful way to give you an insight into what might happen in the future, based on what has happened in the past. Predictive analytics can give you an idea of the risks you might face, help you uncover and take advantage of new opportunities and help you manage your marketing budget.

HOW DOES PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS WORK?

This very handy tool works by looking for patterns in pre-existing data and using it to provide you with insights into the future. Although it might sound a bit sci-fi, if you use a tool like Google Analytics you are already using a very basic form of predictive analytics. For those who want to use predictive analytics seriously in their marketing there are a range of different tools available.

When it comes to marketing, predictive analytics can be used to predict a customer's future buying behaviour based on previous patterns. This can let you know not only what they might buy in the future, but when they shop and what triggers their buying from you e.g. a marketing email, discount coupon, or an article posted on social media.

Predictive analytics lets you look at trends and patterns and gain insights that can help you not only plan your future strategy, but get an idea of how future campaigns might perform. You can also gain awareness of potential risks and pitfalls so you can avoid them. This is one of the most cutting edge, useful and expanding areas of data and getting to grips with it now can help you adapt your business and drive it forward in the future.

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CONCLUSION

When it comes to the different ways that data can help you in your marketing, we are still only scratching the surface and new tools are being unveiled every day. Although hopefully this guide can give you a few starting points, the best way to find out what data can do for your business is to experiment for yourself.

Data is already playing a big part in marketing and this is only going to increase in the future. Now is the time to start getting to grips with the different tools available to help you integrate data into your business if you want to keep your business current and avoid falling behind.

From planning future marketing strategy to evaluating what's working, monitoring your competitors and improving the performance of your social media and website pages, data has an infinite number of uses for businesses of all shapes and sizes.

The era of data is well and truly here and with the integration of online and mobile data, it's likely that by the end of 2015, businesses will have even more ways to learn about their audience and maximise their marketing results.



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