



DIGITAL MARKETING FOR MSPs

**FROM STRATEGY TO SOCIAL
MEDIA: A 5-STEP GUIDE**



Introduction

As with any form of marketing, digital marketing is essentially all about people – about identifying and connecting with the type of people most likely to be experiencing the IT challenges that your MSP business can resolve. It's about staying on their radar and covering as many touch-points with them as possible.

And it's about doing this without the 'hard sell' associated with some of the more traditional marketing methods.

If you are not a marketing specialist digital marketing can be confusing. The aim of this eBook is to dispel some of the mysteries by providing practical advice to help you with:

- › **Setting up a digital marketing strategy**
- › **SEO**
- › **Email marketing**
- › **Social media**
- › **Online advertising**

1. Setting up a digital marketing strategy

Your prospective buyers must be able to find and connect with you through the digital channels of their choice. So you need a presence in all the places they are likely to look for information about managed services.

Easy to say, but do you have a strategy in place to achieve this? If not, you can try this three-pronged approach to getting started.¹

1. Claim it

Claim your 'digital real estate', including:

- › **Business listings/directories** that matter to your target market. These are important because they are heavily localised and results show prominently in search engines.
- › **Social media** channels that are used by prospective buyers: for MSPs, typically Facebook, LinkedIn, Google, Twitter and YouTube. These are good channels for building your company brand and are also important for SEO because they are picked up by search results pages (particularly Facebook and LinkedIn).
- › **Your website** – the cornerstone of your digital strategy and often the end-destination of visitors from other channels.

A clear, easy to use website is essential. Traffic across the site needs to be monitored constantly to reveal where visitors are coming from, which pages are attracting most interest, whether users 'bounce' after the first page or stay to look around and whether they take up calls to action (CTAs).

Tools are available to help you track activity, including Google Analytics, Google Search Console, Bing Webmaster tools and Google Tag manager.

2. Brand it

Your online brand presence is important because it can enhance your credibility at each stage of the buying process, from awareness right through to action. The following are essential to building up a strong brand presence:

- › Social media
- › Content
- › Business reviews
- › User experience

¹ Dragonsearch Digital Marketing services:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXjZ7ejlCbM&t=1683s>

3. Drive it

This refers to driving lead generation, by marketing to each stage of the sales funnel, using different techniques and content to reflect the different requirements at each point in the buyer's journey:

Awareness → Interest → Consideration → Action

For example, at **the awareness/interest stage**, you should focus on industry content by highlighting common IT challenges for SMBs: the benefits of in-house versus outsourcing; ways of handling security and BDR issues; and the challenge of retaining skilled staff.

At the **consideration stage**, you can focus more on your brand and services: USPs; customer experience as expressed in case studies and testimonials; service details; and SLAs.

By the **action stage**, you need to make it clear how and where to contact you – and how to move to the next level.

Been there; done it?

You may already have a digital marketing strategy in place, but don't forget to carry out regular audits to make sure you're still on track. It is important to set real (and measurable) objectives for each element. Without these, how can you know if your digital strategy is working?



2. Building an SEO strategy that works

If your website is not being found online, or it ranks low-down in search result listings, then your SEO is not delivering.

Even if you top the organic search results, given the increasing number of paid ads taking over the prime spots on listing pages, you may still find your details near the bottom of the page.

If this is your experience, it is something you need to address.

What is SEO?

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) increases your company's online visibility with your target audience. To achieve SEO, you need an effective search marketing strategy, including optimisation techniques and successful keyword strategies; a mobile-friendly website that is technically well-designed; and a constant flow of relevant, high-quality content.

Why is SEO so important for MSPs?

It's important because prospective customers begin their purchase process with an online information gathering exercise. To ensure search engines like Google direct them to your website, you need to leave a clear digital breadcrumb trail and ensure you are visible in all the places your prospects might look.

The search engine sets the rules; what can I do?

While Google (and other search engines) keep their search algorithms secret and change them periodically, the general principles of how they work are known; and the good news is that you can influence them in a number of ways.

'Old school' SEO did this using 'on-page keyword stuffing' and title tags to attract search engine attention. This generally resulted in a poor user experience.

Now, with Google trying to provide users with answers rather than just links, a content-rich, easy to navigate website that is optimised for mobile can result in both an improved experience for your visitors and better organic search performance for you.

Six ways to ensure your SEO strategy works

If your audience is not currently reaching your website perhaps it's time to take another look at your SEO strategy.

1. Make sure your SEO strategy is designed for people not machines

The ultimate consumers of your information are people not search engines. You need to know who your typical buyers are and what is driving them.

In the early information gathering stages, these buyers are probably not looking for your company by name – they are more likely to be searching for solutions to problems.

You need to know what these problems are, so you can create interesting, relevant content that addresses them.

Blogs are a great way of debating current pain points and suggesting how these can be resolved (in generic terms, rather than by giving a full-on sales pitch). The regular addition of new content through blogs will also help with SEO.

2. Review the primary keywords you are using

You need to be sure that you are talking the same 'language' as your target audience in your content. If, for example, a prospective customer is searching on 'preventing cybercrime' but your primary keyword is 'security-as-service' – the two of you may not meet up.

This means identifying all of the words, terms and phrases your prospective customers are using when they search for your services. Are they searching on IT service desk, IT support, network support or something else entirely? If you operate internationally, these terms can often vary by country: IT service provider is a more common term than managed services provider in the US, for example.

Revisit your keyword strategy regularly to ensure it remains current and incorporates any new terms relevant to your audience.

A specialist SEO firm can do this for you – or you can carry out a simple analysis yourself, using some of the free tools available:

- › **Google AdWords Keyword Tool** will take your list of targeted keywords, suggest related phrases and provide data on word 'popularity' (i.e. how many people have searched for this word in the last month) as well as on how many other sites may be using it. It can also help you to identify new keyword opportunities and keep up with trending keywords.
- › **Google Analytics** can help you to identify the keywords that are most successful in driving the appropriate people to your website.

And, of course, you can ask customers and partners what search terms they would use, as well as checking which competitors are using.

3. Address the 'volume versus quality' results conundrum using 'long-tail keywords'

Broad-brush keywords like managed services, IT support, IT service provider and network support are relevant terms and will attract high-volume search results. Unfortunately they will be too generic to put you in the higher rankings – and they may be too general to be of interest to potential customers looking for a specific type of IT support.

Increasingly, MSPs are turning to more specialised descriptors ('long-tail keywords') to refine search results and draw in a higher quality audience. Examples might include: highest SLA rated NOC Services; 24/7 IT Service Desk; or HIPAA-compliant managed services. They may refer to a specific vertical sector if that is your focus: IT services for legal firms or managed services for healthcare. And a location can also be a useful 'long-tail', for example, 'San Diego-based' or 'serving SMBs in Hampshire'.

4. Make sure your website is user-friendly

If potential customers find you, you want them to linger. Reducing your bounce rate (i.e. the percentage of visitors who leave your site after just viewing one page) will also help you to improve SEO.

Apart from ensuring there is a wealth of relevant content to hold visitors on your site, it must be easy to navigate.

Check also that your home page is not so slow in loading that visitors get bored and move on to another MSP's site.



5. Make sure your content is relevant and regular

Content is really important for SEO.

Search engines take content into account when deciding on the best places to direct users to get answers to their questions: both in terms of the value of the content (how often is it accessed, shared, linked to other sites...) and its age – new content is rapidly indexed and ranks higher in the search lists than older pieces.

Regular blogs and social media entries are great ways of keeping your online presence fresh and attractive to search engines.

6. Don't forget the machines altogether

Consider these five tips to make your website more search-engine friendly:

- › Be present on all the social media sites used by your target audience – they are really important for a strong SEO strategy. Facebook and LinkedIn send out strong signals to search engines. User reviews will also be picked up.
- › Be present on all relevant listings such as Google My Business, Yelp, business associations and directories. As well as appearing for name searches, your company will also be included in generic results. Make sure your listing stands out on the page, by including all relevant information – images, maps, contact details and links.

- › Ensure your site is mobile-friendly: this will give you preferential treatment from Google.
- › Ensure all meta-descriptions and 'alt text' (for images) give a clear idea of content and its relevance to searchers.
- › Fix any dead pages or 404 errors.

SEO - an ongoing process

Once you have completed your SEO audit and resolved any issues identified, be patient: improving SEO won't happen overnight. Track progress closely, using the analytical tools mentioned earlier and if you don't see any improvement, be prepared to adapt your strategy.

SEO is a complex area and a time-consuming one. Get it wrong, and your business will not be visible to prospective managed services customers; get it right, and you could be their first port of call.



3. Ensuring email marketing delivers

Executed well, email marketing can be a cost-effective way of keeping your company name in front of your managed services audience, moving prospects through the sales process and nurturing existing customer relationships.

But if you are not seeing the results you were hoping for with your email campaigns, it could be worth taking another look at what you are doing – and what you are not doing.

Six reasons why you should be doing email marketing

1. Claimed to have the highest ROI of any marketing channel.
2. Fast and responsive so it can be used very effectively to react quickly to situations/opportunities that are relevant to your target audience. Recent cyber-attacks such as WannaCry and Petya are examples of these.
3. Highly targeted: you can segment your mailings to suit specific audiences and match their stage in the buying process.
4. Great for brand building and name recognition through regular contact.
5. Measurable: tools are available to track 'open' and 'click-through' rates, so you can evaluate the success of each campaign.
6. Drives traffic to your website, which in turn can have a positive impact on SEO.

Twelve things you should be doing in your email campaigns:

1. **Be clear** as to why you are sending the email. Ask yourself the following:
 - › What are you offering? (headline statement)
 - › Why is it of value? (body copy)
 - › What do you want recipients to do? (CTA – call to action)
2. Keep it **short and simple**. The optimal length of an email is hotly debated, but a study by email app specialist Boomerang found that emails between 50 and 125 words had the best response rates at just above 50%. Response rates declined slowly above this word count to about 44% for 500-word messages. After that, they stayed flat until about 2000 words – then declined "precipitously".²
3. **Speak directly** to your target audience or segment. Tailor your message to meet the needs and background of your various audiences. This may mean segmenting by status (customer/prospect/suspect); country; users of specific IT tools; vertical market; job roles; or seniority (C-level only for example).
4. Ensure content is of **value to the recipients**. Talk about issues that are important to your target audience and offer resources that will help them: white papers, research study results, invitations to industry events and webinars, and customer case studies.

² <http://blog.boomerangapp.com/2016/02/7-tips-for-getting-more-responses-to-your-emails-with-data/>

5. **Personalise** emails. Addressing a named individual rather than sending to 'Dear CIO' (or equivalent) can make the difference between having your message read or not.

6. Think about the **timing**. Take day and time into account when you plan to send out an email campaign. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are often cited as the best days; as for the best time – early morning, late morning and lunch hour have all been quoted as good.

There is no hard and fast rule. Track your own results to see which day and time has most success with your audiences. And don't forget to take account of recipients' local time if you are mailing internationally.

7. Grab attention with a **compelling subject line**. Without this you risk the recipient not even opening the mail. Only 14% of messages that omitted a subject line altogether received a response.³ Again, keep it short – within four words if possible, as response rates have been shown to reduce as more words are added.

8. Provide a clear CTA. One CTA is clear; two is still clear but offers an alternative course; three or more can be confusing.

9. Make the mail **appealing**. Your mail should stand out in the recipient's inbox and entice people to open it:

- › Ask a question to engage – but not too many: emails that ask 1-3 questions are 50% more likely to get a response than emails asking no questions.⁴
- › Use shorter words in shorter sentences.
- › Don't be afraid to express opinions; they can result in a higher response rate – provided they don't become a rant, of course!

10. Make sure your mailing is **optimised for mobiles** and other devices.

11. Try **different variants** to see what gets the best response. Test out different content topics, subject lines, CTAs and signatories to see how these affect your open and click-through rates – then use this information to refine future campaigns.

12. **Keep it going**. A flow of regular emails (not a deluge!) will lead recipients to expect contact from you daily, weekly or monthly, as your resources permit.



^{3,4} <http://blog.boomerangapp.com/2016/02/7-tips-for-getting-more-responses-to-your-emails-with-data/>

Five things you should not do in your email campaigns

1. **Buy lists** of email addresses. If you build your own email database organically (for example, from information requested on your website to access gated resources and from contacts made at events) then recipients should be more likely to recognise you and be more inclined to open your email.
2. **'Scattergun'** Don't be tempted to send everything to everybody. Segmentation and tailoring will reap rewards.
3. Give a **hard-sell**. The focus of your mailing campaigns should be to inform and help, not tell the recipient how wonderful your company is.
4. **Overdo it**. While earlier advice was to email regularly, don't send so many that they end up in spam.
5. **Give up!** Email marketing takes time and many tweaks to get right. The important thing is to track results so you can feed in this information as you build future campaigns.

One big thing you should be working on

Email marketing could become more demanding from May 2018, when the requirements of the **EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** come into force.

Are you ready for GDPR?

If you are based in the European Union (EU), or you do business there, GDPR will introduce more stringent requirements to the way you use marketing emails and SMS messages – specifically regarding the way you handle and protect people's data and share it across different marketing activities. GDPR is all about accountability, and non-compliance will result in significant fines.

With less than a year to go, however, there is still a lack of awareness among some MSPs – and a lack of preparedness among many of those who will be affected. By this stage you should at least have identified where your data is stored, how it is being used and what policies are in place to govern how it can be used.

If you are still working through the detail, you may find useful some of the publications from the **UK's Information Commissioner's Office**. It has an entire section of its website devoted to GDPR, including a helpful **twelve step guide**.⁵

And of course there is the **European Union's GDPR website** too.

Email marketing can be very powerful in driving your digital marketing efforts, reinforcing awareness of your services, bringing visitors to your website and, ultimately, generating sales leads.

While things will become more onerous in 2018, GDPR shouldn't deter you from using email as an effective marketing tool; after all, GDPR can also be viewed as an opportunity to strengthen brand credibility by demonstrating good data protection.

⁵ Preparing for the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 12 steps to take now <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1624219/preparing-for-the-gdpr-12-steps.pdf>

4. Tracking your social success

Are you getting as much benefit as you anticipated from social media marketing? Maybe you've ticked all the social media boxes but your strategy still isn't delivering the goods. Do you even know how well you're doing?

There was a time when social media was considered a bit of an irrelevance for B2B.

Now that view has changed.

Social media offers great opportunities to make your MSP business more visible – both locally and globally. And if the figure of two billion plus social media users worldwide doesn't convince you, then the fact that your customers, partners and prospects all expect you to have a strong social media presence should.

Most MSPs reading this will already be using social media as part of their marketing strategy. But how many can quantify how effective it is – or even be confident that they are tracking the most appropriate metrics?

Many of us are struggling to link social media impact to specific business outcomes – perhaps through lack of time, resources or expertise.

Some 44% of marketers say they haven't been able to show the impact of social at all, with another 36% saying they have a good sense of the qualitative, but not quantitative, impact of social initiatives.⁶

It's certainly more complex than counting the number of 'likes'.

So, what should you be measuring? Inbound traffic? The number of leads? Increased sales and referrals? All of the above?

It depends on what you want to achieve and the tactics you use.

Your social media goals are likely to include the following:

- › Build awareness of your company and services particularly among new audiences
- › Engage regularly with customers and prospects
- › Increase credibility by developing a reputation as an industry thought-leader
- › Promote customer loyalty
- › Drive leads for the sales team

For each goal, you need specific targets. For example, your goal may be to capture leads for the sales team – but how many and by what date? How many of these leads do you expect to convert into sales? How much revenue would result?

Key performance indicators (KPIs) must be specified for each so you can measure how you are doing in terms of meeting your goals.

Easier said than done!

Marketing Agency Metia⁷ has produced this sample measurement plan, which you may find helpful as a starting point.

An example measurement plan

Objectives

Build awareness of the company and its solutions among net new audience.



Tactics

Reach new, relevant audience with a video published through social media advertising.

KPIs

- › Impressions
- › Video starts
- › Views to 75% of video duration
- › Engagements
- › New followers generated
- › Traffic referred to website
- › % traffic from new users

Tools

-  Social media platform analytics
-  Website analytics

Objectives

Develop the company's reputation as an industry leader.



Tactics

Publish blog posts with firm opinions on the topics that matter to the target audience. Market these blog posts through social media.

KPIs

- › Impressions
- › Engagements
- › Link clicks
- › Blog views
- › Scrolls to 75% of blog length
- › Visitors who view multiple pages
- › Visitors who return to the site within 30 days

Tools

-  Social media platform analytics
-  Website analytics

Objectives

Generate revenue by capturing leads for the sales team.




Tactics

Incentivise lead capture through gated content that appeals to the target audience's challenges and motivations. Market this content through social media.

KPIs

- › Impressions
- › Engagements
- › Link clicks
- › Landing page views
- › Lead capture form starts
- › Lead capture form submissions
- › Qualified leads generated
- › Revenue generated

Tools

-  Social media platform analytics
-  Website analytics
-  CRM

⁶ Forrester Research: <https://www.channele2e.com/business/marketing/there-are-no-right-social-kpis/>

⁷ <https://www.metia.com/blog/2017/may/the-b2b-marketer-s-quick-guide-to-measuring-social-media-marketing/>

Metrics that can inform your KPIs

Once you have a plan to work to, where do you get the metrics you need to inform your KPIs?

A wealth of stats are available from social media channels – so many in fact that they can be overwhelming.

Total Product Marketing (TPM)⁸ has produced a useful summary table of the main metrics available and how they can help.

Beware the so-called ‘vanity metrics’; these flatter the company ego rather than deliver real insight.

10 social media ROI metrics worth measuring⁹

Social metric	What does it measure?	Use it for
Follower count	What marketers call a “vanity metric,” follower count is not as important as you might think. The size of your following doesn’t matter if they aren’t engaged and interacting. Focus on follower quality, not quantity; after all, one influential fan can be more valuable than 1000 unengaged followers.	Measuring follower count growth rate in the early stages of building your social profiles. Initially, it can be an indicator of the health of your social strategy.
Impressions	The number of times a post appears in a social feed.	Learning how the channel and timing of posts affect the visibility of your content.
Reach	The number of people who see a post. One person may see a post multiple times, so reach is often less than impressions.	Gaining context by seeing the total possible audience for your social content.
Engagement	Likes, favourites, retweets, shares, mentions, and comments are signs of engagement. Like follower count, these can be “vanity metrics,” but tracking them over time can help you spot useful trends.	Understanding what kinds of posts and content capture attention.
Engagement rate	The percentage of your followers – or of all people who see a post (your reach) – who interact with that post. Number of interactions/followers (or total reach).	Assessing and comparing the success of social campaigns.

^{8,9} <https://totalproductmarketing.com/social-media-roi-metrics-matter/>

Social metric	What does it measure?	Use it for
Traffic	The number of people who visit your website by clicking a link in a social post or profile. A similar but more refined metric is ‘clicks to website by source’, which breaks down traffic by social media channel.	Learning whether your social strategy is generating web traffic and which channels and content are most effective.
Click-through rate (CTR)	The percentage of people that click a link you post in order to view your content. Number of clicks/impressions, reach, or followers.	Another tool for assessing and comparing the success of social campaigns or individual posts.
Bounce rate	The percentage of people who abandon your website, or content, after viewing one page. If followers continue to another page after your landing page, your bounce rate decreases. Tip: Tracking CTR with bounce rate can reveal if a compelling tweet is leading to a weak landing page or vice versa.	Compare the bounce rate of visitors who come from a social post with the bounce rate of those who visit from other sources. If your social media bounce rate is lower than Google, for example, it’s an indicator you’re engaging quality followers.
Multi-touch attribution	Measuring attribution from social media is tricky, but the ‘multi-touch model’ is generally the most useful (though it may require an advanced analytics tool). Unlike last-click attribution, which gives all credit for a conversion to the customer’s last touch-point, multi-touch attribution distributes credit across each interaction in the customer’s conversion journey.	Determining when, where, and how social media plays a role in driving conversions.
Traffic-to-conversion rate	Whether your conversion goal is email signups, content downloads or sales, this is the percentage of visitors from social channels who complete the goal.	Identifying your highest-converting social tactics as well as weak links in your conversion funnel.

These metrics will help you to track the impact of your social media content and can be a good indicator of how well social media campaigns are driving your strategic marketing goals.

Combined with your CRM analytics, they could also help you to quantify a tangible value to your business from social media by enabling you to track and attribute a notional social media contribution to revenue.

Social media is all about connecting with people, but its importance lies in connecting with the right kind of people - the people who are most likely to be interested in your managed IT services and influence the decision to partner with you.

Tracking social media metrics will help you to identify the social channels and campaigns that are most successful with your target audience and see where you get greatest returns. You can build on that feedback when planning future campaigns.

Are you a social success? I think we're all still learning, but being able to measure just where we are on the 'success scale' is a good start.

And if you feel that the organic benefits from social media are too slow coming your way, you may decide to give your online presence a boost by paying for online advertising.

5. Paying to play with online advertising



Can you continue to rely solely on SEO marketing to bring traffic to your website? Are your social media campaigns failing to extend beyond the audience that already knows you? Are you wondering what else you should be doing to drive new business from your digital marketing campaigns?

Increasingly, MSPs are looking to fill these gaps and increase conversions using paid online advertising. If you are one, it's time to consider the options available to you.

For MSPs, the three most relevant online advertising platforms are: Google AdWords, Google Remarketing and paid advertising on social media, such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

A reminder of what they offer

The table below based on Total Product Marketing's article **The Best PPC Platforms for MSPs**¹⁰ shows a brief description of each, together with a useful summary of pros and cons. You may find it helpful as a guide when considering online advertising options.

¹⁰ <http://talkincloud.com/cloud-computing-sales-strategies/best-ppc-platforms-mmps>

Platform	Description	Good for MSPs because	Not so good for MSPs because
<p>Google AdWords The focus here is on Search ads rather than Display ads, as these are most relevant to MSPs.</p>	<p>Search ads appear next to the Google search results of people looking for the products and services you offer.</p> <p>You are charged only when people click to visit your website or call your business.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Highly targeted to search terms (keywords). › The largest potential reach in terms of leveraging Google. › Ability to target by location, keywords, interests, device and more. › Ideal for local or international campaigns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › High levels of competition when, for example, the most in-demand search terms are combined with crowded locations such as London, so can be expensive. › Conversion tracking can be challenging for longer sales cycles. › Easy to 'set and forget' – but you need to continuously monitor and tweak your campaign.
<p>Google remarketing</p>	<p>Allows you to target previous visitors to your website with display ads shown on other websites or as they search Google for terms related to your services.</p> <p>You can target all visitors or focus on specific criteria – such as those who visited a specific page but did not take up the call to action.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Shows who saw your ad but didn't click it (view-through conversion tracking). › Easy to target the ad by placing a tracking code on your website to reach people who have visited. › Generally more cost-effective than AdWords. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › You are relying on the initial traffic flow. › Not so effective at reaching new audiences.
<p>Paid social media For MSPs, the preferred platforms seem to be Facebook Ads and LinkedIn.</p> <p>Both have B2B-specific targeting mechanisms so can be very effective at putting content in front of your target audience in the early stages of information gathering.</p> <p>Targeting can be specific where you know the names of the companies/people you want to connect with – or wider, where you specify e.g. vertical sector, company size and job title.</p>	<p>Facebook Ads Once considered the preserve of B2C marketers, Facebook is now accepted as a useful B2B platform. Facebook Link Click Ads for example can help to send people to your landing pages or blog posts when you insert sponsored content in your targets' news feeds. As a side benefit they may generate 'likes' for your page too.</p> <p>LinkedIn Pre-eminent for business and professional networking.</p> <p>It has a smaller audience than Google and Facebook, but claims to offer B2B the 'right' kind of users rather than volume users. LinkedIn offers three major options for self-service advertising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › sponsored content › sponsored InMail, and › text ads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Extensive targeting options, including custom audiences, locations and connections. › Encourages interaction and content sharing, so good for engaging target audience. › Can be more cost-effective per click. › Flexible: easy to change the objective of the ad. › Works particularly well for ads with eye-catching visuals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Claims to be the #1 social media platform for content distribution, with 94 percent of B2B marketers using LinkedIn for this purpose.¹¹ › Member demographics skew higher for both salaries and job responsibility than memberships of other social networks. › Historically, LinkedIn advertising has lagged behind Facebook and Google, in terms of targeting capabilities – the new 'matched audiences' tool has addressed this however. › LinkedIn's self-serve ad interface is designed to be easy enough for small businesses to use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Competition is increasing. › Supporting content and other channels may be needed to engage your audience. › Ads can easily get lost in the noise. › Lots of trial and testing are required. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › LinkedIn is still often perceived as a recruiting platform. How many users are just looking to change jobs? › Because it gives access to a higher-value audience, advertising can come at a premium price although the conversion rate can be higher, making the cost per lead acceptable. › Because you are likely paying more, it is all the more important to carefully identify your buyer personae and ensure calls to action are perceived of value by them.

¹¹ B2B Content Marketing 2016 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America report, quoted in <https://business.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/business/en-us/marketing-solutions/products/pdfs/LISponsoredContentDatasheet5-2-16.pdf>

Identifying the best online advertising option to drive new business for you

It is one thing knowing the options; quite another to decide which is best for you. When you start out, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the statistics being bandied around.

If it's reach you're looking for, Google Search has over a billion users, Facebook has two billion; LinkedIn claims more than 500 million members; and Twitter's average monthly active users (MAUs) reached 328 million in Q1 2017.

But how many of these are likely prospects for your managed IT services?

The only way to discover this is to try each of them out for a limited period and see how they compare in terms of delivering the most conversions (i.e. number of people who take the action you want them to).

Considering the cost

Ultimately, it may come down to cost – in which case your available marketing budget may be making the decision for you.

As noted earlier, **Google AdWords** can work out expensive for MSPs – unless you can identify keywords that aren't so hotly contested. You can get an idea of likely cost by searching on the keywords to see how many competitors you are vying with and by using tools such as Google Ad's Keyword Planner or SEMrush (www.semrush.com) to help.

Google remarketing can be a more cost-effective option, but it is also more limited in its ability to reach new audiences so may not be the best option if your goal is to drive new business leads.

Increasingly, MSP money is going on **social media advertising** – Facebook Ads and LinkedIn in particular.

LinkedIn can also be expensive, but if its business focus means that your campaign will result in a higher number of conversions, then it could be the best investment.

Twitter is significantly cheaper than LinkedIn and while not specifically a business channel, it is used by business people. Users can be targeted by the accounts they follow or the keywords they use, so it is relatively straightforward to identify your target audience.

Then there are **Facebook Ads**. Facebook is considered to offer more value for money for MSPs, with a significantly lower cost-per-click (CPC) than Google AdWords – although it is difficult to find meaningful comparative figures. If you get a significantly higher *conversion rate* from your Google AdWords campaign, then obviously that would be the best investment for you.

Short of using a crystal ball, when selecting one (or more) options, it really does come down to assigning a modest budget to try each. Suggested figures range from \$2,000–\$5000 for this trial period – and the results will hopefully give you a feel for what will work best for you.

Why you should consider 'pay to play'

1. It's fast: to set up and to see results.
2. It's measurable: everything from costs, number of views, clicks, conversions – and much more can be tracked.
3. It's not affected by any changes made to the ranking algorithms of Google or other search engines.
4. It's flexible so you can segment your target audience, tailoring ads to specific prospects at specific times and on preferred devices.
5. It's very effective for generating local interest thanks to highly developed location targeting.
6. You are in control of what you spend.
7. You only pay when your ad is clicked.
8. It's an effective way to test out new services and gain information that can be applied to other digital marketing campaigns – identifying the most successful keywords, for example.

Why wouldn't you?

If you consistently appear among the first half-dozen companies in the search listings – and have a steady flow of traffic to your website, you may not need to use online advertising right now.

If, on the other hand, your website is not being found and you are not immediately visible in search rankings, then it's probably worth assigning some budget and giving it a try.

In a crowded managed services marketplace you need to be using every marketing tool at your disposal to raise your visibility.



Conclusion

Where to start?

Deciding where to direct your marketing resource first is no easy task given that the various digital elements are so closely intertwined.

Having in place a clear, measurable digital strategy is a prerequisite.

After that, content is probably the best place to start, given that it underpins most digital marketing tactics.

A regular flow of high-quality content (such as blogs, case studies and thought-leadership pieces) will attract visitors to your website, inform social media posts and email campaigns – and help to improve SEO rankings.

Unfortunately many MSPs have limited sales and marketing resources in-house – indeed in smaller businesses, the owner or CEO is often responsible for these activities alongside the running of the company.

Partnering can help

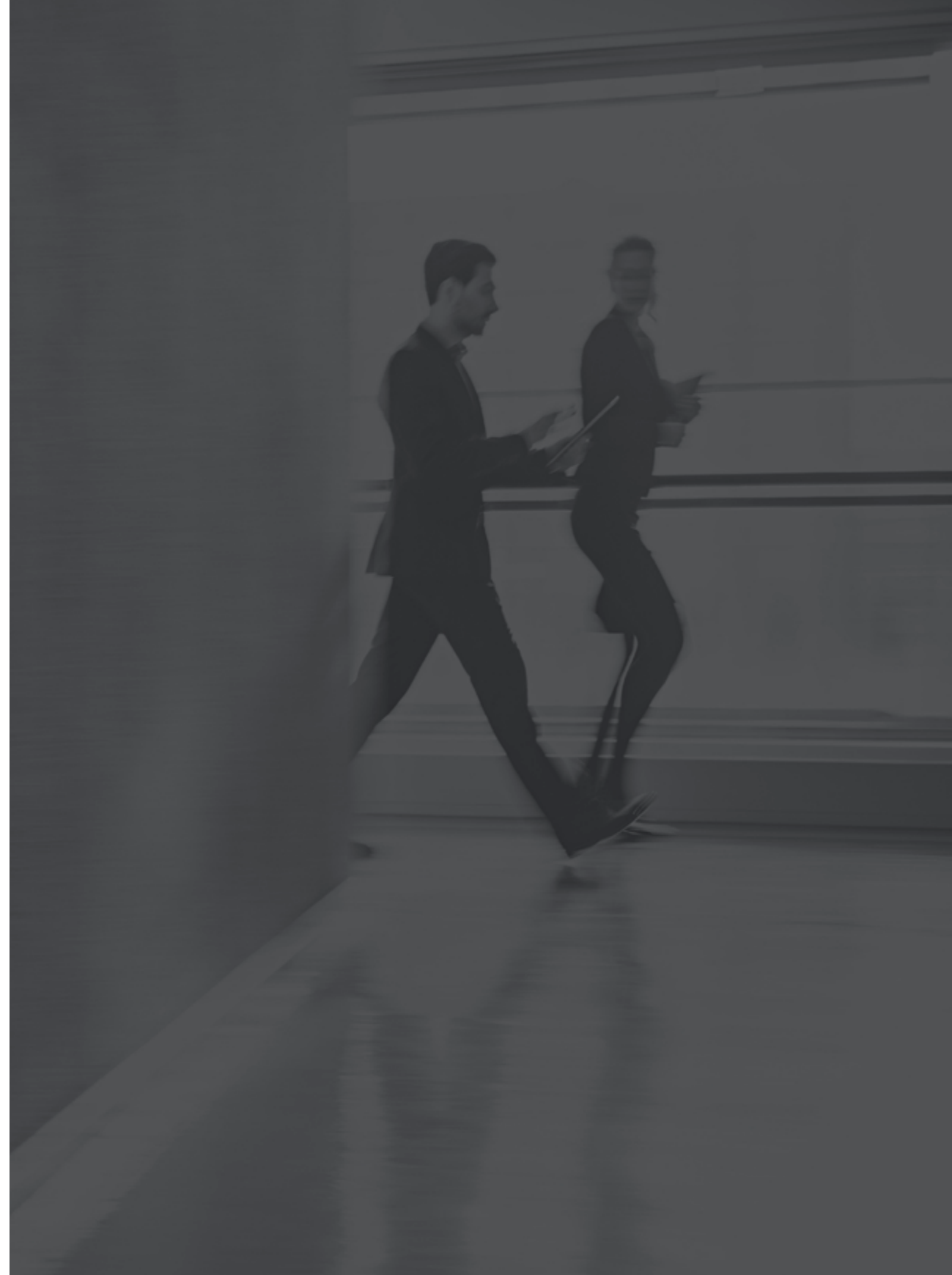
Rather than struggling to deliver on digital, you could always take a leaf from your own sales book and consider outsourcing some or all of your digital marketing to one or more of the many specialist agencies.

And on the subject of partnering, if you would like to free up more of your time to focus on your digital marketing strategies, contact us to see how partnering for NOC and Service Desk can help you to do just that.

Find out more

To find out how we can help you take your MSP to the next level just get in touch with one of our partner specialists today.

 www.inbay.co.uk



ABOUT INBAY

Providing exceptional service to our partners' clients is our number one priority. Inbay has been providing specialist IT support since 2003, first as an MSP and now as a trusted partner to MSPs on an international basis.

We have built a reputation for helping our partners grow their managed services businesses by providing the highest quality service desk, NOC and project services at a fair price.

Operating from our headquarters in London, we offer MSPs 24/7 support to complement and extend their own resources, enabling them to scale cost effectively and drive profitable growth.

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