

10 Ways to Apply Your Digital Marketing Budget Besides SEO (That can actually work)



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To have put all this effort into systematically dismantling an entire sub-industry, and then not to offer any alternative solutions would be very bad form indeed.

Fortunately, the vast reaches of the web offer limitless possibilities for any company to promote their message. Between all the available channels and platforms, tools and technologies, strategies and tactics, there is a plan that will work for every company.

The trick is to find that right combination — the digital marketing mix — that works for your unique strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

One thing is for sure: You'll have plenty of other ways to spend the budget you saved by cutting out the deadwood SEO.

This report is not so much a hard-hitting investigation, as much as a collection of ideas to stimulate your thinking about all the ways you can amplify your voice in the blaring cacophony of the digital marketplace.

With that said, let's explore the 10 Ways to Apply Your Digital Marketing Budget Besides SEO.

SEO Blocking and Tackling

If we haven't been clear enough on this point, I'll reiterate that we don't intend to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Certainly there are tasks generally associated with SEO that provide benefits. No doubt the Pareto Principle applies here as well — 20% of the SEO tasks result in 80% of the benefit, and vice versa. Though we think the percentages are probably more extreme — maybe 90%-10%.

At any rate, the SEO effort that will provide you the most bang for your buck are the simple blocking and tackling tasks that can be handled in a couple of afternoons and on an ongoing basis by any number of staff — without the aid of an 'SEOers'. They don't require any special skills. It's just a matter of knowing to do them and then just doing them.

Here are the 11 most important SEO tasks and who can handle them:

Adding the key terms and good descriptions in the meta tags of every page

There are those dreaded words... "Meta Tags"! (gasp) Like some kind of arcane technical mystery. All that means is information about the document in a format Google likes. And there's only two that really matter: Title and Description.

Every page on all of your properties, including your website proper, blog, landing pages, resource pages, etc. should have:

```
<meta name="title" content="Headline containing the key phrase that describes the page.">  
<meta name="description" content="Longer description that contains the key phrase as close to the  
beginning as possible and a couple other relevant phrases for context in 160 characters or  
less.">
```

That's all.

Someone on the team needs to write those two things for every page. And the web developer can deploy them. And it isn't like they even have to get into the code. Most every platform has a simple form field on the page editor to populate this data. It's copy-and-paste.

Including the key terms in <h1> and <h2> tags on every page

Chances are, the meta-title will serve as the visible <h1> and the meta-description will be the <h2>. Why wouldn't you do it that way? That's the easy way to do it. And if they do match, Google will like it and reward you for it (ever so slightly).

So write it once — deploy in two places. Easy.

The other advantage of having two people like a content developer and the web developer both responsible for a part of this exercise is that they can hold each other accountable.

Link your internal pages to relevant places in your own site

This task can be a bit tedious, because you have to find the most appropriate pages to link from the most important points. But the tedium has nothing to do with creating links. That part is easy and just takes a few minutes. The hard part is deciding on the best things to link on and where to link to, and this requires subject matter expertise (though AI can increasingly help with this chore).

Ideally, it will be the author of each article — the person with the insight into the main points they are making — who should choose what to link to. And they should do it primarily because it adds to the substance and clarity of the message for the reader, not to satisfy Google.

So you see, this isn't really an SEO job. It's content development best practice, and the SEO just takes care of itself.

Link your internal pages to highly relevant external pages

Here's the one where many digital marketers draw the line. There's no way they're going to create a link leading off their site, for fear of losing traffic. And that goes triple for competitors' websites. This type of marketer sees the Web as a closed system in which they are trying to

capture as much of a finite quantity of visitors time and attention, and deprive that to their competition, if possible.

The problem for those types of marketers is that Google loves links to high-quality, relevant, external sites — a lot.

By depriving their competitors of oxygen (i.e. no external links) and trying to conserve the little oxygen they have (i.e. extend visitor time-on-site), they end up restricting the source of oxygen — the Google Algorithm — to themselves.

The other type of marketer realizes that the people behind those clicks are going to find your competitors one way or the other, as soon as they get bored with your site, which is probably pretty soon unless you keep the flow going. And they know that the best way to do that is to pass the ball off to other sites and wait for it to bounce back to you, eventually.

The open-minded marketer understands that the Human Beings who are checking out their site probably deduce for themselves who you are and what your place is in the sphere of what they are looking for or care about. They might appreciate helpful links to information that actually moves them toward *their* goals — not yours. They might even subconsciously admire your quiet confidence to send visitors off to other sites that could very well capture their attention, knowing that those visitors will be back soon enough as prospects when their search eventually leads them to the finalists.

I don't know how many marketers fall into either of these arbitrary categories, and we have no statistical evidence to support my hypothesis. (Help Google Gemini!)

Perhaps we should put that to the test. It would be easy enough to take a poll.

The point is: The Google Algorithm loves external links, so if you've got the heart for it, feel free to distribute them liberally throughout your content.

And in the End, the clicks you get... are equal to the links... you send. (Apologies to Paul McCartney)

Optimize your images (file size, name, alt tags)

As a person who has spent way beyond my 10,000 hours in the back-end of websites mucking around in files and code, we can attest to the appalling state of so many websites out there in terms of what people do with images. Massive 2K images compressed to 200 pixels with HTML attributes. Files named whatever hash the program they were using automatically gave it because the person who created the image couldn't be bothered to name it, and the person who uploaded it to the website also couldn't be bothered. That kind of thing.

Never mind Alt Tags.

Let's just say there is probably plenty of room for improvement in terms of optimizing your images. So this one falls into the category of a solid afternoon's work to go through and just get all the images updated with:

- Files names include keywords
- Include keywords in Alt Tag
- Physically sized to match the dimensions on the page

This would be a great exercise for your web developer to do using AI to help automate this process.

Optimize your page load speed

This is a job for your web developer as well. You do NOT want a novice SEOers messing around with your Wordpress plugins trying to minify your JavaScript or something like that.

Not to say that it's that complicated. Any competent web developer with the aid of AI and all the other resources available should easily be able to address all the biggest issues within a matter of hours.

What you don't want to do is go too far in your attempts to optimize performance. The solutions tend to end up conflicting with each other and creating bigger problems at a certain point.

Ensure your website is optimized for mobile

Google loves mobile, too. This is another job for your web developer. It doesn't really have anything to do with SEO. Just make sure that all of your templates and images are mobile friendly.

There are all kinds of tools and, of course, AI, to help ensure everything on your site is as mobile-friendly as it can be. So this is another one of those that, if this area has also been neglected on your site, should take your web developer a day or less to get up to speed.

And hopefully it goes without saying that you then need to include 'mobile friendliness' in the weekly website maintenance routine — not for the sake of Google's Algorithm, but for the sake of the people visiting your site on their mobile devices.

Ensure you have a clear navigational structure that incorporates key words

Most companies probably already get this right. Certainly you understand your business well enough to arrange it logically into a menu structure. It's not a technical challenge for the web developer. So there's really not a lot to say about this one. It's only included because it is so consequential (relatively speaking).

I guess the reason it is so consequential is the same reason that meta tags are important, and the <H1> tags, and link names and others. Google would like you to spell everything out as

explicitly as possible. That's what meta tags are. They tell Google exactly what this page is about. The <H1> tags should spell it out in the fewest words possible. And the navigational structure should be the clearest possible blueprint of your company.

Google has incredibly powerful AI-driven software and massive data centers all focused on inferring everything they possibly can about you from the environment around you. But it also wants your explicit details. They go hand in hand.

Set up a Sitemap

Sitemaps is exactly the same data as in the navigation taxonomy, that is, the navigation menus of your website, only it is presented to Google in a more structured format, specifically XML. Sure, Google can read your navigation menu, recognize it as such, identify keywords within it, and assign keyword relevance based on that. But when that information is embedded within layers of HTML, CSS, JavaScript, JQuery and more, Google servers have to work pretty hard to figure all that out.

Sitemaps are a way for you to deliver that same information in a clear, unambiguous manner. The XML format not only doesn't make Google's crawler dig so hard for the relevant data, but it provides metadata that makes it that much easier for Google to read it. That's why Google wants you to have a sitemap, and why they'll reward you for it.

And the great news is, you can have a sitemap at the click of your finger. Any web developer worth their salt will have already set up the sitemap on Day One. But if they haven't, it's probably a native feature of whatever platform you're on (Wix, SquareSpace, Shopify). If you're on Wordpress, Joomla, Drupal, or the like, there is certainly a plugin/extension available. Just Google it.

Set up schema markups on your web pages

Schema markups are another form of structured microdata that provide additional context about the content to search engines like Google. This markup helps search engines understand the content better, resulting in more informative and visually appealing search results.

Specifically, it collects very specific kinds of data for different types of objects, found on the web, such as:

- Creative works:
 - Book
 - Movie
 - Music Recording
 - Recipe
 - TV Series
- Embedded non-text objects
 - Audio Object

- Image Object
 - Video Object
- Event
- Health and medical types
- Organization
- Person
- Place
 - Local Business
 - Restaurant
 - Etc.
- Product
- Review
- Action

For each object type, there is a specific set of data that is expected. For example, the Restaurant object will have fields such as 'Hours of Operation', 'Type of Food', 'Address', 'Phone', etc. In order for any entity of this type to show in SERPs, they need to have all this data included properly. That way, Google can easily design display templates around these specific object types, allowing for consistent appearance when they are placed in a web page.

If you're paying attention, you will have noticed that schema markups are doing just the same thing as headings, meta tags, alt tags, and sitemaps. All these elements provide Google with all the relevant information about your site in a structured way. With those specific details about your business and site understood clearly, Google can then employ its AI to determine just where you fit in the scheme of things relative to every other site.

As we addressed above, SEO work is not as much about keyword relevance or even popularity at all as it is doing all these web dev tasks that feed the essential information to Google in the most efficient way possible in order to help Google deliver more search results with less energy consumption.

But they will make a difference in your search results. And more good news... none of them are rocket science or any kind of a challenge for your web developer.

It's all in a day's work. And no SEOers required.

Make sure your social properties and website regularly reference each other

Obviously you should have your social links easily accessible from every page of your site. And by all means include references and links to social posts on your blog. Naturally you're going to be posting on social media to promote your latest blog post or podcast. And you're going to do your best to get others to mention you on their social and like and engage with your stuff.

Do we really need to spell this out? we don't think so. That's what a social media marketer does.

Is an SEO expert going to add any valuable insight into how to optimize page rank by doing your social media just so? No. They are not.

Perhaps you've noticed a pattern here, which really wasn't clear to me when we started writing this. There are really two types of SEO:

- 1) Giving Google just the details in the most structured way possible, which is usually quite simple because it is so clear-cut.
- 2) Producing useful, interesting, content that people like to engage with and share, and eventually gaining popularity and authority.

There are no tricky tricks needed for either of these. In the former case, it's so basic and structured there's no way to game it. In the case of the latter, the AI that figures out what people like is far too complex for anyone to game it.

So there you have it. All the SEO you really need, broken down into a few hours (or days at most) of work to ensure everything is shipshape, and then a few simple daily or weekly tasks and maybe a quarterly tune-up.

And with that out of the way, you can focus your precious attention on the plethora of channels available to generate all the visitors you need.

Paid Search

Life is so much easier once you accept the fact that if you want to thrive on the Web you just need to pay tribute to Google. Forget about the free traffic fantasy. If you want to make it on the Web today, you pay your money and you get your clicks.

Sure, you're still competing with all of Google's whirly gizmos, and dozens of paid search competitors, most of them bigger than you. You're still restricting yourself to the long-tail words, because the root terms are just too expensive.

You're still in the middle of an arms war. But at least now you're involved in air-to-air dogfights instead of hand-to-hand combat on the front line.

"Not Fair!" You say? Maybe so. But that's just how it is. And always has been, really.

In the digital marketing world, as in the wider tech world, as in the whole world at large, if you have the money to pay for what you want or need, you just do that. Simple. If you don't, you have to figure out a way to make something out of nothing by applying your ingenuity, your determination, and your time.

So Google Ads is for companies with plenty of money. We find as a general rule that the table stakes for a Google Ads program is a budget of at least \$2,000/month. Anything less than that

and you're likely to see your campaigns sputter and stall — like a Lamborghini trying to tool along at 20 MPH.

I'll cover other ways that scrappy entrepreneurs and SMBs can apply themselves to compensate for a lack of funds below.

But just to indulge in a little ironic consolation, you might like to know that many, if not most, of those companies that are flush with cash and pumping a bunch of it into Google Ads don't even bother to check even the most basic settings, and are hemorrhaging money with little to show for it.

So while the low-dollar masses are blowing their budgets on SEO, the monied class are blowing theirs on PPC.

It reminds me of the whole crack and cocaine situation in the 80s.

Organic Social Media

Don't have thousands of dollars a month to spend on Google Ads? OK, then you'll have to build your traffic the hard way — starting by cranking out lots of content, and promoting it on social media.

Organic social media is similar to organic search in that it is also considered a long game strategy and as such is difficult to accurately track. You'll have to work hard to find those few leads, let alone customers, who can be attributed originally to organic social. More often, some forms of social engagement are in the mix of sources attributed to any given visitor, but it's not usually the click that leads to the lead capture or sale.

As with pretty much every other channel, what is really going on here is that Organic Social engagement accrues to an overall awareness that floats around like a mist in the ether, which occasionally condenses into a direct or Branded Organic click.

Paid Social Media

Paid Social can be a great alternative to Paid Search. Depending on the nature of your business, promoting your products and services directly through the appropriate social platforms can be very cost effective, possibly the most cost-effective traffic you can generate.

Social platforms like LinkedIn, FaceBook, TwitterX, Instagram, TikTok and all of the others provide the ability to laser-target your markets, and are increasingly employing AI to further target your paid ads.

Generating content for social media and then not using paid social to amplify that content doesn't make sense. The cost to produce content is substantial, so it makes little sense to

spend money producing content, and then to limit the visibility of that content only to your own small following.

Quit wasting time and resources trying to generate traffic slowly-but-surely (unless that strategy actually works for your business). Paid Social is the quickest and easiest way to get yourself in front of visitors.

TikTok

TikTok is just one of the social platforms that allow you to put your product, service, or message instantly in front of people who are ready to act. We only single out this particular platform because it is possibly the fastest-acting and most cost-effective marketplace, and people may have a more limited impression of the breadth of TikTok's reach. Just about any topic or area you can promote through Google can be reached through TikTok as well.

Youtube

Video is compelling content. If you are attempting to promote a product, service, content, yourself, or anything else, you must produce video. Youtube is the king of video platforms, but since you're producing video, it might make sense to put it up on other platforms such as Vimeo.

What type of video you choose to make depends on the nature of your business.

The easiest thing to do is go look at what others in your space are producing, and replicate that.

The best thing to do is look at what everybody else is doing, and then find the thing that none of them are doing that would add the most value.

Either way, the size of your Direct and Branded Organic traffic will grow in proportion to the quantity and quality of the videos you post on Youtube.

Podcasting

Podcasting offers a unique avenue to carefully communicate your brand message, providing a more intimate connection with the audience compared to traditional marketing channels[1].

Podcast advertising enables reaching a new audience, building brand awareness, and boosting sales, making it an effective tool for business growth[2]. Consistent podcasting contributes to brand recognition, enhancing customer engagement and loyalty over time[5].

Moreover, it allows businesses to showcase expertise, build trust, and humanize their brand, as the audience hears directly from the people behind the business[6]. With the ability to deliver valuable content, podcasting emerges as a versatile and cost-effective marketing strategy, making it an ideal choice for businesses aiming to strengthen their online presence and foster meaningful connections with their target audience.

Webinars

Webinars are a great means of generating net new leads and nurturing mindshare. This is another channel where the performance may seem lackluster — you were hoping for a few more net new leads, or a few more conversions after the event.

You just have to take that series of singles, and trust that sooner or later they are going to turn into runs in the form of future conversions who drop in from out of nowhere as Direct and Branded Organic visitors.

Surveys

It always baffles me how infrequently surveys are used to engage prospects and customers. They are an ideal way to knock down four birds with one stone.

- 1) Surveys are a great way to engage your audience by allowing them to weigh in on an interesting and important topic, and see the results of what their peers think. Highly interactive and relevant. Everybody loves to take a poll that reveals some interesting insight.
- 2) Surveys can be designed so that respondents are telling you exactly what their perspectives or hot buttons are. By taking polls, the audience is basically segmenting themselves in the database.
- 3) If the audience is large enough and the survey is well-designed and carefully conducted, the resulting information could be compiled into a report or infographic that can serve as a lead magnet.
- 4) Results of the survey can yield invaluable insights about the market in general that could result in changes to your product/service offerings, branding approach, or anything else.

Marketing Automation

One thing we have seen over and over through the years is that the same companies who are obsessing over SEO often completely overlook their most valuable resource — their own mailing list. They don't realize that the contacts in their database are their best route to future sales, either directly or via word of mouth promotion.

An automated nurture stream that sends a steady flow of useful, engaging content to existing customers and leads, especially if it's personalized based on relevant segmentation, is a proven way to activate the highest quality potential customers and promoters.

Not to do so is analogous to makers of olive oil doing a first quick press of olives to take out the extra virgin oil, and then just throwing the leftovers out. What a waste!

Events

In person and virtual events where people actually engage with each other directly and in real-time are a big commitment. There's at least an investment in time, and likely a significant

investment of money to enter a public forum that is focused and curated to allow you to engage directly with people, we would argue it may be the best investment you can possibly make.

In the early days of the web many people rejoiced at the prospect that so much of our engagement with each other would soon be mediated through our new digital environment, which meant that engagement and transactions could be accurately tracked and prospects precisely segmented in order to maximize conversion performance.

Those people have tried mightily over the years to establish this format in our marketplace and society, and they have succeeded to a great extent. However, it seems to me that the Human Spirit has prevailed, as the vast majority of meaningful engagement that actually moves people to action still takes place through person-to-person (P2P) interaction in real-life (IRL).

We could reduce this to a general rule of thumb: The more personal, immediate and authentic the engagement, the greater the impetus to take action.

Events are at the top of this scale.

Others

That is just a sampling of the ways you can attract, engage, and delight your fans. But there are many, many others. And when you start to mix and match them, there is no limit to what you can do. Eventually, you can develop a marketing mix that is uniquely your own as well as highly effective and efficient.

We at Alphire Digital Marketing Agency would love to learn more about your plans and challenges, and brainstorm ways to catapult you to a whole new level.

Contact us today.