



Digital marketing strategy

A Guide for Microbusinesses



Microbusinesses are the backbone of the Irish economy

In the world of small businesses, microbusinesses are the smallest of the small - and typically employ between one to nine employees. But despite their small scale, microbusinesses play a critical role to the Irish economy - and daily life.

According to the **Central Statistics Office**, there are 272,531 enterprises in Ireland. Of those, 91.4 per cent are considered microbusinesses, which translates to nearly 250,000 businesses. Those quarter of a million microbusinesses employ 424,757 people. Microbusiness owners hail from just about every conceivable trade or profession - from plumbers and mechanics, to accountants, lawyers and florists.

As a microbusiness owner, having a strong online and digital presence can enable you to be more targeted, efficient and cost-effective in speaking with your customer base. However, knowing where to start or how to improve can be daunting, especially for owners with limited experience, time or resources.

This e-book, will show you how to set the foundation for a good digital marketing strategy, build and execute your digital plan and how to measure your digital plan's success.



The foundation for a strong digital strategy

Many companies fall into the trap of trying a wide range of digital marketing tactics (pay-per-click search engine ads; web advertising; an expensive, professionally designed website) without a clear plan - and come away with little success.

The foundation for any good marketing strategy - digital or otherwise - comes from an honest, solid understanding of your business's current situation.

Start with a SWOT analysis

Conducting a SWOT analysis is a great, tried-and-tested place to start. This will enable you to determine your business's main **Strengths** and **Weaknesses**, as well as the **Opportunities** and potential **Threats** your business must contend with.

- ▶ First, let's start with **strengths**. What positive attributes or advantages does your business have? For example, do you offer a completely unique service? Is your customer service second-to-none? Does the location of your business lend itself well to high footfall?
- ▶ In terms of **weaknesses**, think about areas that you could improve, or things that currently present challenges to you. One example might be that your business is new, and therefore hasn't had the chance to establish much of a reputation. Another example of a potential weakness could be difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified staff within your specific field.
- ▶ **Opportunities** for your business could come in the form of a chance to break into a new, under-served market for your products, or increase your visibility through ads on social media channels.
- ▶ **Threats** - as ominous as this may sound - is more about understanding potential obstacles your business may face. For example, are there competitors that offer similar products or services for less? Are your desired customers moving more towards e-commerce and leaving your bricks -and-mortar store behind?

Set achievable, realistic goals for your business

Think carefully about what your business is trying to achieve with a digital marketing plan. Whatever the goals for your business may be, they should follow the **SMART** formula.



SMART is a well-established goal-setting methodology that will help you be clear about your intentions as well as channel your time and resources efficiently.

First, your goals should be **Specific**. Provide a simple, clear description of what you are trying to achieve, be it increasing sales and your online presence, or improving the quality of your service.

Your goals should be **Measurable and Meaningful**. What metric or target can you set to indicate success? For example, are you trying to increase sales by 20 per cent this year? Are you aiming to hire and train at least two new staff members by year end?

Next is **Achievable**. Don't shy away from setting challenging targets for yourself, but ensure they are realistic.

Relevant - This is all about setting goals that align well with your business's overall strengths, values and long-term objectives. For example, if most of your customer base interacts with you online, launching an ambitious print media ad campaign would not be the most effective approach.

Time based - Make sure to set a realistic end date to accomplish your goals. This will help you set priorities and provide more motivation to put key pieces of your digital marketing plan into action.

Setting SMART goals not only brings clarity to your own objectives, but they will provide your staff the clarity they need about your business's direction and how your digital marketing plan supports that direction.

Understand and define your customers

It pays to be very clear about who your customers are. This allows your business to connect with and engage specific customer types with relevant digital content, such as paid search engine ads, blog posts or marketing emails. Ultimately, your goal is to convert those customers to a sale.

Customer personas

An excellent way to develop a deeper understanding of who your customers are is by developing customer personas. These personas help define your customers' key characteristics and behaviours.

Start by writing down what you know about your customers. Don't worry if you're missing certain pieces of information, or if what you do know isn't totally relevant to your business. Ideally, you should have an idea of your customers' age, gender, family status, income level and professional status.

Next, move on to customer pain points. Identify which aspects of your business create the greatest challenges for your customers. Possible pain points could be anything from inconsistent service and long wait times to product availability and cost.

Another area to research is customer buying decisions. Specifically, what role do they have in purchasing from you, how frequently do they buy from you – and what key factors stop them from completing purchases.

You can gather customer information in several ways. This can include customer surveys, feedback from your sales team, active listening by staff as well as soliciting regular updates from customers in-store, online or on the phone.

From a digital perspective, online tools like Google Analytics provide lots of insights on customers' interests, habits and commonly used keywords when searching for products and services.

Most businesses will have several different customer personas. For example, a hardware store that sells paint, lighting fixtures, tools and homewares could have customers who are experienced builders as well as amateur DIY enthusiasts. Each persona will have very different interests and needs. A great way of defining each of your customer personas is to give them real names. Our example hardware store might have customers such as "Harry Handyman" or "Debbie DIY." This is a very useful shorthand trick for you and your staff to use.

Scope out your competition

It's important to know who your key competitors are and to actively monitor what they are doing online. Be clear about what you are evaluating.

Keep in mind – just because a competitor is active online doesn't mean they are reaping massive profits or that their customers are even engaging with them.

As well, competitor benchmarking can be quite an in-depth, technical activity for microbusiness owners. At this early stage of the online journey, it's best to keep your analysis to a few key points.

Here are three quick examples:

- ▶ Dig into customer reviews on Google, social media channels and third-party review sites. Some reviews can be taken with a grain of salt, while others can be quite revealing.
- ▶ Scope out their social media channels, blogs, website and sign up to their newsletter (if available). This can provide valuable insights into your competitor's public persona and how they interact with their customers.
- ▶ Get a sense of your competitor's pricing and product offering. Are they offering true value, or over-inflating their worth?

Build and execute your integrated digital plan

With the groundwork laid, it's time to start building out your digital marketing plan.

Focus first on the fundamentals of your business

First things first - before you progress with your digital marketing plan, it's important that you ensure your own house is in order, so to speak.

Start with some of the bigger-picture elements: Do you offer quality products or services? Is your staff competent, knowledgeable and well-trained? Do you have the capacity to expand your business in a meaningful way?

Another useful activity is to create a clearly defined mission statement or "elevator pitch" for your business. This will help you succinctly describe what you provide and why it matters in about 20 or 30 seconds (or less).

A common elevator pitch could be structured like this:

"We are [your business name here], and we [what you do] for [target audience] that [benefits of your product/service]. Include any unique selling propositions (USPs)."

Here are two generic examples for product-based and service-based businesses:

▶ Product-based business

We are Ciara's Clothes Store and we offer high quality, Irish designed contemporary ladies fashion. Our clothes empower women in their daily life and can take you from day-time office wear to evening.

▶ Service-based business

We are Murphy Solicitors and we provide expert legal advice for individuals and businesses in a range of areas including conveyancing, litigation, personal injury, wills and probate. Our solicitors have a wealth of experience and provide excellent, client-focused service.

Other real-world elevator pitch and mission statement examples:

Willow:

"Our mission at Willow has always been to offer you a fresh and unique mix of femininity with a modern edge. We travel the world to curate a collection of luxurious and offbeat labels so that you can piece together your own personal style story - all in one place!"

LinkedIn:

"To connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful."

IKEA:

"To offer a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them'.

A final - but important - fundamental is to evaluate digital productivity tools that could save you time and increase efficiency. This could include investing in a modern e-commerce website, or customer relationship management software that helps you track transactions and buying behaviours.



Identify the tactics and customer touchpoints you intend to use

Putting together a digital marketing plan can feel daunting and there are many possible tactics and customer touchpoints you can explore. That's why it's important to map out which touchpoints will have the most impact for your business and integrate them together.

Let's use a practical example: a giftware shop which has both a retail premises and an e-commerce website.

The giftware shop carries a range of products including jewelry, crystal and glassware, lighting, gift sets and hampers. As a microbusiness, it was important for them to prioritise which tactics and communication channels to employ.

- ▶ **Website:** They ensured that their website was fully mobile friendly to allow people to browse, search and purchase on the go. Detailed product information was included and the shopping cart section was improved to include delivery and returns information.
- ▶ **Social media:** Facebook and Instagram were chosen to increase visibility and engagement with potential customers. Both platforms work well to showcase their product offering and drive/send customers to their website. They also use Twitter as it is an effective way of promoting themselves in the local business community.

Keep in mind – there are many cost-effective platforms to help you manage your social media profiles, such as Hootsuite or Buffer.

- ▶ **Email:** Once customers made a purchase, the giftware shop invited them to subscribe to marketing emails with new products and offers. A customer who has already purchased is a warm prospect for future purchases. The shop included links to their e-commerce website within their emails where customers can browse, buy and review products.

Intuitive, cost effective solutions, such as Mailchimp, or Constant Contact are well-regarded email marketing tools.

- ▶ **Reviews:** The shop encourages customers to post reviews on Google Business Pages or Trustpilot, which is a great reassurance point for future customers.
- ▶ **Google My Business:** The shop created a Google My Business profile page with directions, opening hours, contact details and customer reviews. All these elements are important to build trust and reassurance.

The giftware shop prioritised the areas they felt were most important and that they could properly resource both from a budget and personnel perspective. In time, they plan to improve their on-site Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to increase visibility on search engines, while investing in Google Ads (formerly known as Google AdWords) to promote the business.



Also – be sure that whenever you're developing assets like a social media profile, website or even physical merchandise – your branding remains consistent throughout. This ensures that, over time, your brand will become recognised and trusted by customers.

Measuring success

At last, we find ourselves at perhaps one of the most important points in your microbusinesses digital marketing journey: measurement. Without it, it's nearly impossible to have an objective view into what worked (and what didn't) and where you should be putting your marketing resources.

A good way to measure the success of your tactics is by separating everything out into three main buckets: good, difficult and different.

- ▶ **Good**
What went well? Which tactics met your expectations (or measurement goals) and had a positive impact on your business? What would you do again?
- ▶ **Difficult**
Were there unexpected issues or difficulties that came up? Was there a tactic or touchpoint that didn't generate your desired results?
- ▶ **Different**
This is where you should give thought to what the next, improved version of your digital marketing plan looks like. What will you do differently to be more effective? For example, should you look at other new technologies, or perhaps redirect some of your advertising resources towards a different customer base?

There are also many hard numbers by which you can measure success. These include data, marketing email open rates, social media engagement stats and customer reviews.

Keep in mind – one of the exciting things about digital marketing is that it is constantly evolving and nothing is ever set in stone. With small, incremental improvements along the way, you'll no doubt find your online presence is taking shape and helping to make an impact on your business.



Unlock the power of the internet with a trusted Irish .ie online identity

It's uniquely Irish

The official Internet country code for Ireland is **.ie** and is the only online address that is Irish. A **.ie** tells the global community that you are Irish and tells the Irish community that you are local. You can even register an Irish language name if required, fadas and all.

It's more likely to be available

There is a wider choice of available **.ie** domain names compared to **.com**, as significantly more of those names are already registered.

It lets your customers find you online

.ie addresses rank higher than **.com** addresses on Irish based search engines like Google.ie. Irish consumers are more likely to click on local website addresses.

It's trusted

Every **.ie** applicant's identity is checked and validated at the point of registration. Consumers will have confidence in your business as **.ie** is a well-established and trusted domain. 77% of Irish consumers prefer a **.ie** website when buying online, instead of a **.com**.¹

It's the preferred online address for business in Ireland

91% of Irish consumers associate **.ie** websites with Irish businesses over other websites like **.com**.¹ The **.ie** domain accounts for the majority of hosted domains in Ireland.²

It protects your brand

Securing your **.ie** online address strengthens your brand and protects your online identity. All **.ie** domains are registered on a first-come, first-served basis.

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¹.ie Consumer Trust 2020

².ie Domain Profile Report