

ON-LINE ADVERTISING TOOLS FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

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ABSTRACT: *This paper explores online advertising tools and their impact on SME growth and competitiveness. Digital marketing is presented as a cost-effective alternative to traditional methods, offering increased efficiency, interactivity, global accessibility and continuous availability. The study examines tools like Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which improves website visibility through on-site and off-site techniques, and content marketing, which involves producing valuable content to engage target audiences. Additionally, social media marketing is highlighted as a critical strategy for enhancing customer interaction, fostering loyalty, and driving traffic through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The findings reveal that these tools not only enable SMEs to increase their visibility and build brand loyalty but also allow them to operate with greater agility and cost-efficiency. The study concludes that by embracing these digital marketing strategies, SMEs can better adapt to the demands of the digital economy, enhance customer relationships, and achieve sustainable growth in an increasingly competitive marketplace.*

KEY WORDS: *digital marketing, SMEs, Search Engine Optimization, content marketing, social media marketing.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *M31, M37, L86, O33.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The explosive emergence and development of the Internet has determined unprecedented changes in the business environment; today, businesses are no longer limited by the physical boundaries of the countries as new communication and coordination channels among customers, traders and business partners have been created in the virtual environment. These changes, of huge magnitude, have determined the reconfiguration of a series of marketing practices with a view to make them more flexible and adapted to the new conditions or even with a view to conceiving new practices. That

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is how new terms and concepts emerged on the business scene at the end of the 20th century: a new prefix was added to business, which became **e-business**, commerce migrated towards **e-commerce**, and Internet rapidly turned into the electronic marketing scene (**e-marketing** or **digital marketing**). All these trends were accelerated, at the beginning of year 2020, when the restrictions connected with the avoiding of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 infection determined the entrepreneurs worldwide to innovate in order to be able to identify and implement new marketing solutions adapted to the virtual environment.

Known as *electronic marketing, on-line marketing, digital marketing* or *cyber marketing*, the new marketing has become synonymous with the use of the power of computer networks and on-line communication, namely of the interactive digital environment to carry out the marketing objectives of a business, irrespective of its size (Orzan & Orzan, 2007).

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF DIGITAL MARKETING COMPARED WITH TRADITIONAL APPROACH

Digital marketing has a lot to offer compared with the traditional variant; it is not strictly about replacing classical advertising, direct marketing or sales force with other solutions specific for on-line communication channels, but about expanding the classical marketing conception in a way so that both the entrepreneurs and the consumers win. From this point of view, Table 1 displays a short synthesis of the advantages digital marketing offers compared with the traditional marketing approach.

Table 1. Advantages of digital marketing compared with traditional marketing

Advantage	Grounds
Digital marketing makes possible the decrease of the budgets meant for implementing advertising activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The electronic versions of the advertising stuff may be printed and updated online, without extra costs; ■ Postage expenditures, those for the advertising stuff prospectors and shippers and/ or those for the advertising telephone calls also decrease, at their turn.
Digital marketing determines time saving and shortens part of the stages of the marketing process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advertising stuff should no longer wait to be printed and the buyers should no longer wait to be contacted by a representative of the sales force; ■ Market messages are taken over by the marketers with increased speed; ■ The speed of adapting the offer to the demands of the consumers increases considerably.
Digital marketing offers an alternative buying channel to its customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Owing to the facilities given by on-line communication and company-customers interactivity, the latter ones will engage in adapting the product to their needs (colour size, transport means, etc.); customers are also encouraged to place themselves purchase orders on-line.
Digital marketing offers an increased level of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Looking for and tracking useful information for the interested customers is extremely easy;

interactivity and provides multiple information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A closer relation between entrepreneurs and their customers is possible, as the latter ones are willing to buy immediately in the case they are persuaded that they have found the right provider; ■ Potential customers might interact with consumer communities who express their point of view, share their own experience and recommendations regarding the use of the product (through forums, blogs, and web sites).
Digital marketing offers opportunities for instant international collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Time and distance barriers that temporize the concluding of the transactions with the customers from other countries are eliminated; ■ Unprecedented opportunities for the small businesses come out: avoidance of the barriers that prevent the entering on certain markets, opportunity to adapt to the various features of demand and to serve global market segments.
Digital marketing is available non-stop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The contact with the customers is permanently provided, 24 hours, 7 days a week, and 365 days per year; ■ The on-line servers that serve the business do not interrupt during the working hours and are able to sale irrespective of the time zone differences among the various areas of the Globe.

3. ON LINE ADVERTISING TOOLS

3.1. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

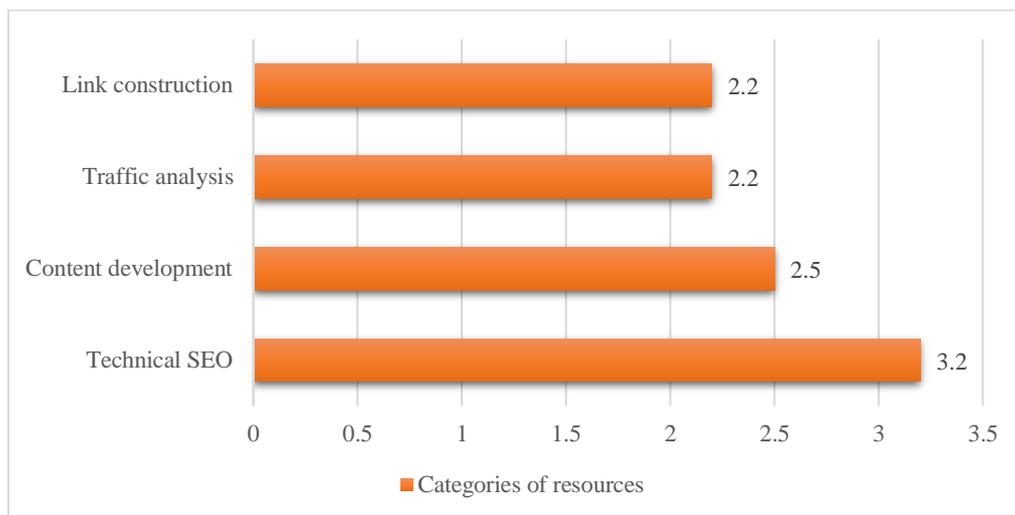
The term SEO was forged at the beginning of the '90s and represents an abbreviation of the English phrase *Search Engine Optimization* (roughly translated, this means “*optimizing based on search engines*”) (<https://www.seolium.ro/ce-este-seo/>). In the on-line marketing, the role of the search engines is to generate targeted traffic, through directing the Internet users towards the products and services they look for.

The most frequently used search engines are *Google*, *Bing* and *Yahoo!*; they represent the Internet network navigation tools, while enabling the traffic of business sites. In addition, in the case when the business also owns a physical location, adding the location on *Google Maps* might add tens or hundreds of customers each month, with a minimal time investment (about 1 or 2 hours).

During the emerging stage of the world-wide-web, specialists designed the possibility to purposely increase the visibility of a business in the on-line environment through search engines, which gave an impulse to the development of SEO as a modern advertising tool that was able to stimulate the intensity of the quality traffic targeting a certain site. It is based on a new conception of on-line advertising that has in view the improvement of the position of a business site within the results inventory of the searches generated by a series of key-words or phrases that are relevant for the domain of activity of that company. Figure 1 displays in detail the optimizing of the resources, in descending order of importance, of a small company.

The marketers, who want to increase the visibility of their business in the on-line environment by means of SEO, have at their disposal two major alternatives (<https://www.seolium.ro/ce-este-seo/>):

- *On-site optimization* – when effectiveness tools are exclusively guided to the site of the company and target the increase of consumers' satisfaction with the experience of visiting the site: increase of the loading speed, improving descriptions and their titles, providing a map of the business site, avoiding errors, properly configuring URL addresses and improving internal links, optimising images, balanced use of advertising, etc.;
- *Off-site optimization* – which regards the way of operation of the Internet and involves the generating, from the exterior, of a series of links towards the site of the business in order to grow advertising. With this in view, a series of strategies might be employed: creating quality contents able to attract a larger number of links (articles that answer fundamental questions in the field the small company operates, info graphs, company's own studies or analyses that are relevant at a national/international level); writing articles for other sites (guest-blogging), press releases transmitted to the journalists, using influencers (bloggers or vloggers) with a view to gradually increase the profile of the brand and to contact new target-public segments (<https://smarters.ro/>).



Source: Popescu M.A., *Methods for the on-line advertising of the companies in the field of information technology*, Abstract of doctoral thesis, Polytechnic University in Bucharest, 2020

Figure 1. Priority of resources, in order of importance, in a small company

In practice, it is required to combine, in certain proportions, both optimising strategies. In accordance, although, from the *on-site point of view*, the business page is perfectly optimised, it will only appear on the lists containing the results of the researches for that subject area in the case it generates, at its turn, links to other sites.

The implementation of SEO is based on the talent, professionalism and creativity of the IT specialists, which combine in carrying out repeatable and yet extremely flexible actions such as: analysis of the relevant key-words for the advertised business; study of the competitors and taking over from them, as an improved alternative, the strong points

in on-line advertising, effectively solving the technical issues to contribute to optimisation (such examples are: flash sites or the sites with a difficultly indexing content, sites with complex arborescent structures such as Javascript, etc.). As far as the present development stage of the digital marketing technique is concerned, here are a series of highly illustrative statistics (<https://www.affde.com/ro/199-digital-marketing-stats-to-drive-your-marketing-strategy.html>):

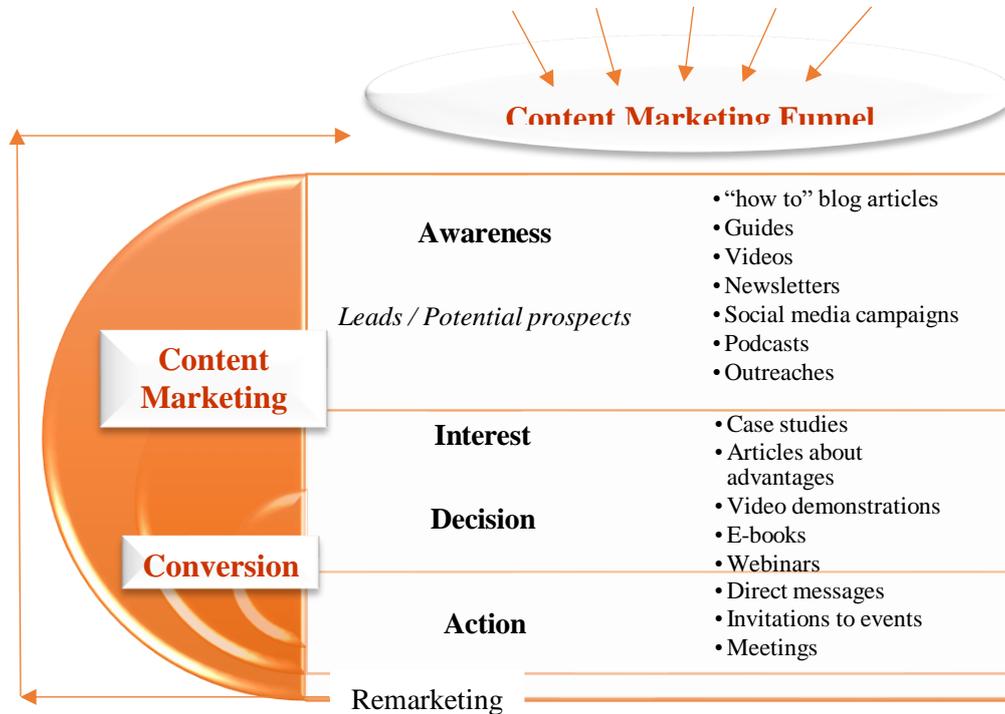
- Google is, by far, the dominant search engine, with 92.42% of the total global search desktop traffic. 2.61% of this traffic belongs to Bing, 1.9% to Yahoo! and only 1.03% to Baidu;
- As an average, Google gets 77,000 interrogations per second;
- 51% of the traffic of a site web represents organic search (that excludes paid advertising), 10% comes from paid advertising, 5 % from social media and 34% from other sources;
- About 64% of the marketing specialists invest in SEO strategies and instruments;
- SEO services represent a real industry: in 2018, brands and advertising agencies located in the U.S.A. got 72 billion dollars from this activity.

3.2. Content Marketing

In accordance with the definition given by the *Content Marketing Institute*, the concept of content marketing designates “*a strategic marketing approach based on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content with a view to attracting and retaining a clearly defined audience, whose final objective is to stimulate profitable actions*” (<https://re7consulting.ro/ce-inseamna-marketing-prin-continut/>). In order to exert a real influence on the customers, the marketer should permanently add and update quality content to the on-line environment.

Depending on the nature of the business, there is a diversity of contents that might raise the interest of the consumers. Figure 2 shows the manner to attach these *content marketing* tools to the **marketing funnel**, which has in view several steps that should be taken with a view to providing the success in implementing this tool:

- **Launching the first item of information about the business with a view to increase consumer awareness** with regard to the products offered and the brands under which the products are marketed – blog articles of the type “how to...”, guides, video stuff, newsletters, social media campaigns, podcasts, outreaches, etc.;
- **Increase of consumer interest with regard to the business and to adopting buying decisions** – case studies, articles about the advantages of purchasing the products/ brands, possibility to download electronic books, checklists;
- **Taking concrete actions that determine the increase of the visitor conversion rate into actual consumers** - webinars, video demonstrations, info graphs, interviews with branch personalities, etc.;
- **Remarketing operations that target the maintaining of the contact through on-line advertising directed towards the users that have visited the site but have not undertaken the desired action** (buying, contract, subscription, etc.): direct messages, invitations to events, face-to-face or on-line meetings, etc.



Source: <https://re7consulting.ro/ce-inseamna-marketing-prin-continut/>

Figure 2. Content marketing funnel and specific tools

In order to understand the magnitude this marketing tool earned during the last years, we should note that over 90% of the on-line traders use content creation as a first approach for attracting consumers and that 72% of them estimate that their undertaking sensibly improved as a result of this strategy (<https://www.affde.com/ro/content-marketing-small-businesses.html>). In the case of small businesses, content marketing provides real opportunities for growing their market with low costs through:

- Increasing awareness for the brand and strengthening a successful brand with a view to building loyalty among consumers;
- Creating and capitalising on a competition advantage in relation with other entrepreneurs that do not know and do not implement this marketing tool;
- Building an *influencer* position among customers and competitors in the domain the business operates;
- Generating an increased site traffic and the possibility to create long-term sustainable relations with customers and competitors;
- Increasing site web users' conversion rate and turning them into potential or real customers and/ or subscribers;
- Increasing visibility on media networks, by means of low time and cost investments.

In accordance with the most recent statistics published in year 2021 regarding content marketing, 69.6% of the marketing specialists actively invest in this advertising

tool, while Internet users have access to about 4.39 billion content pages globally (<https://www.affde.com/ro/content-marketing-statistics-10.html>).

3.5. Social media marketing

Social media represents a special opportunity for digital marketing owing to the rapid facilitation of ideas and information exchange resulting from the expansion of virtual networks and communities. The use of social networks in marketing frequently entails the combination of several on-line and off-line tools with a view to increasing the interactions and the traffic on the sites of small businesses.

The handiest strategy consists in tagging an article dealing with a business theme on a blog, and subsequently repeating it on Facebook, Instagram or Tweet. Starting from this idea, ampler **promotional campaigns** may be carried out, which also include the displaying of video stuffs that regard the business/ product on TikTok or Youtube.

On the other hand, social networks are real “suction tools” for users, who might be easily redirected to the site of the small business. Besides the fantastic advertising opportunities given by these media channels, they might also be employed with a view to reaching a series of marketing objectives (<https://smarters.ro/grow/social-media-marketing/>):

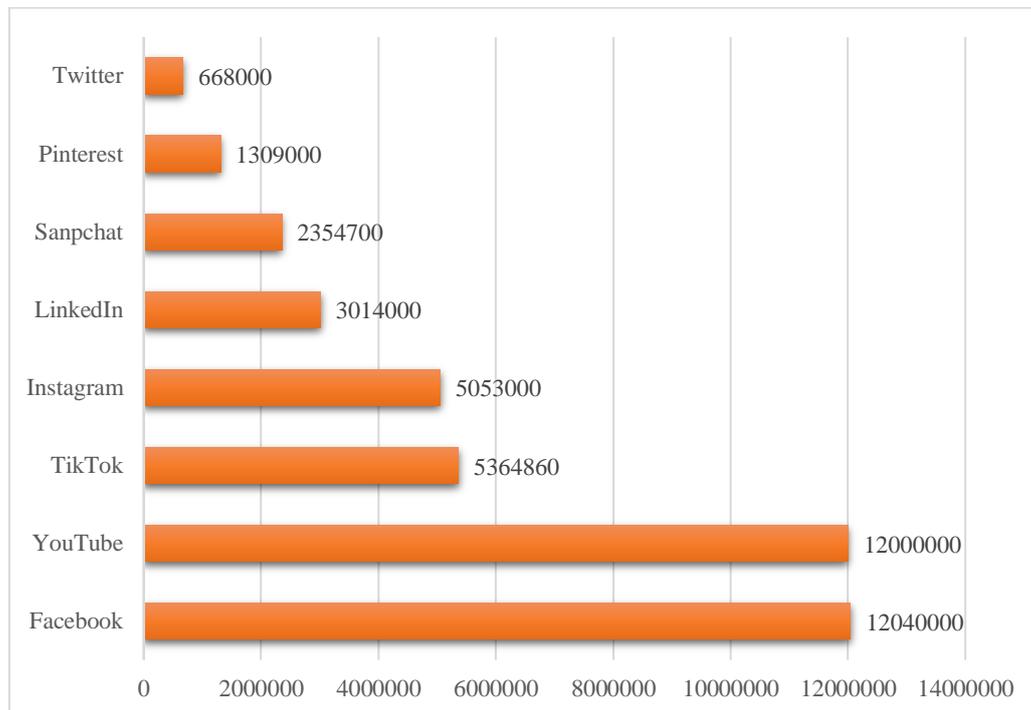
- **Improvement of communication:** which involves, on the one hand, the strengthening of the *relation between the company and the customer* (providing details that regard: the web-site of the business, its physical location, its products, brands, ways to purchase, etc.), as well as the *contents generated by users*. In other words, social networks have determined the emerging of a series of new forms of *word-of-mouth* through which the users share experiences connected with the use of the products, generate/receive feed-backs, publish reviews, influence the buying decisions of other categories of persons, etc.;
- **Identifying new customers:** during the last time, social networks take over a part of the functions of the search engines and the use of proper hashtags on Instagram might help the entrepreneur attract new users. In addition, Facebook pages might be improved through SEO techniques (that we talked about at the beginning of this paragraph), which places them on a leading position among the results depending on the key-words searches relevant for the business;
- **Relational development and fidelity programs:** with a view to improve long-lasting relations with the consumers, entrepreneurs might design fidelity programs that offer discounts or rewards to the loyal customers who regularly come to a certain location;
- **Marketing research:** the algorithms of the social networks provide data about consumer behaviour at a level that, until recently, could have hardly been conceived by the small businesses that use to operate off-line exclusively. In accordance, all the companies that are part of such a network are able to know exactly the moment when the consumer visits one of their shops, the content of the shopping cart as well as the reviews posted after the visit. In addition, it is also possible to precisely measure the impact of the advertising campaigns carried out in these environments

as well as to rapidly collect a series of statistic data about competitors and market evolution.

Worldwide, the number of social networks users is increasing and this is not a circumstantial trend. According to the statistics, this year, the total number of users has reached 3.09 billion persons. Nonetheless, the growing competition and the emerging of new algorithms operating on social networks make the visibility of a business/ brand on the sites of such networks harder to reach than in the past. Yet, the most relevant statistics published worldwide and also in Romania with regard to the inclusion of social media within the marketing strategy of a business entitle us to consider that being present on social networks becomes more and more a necessity that ensures the success of the business (<https://www.livecom.ro/articole-si-noutati/idei-de-marketing-pentru-retelele-de-socializare>):

- 95% of the total number of adults (with ages between 18 and 34) tend to follow a brand through social networks;
- about 63% of the consumers expect to get support from the vendors through social media networks;
- 42% of the world population own, at least, one account on one of the social networks that are active on the Globe.

Figure 3 displays the ranking of the social networks in Romania, at the end of year 2021, depending on the number of users.



Source: <https://www.doads.ro/cele-mai-utilizate-retele-sociale-in-romania-2020/>

Figure 3. Ranking of social networks in Romania depending on the number of users, 2021

In our country, Facebook holds the leading position in the ranking of social networks. For Romanians, accessing the Facebook account has become a habitual gesture that is part of the daily routine.

In addition, the analysis of the behaviour of the Romanian social networks users has revealed the fact that they rather display a passive approach through which they track the data exhibited and the media stuff than engaging in creating and distributing their own content. Under such circumstances, entrepreneurs are advantaged as they are offered an advertising channel with wide-coverage and decreased costs.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The virtual environment presents a series of particular features and requires the intervention of the marketing specialist due to the varied manners of approaching:

- It is an environment where business operations occur rapidly and the data are transmitted with high speed and increased efficiency;
- It is an environment displaying increased dynamism – businesses carry out frequent changes on their sites, new services emerge, new market opportunities come out and these rapid evolutions require marketers' high flexibility and innovating spirit;
- The new hardware elements and software packages may be developed quite rapidly, most of them being generated by non-traditional sources;
- It is a fertile space for the emerging and development of new businesses.

Within the digital environment, the marketing mix is gradually transformed from a producer's tool into a consumer's tool. In accordance, the designing of a coherent and complete marketing mix is a complex operation, subordinated both to the objectives resulting from the need to meeting consumers' demands and from the need to increase the financial performance of the business, in the context of the multiple relations and interdependences among the various categories of *stakeholders* in the on-line environment.

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