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Not in Social Media yet? Your growth will be stymied soon

Whether your company is introducing a new product, promoting a contest, or enhancing an offline advertising campaign, you need an Internet foundation to efficiently manage, deliver and track your online marketing initiatives.

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The Internet and social media revolution are some things people talked about years ago but the real penetration and explosion is happening now in India what with easy access to data almost all over the country and sometimes even in cabs, proliferation of smartphones and speedy connectivity. Any company that excludes Internet from its media plans will be essentially out from the consumers' minds today. Whether it is social media like Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, you need to have some presence depending on your target audience and value proposition in order to succeed in your business.

Tomes have been written on the effective and efficient use of the Internet media but many are still contemplating the optimum use of the same. Google is indeed a pioneer in helping to propagate the reach and awareness among smaller companies. FB is doing a catching up job now but privacy issues loom large. Google also made it fashionable to have the key words concept in every marketer's Lexicon. Amazon is using its cloud and AI features effectively to help SMEs in a big way and that is a big disruption for the giants in the IT industry including Microsoft, IBM and EMC/VMWare.

Effective Internet marketing requires a well-thought out holistic approach that integrates every point of customer contact, be it print, online, or direct interaction. As such, marketing executives increasingly are being asked by their management to integrate traditional media and the Internet to produce an interactive marketing campaign with customised messages to various global audiences, both online and offline. In fact, we are all fast moving into creating customer experiences seamlessly in the digital medium.

This approach, however, needs deeper questioning: "What is the best way to leverage the innovative capabilities of the Internet as a marketing medium without Increasing the burden on our IT department for every technical component of an Internet marketing initiative?" Many a time the marketing executive will be very enthusiastic about doing a campaign in the social media or YouTube that will bring in increased traffic to the company website but without the adequate warning to the IT or sales department, this can cause slow or no adequate response to customers. We must all have experienced this in the past as consumers when say an airline announced a low fare package.



The foundation for successful Internet marketing is to have IT and marketing departments collaborate as a cross functional team. A robust, flexible Internet infrastructure that supports complex integrated marketing initiatives serves the needs of both marketing and IT. Such an infrastructure offers the marketing department the freedom to implement sophisticated, integrated marketing campaigns quickly and cost-effectively while receiving timely, accurate and in-depth insight into the success of the campaign. In doing so, it enables the marketing department to focus on the creation of the content without having to worry about the underlying technology.

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Key characteristics of Internet marketing include the ability to extend brand reach, customisation of content, unlimited scalability, and geographical targeting. This must also provide access to a global marketplace for customers and suppliers, and enable companies to optimise business systems around the globe. The solution should also provide key

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competitive advantages: an enhanced user experience, delivery of relevant content to the customer, and access to data collection and feedback.

Here are some specific considerations when setting up an Internet marketing infrastructure:

Outsource the Internet content from a globally distributed network that intelligently delivers content close to requesting users, thereby avoiding Internet congestion. This will ensure that customers receive the

most timely and richest content available with top-notch performance. However this poses different challenges that need to be addressed.

Content targeting technology integrated with the Internet marketing infrastructure enables you to target specific content to one's customers based on location, network access speed or other information stored by one's system. This is perhaps one of the most beneficial features of Internet marketing.

Integrated business intelligence tools will enable one to measure the success of the online initiatives, evaluate whether the website is generating the "right" type of traffic, establish where customers are coming from and at what times, and ascertain what most interests them. Most successful web marketers have mastered this analytics and the best case is that of Amazon.

The best marketers are providing a complete end-to-end consumer experience. For example, a consumer products company uses print advertisements to direct prospects to a website to sign up for free samples, while another uses the Internet as an effective channel for a new product launch. Some companies are creating communities in the web based on certain behaviours or interests.

Whether your company is introducing a new product, promoting a contest, or enhancing an offline advertising campaign, you need an Internet foundation to efficiently manage, deliver and track your online marketing initiatives. If you are not ready yet, this economic downturn is the best time to embrace it whole-heartedly.

M MUNEEER is the managing director of CustomerLab Solutions, an innovative consulting firm delivering measureable results to clients.

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