



Research Proposal

“How has the digital
medium revolutionised
marketing for Small and
Medium Size Enterprises
(SMEs)”

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Introduction

It has been decided by the researcher to give this project the working title “How has the digital medium revolutionised marketing for SMEs? The title shows what the researcher wants to discover.

Digital marketing is felt to be very current, with the rapid growth in social media and access to superfast broadband, it is an area that has huge potential. This research will look to see if these opportunities are being utilised by the small to medium sized businesses being scrutinised in this study. Once this information has been collected the researcher will be able to see whether the secondary data available shows the same results as the data which has been gathered and analysed first hand?

The area to be covered by this dissertation relates primarily to marketing, and how it has been revolutionised by the development of digital marketing with the emphasis on small to medium sized businesses.

Shown below are the points that form the basis to the research undertaken.

What changes have SMEs made to the way in which they market their businesses, since digital media became accessible to everyone?

Which forms of digital media have been incorporated into the marketing strategy of these businesses?

Are the businesses aware of the value of using social media to interact with customer and to what level?

Has this changed the way they spend their marketing budgets?

How have these changes impacted their customers and the businesses relationship with their customers?

Has the way they trade been affected? (Selling online for example.)

The research will look at around fifty organisations to get first hand data, relating to their experiences of marketing in the digital world. It is intended to view the various digital mediums and the benefits offered to both customers and the organisation, the primary focus being on the business.

Review of pertinent literature

This section of the proposal will provide the reader with research and findings which are relevant to the chosen subject. Three sources have been selected to show why this dissertation is both current and relevant.

Firstly, a research paper undertaken by the Department of Innovation and Skills (September 2015) has been used to research the progress in the use of the various forms of digital marketing by 800 small businesses surveyed over several years. The quotes below are an indication of the relevance of this paper in this research project.

“Almost all SMEs use the internet for business purposes, but intensity varies with increasing size...”

“...the most common use of the internet is emailing customers, but e-commerce was much less prevalent...”

This will form the foundation on which to develop our first-hand research, which will involve contacting a number of businesses, to see if and how things have changed over the last five years. The researcher will then be able to compare the findings.

Here is an excerpt from a survey of small businesses conducted by the Open University Business School written by Dr Rob Baldock and Dr Richard Blundel.

“the spread of digital technologies has had a particularly dramatic impact on small businesses of all kinds, helping to create new markets and re-shape business models.”

A book Internet and Digital Marketing for SMEs: 30 Things You Need to Know by Michael Anderson provides another quote which inspires the research into this subject and the hunger to see whether this is indeed the case.

“Old world marketing is finished”

In the words of Michael Porter from an article ‘Strategy and the Internet’ (2001) in the Harvard Business Review the use of digital marketing is no longer an ‘if’, the researcher wants to show whether this is the case in small to medium businesses.

“The key question is not whether to deploy Internet technology—companies have no choice if they want to stay competitive—but how to deploy it.”

These and other resources provide the groundwork for this dissertation, and the catalyst to the further research of the subject. It can be seen from the excerpts above that the trend towards digital marketing is there, what this research intends to discover is whether this trend has filtered through to the small to medium sized businesses and what form that revolution has taken.

Research Strategy and Methodology

Methodology is an important part of the dissertation process, along with the use of the relevant tools. These are the factors that will form the structure of the dissertation.

It is intended to use both primary and secondary sources. The primary data will be quantitative and collected by the researcher using questionnaires. Research has been conducted into the best way of designing a questionnaire with the aim of getting the best quality data. This will allow the researcher to follow a structure that falls in line with the secondary information available, this will make the comparison and contrast of data more relevant.

The secondary data has been collected from an assortment of sources. These sources include books, journals, surveys and online data. This data will be compared with the findings of the primary research to see if the reality does concur with the secondary data analysis.

Quantitative data, is seen as the best method for the collection of information for this project, as this study deals with facts and figures, the information gathered is objective and not subjective as is the case with qualitative analysis.

Qualitative is said to be analysis that uses subjective judgment based on unquantifiable information, whereas **quantitative** analysis refers to economic, business or financial analysis that aims to understand or predict behaviour or events through the use of mathematical measurements and calculations, statistical modelling and research.

The tools to be used to compile and compare this data will include, tally charts, spreadsheets, graphs and charts

Logistical and ethical consideration

The logistics of conducting this research must be considered, these include time taken, the financial outlay and access to the required study subjects.

The subjects selected for participation in the study are small to medium sized businesses. It is intended to send out 60 questionnaires. In order to try and safeguard 50 completed forms an additional 10 will be sent out. The return of forms is not in the researchers control but as seen an attempt has been made to compensate for any failures. Access to the business owners should be easily available, as addresses are available online.

Cost implications include printing, postage and stationery, in the case of 60 questionnaires being issued, 120 stamps, 120 envelopes will be required, 60 being stamped addressed envelopes for the return of the questionnaires along with 220 sheets of A4. Laser printing facilities are available in house; this provides the most economical print.

Time considerations, include the design and preparation of questionnaires, addressing and filling the envelopes. Critical to the success is the design, it is essential that the right questions are asked and a structured response option, so that the data collected is relevant and high quality. The factor which is outside the researchers control is the speed at which completed surveys are returned.

Ethical factors have been considered in the selection of participants. In this case as the targets of the research are small to medium sized business owners, it is not expected that any of the participants will fall into the underage or vulnerable categories.

Literature will be supplied with the questionnaires providing information as to who the researcher is, why the data is being collected and what that data will be used for. Those taking part will be given the opportunity to decline and will also be assured of their anonymity. The researcher will include a note of thanks with all the questionnaires sent out, to show their gratitude for the businesses participation. Participants will be asked to sign a document confirming that they are happy to take part and return the completed document with the questionnaire in the stamp addressed envelope included.

A planned timetable

This section includes a timeline for the project. It covers a period from the selection of the research area, the choice of title to the final presentation of the finished dissertation. The data includes the projected start and finish dates for each task, the number of days taken for each task and the percentage currently completed. The timetable is in the form of a Gantt chart.

How has the digital medium revolutionised marketing for SME's?													
Project Lead: Daniel Davies													
Task	Task Name	Start	Finish	Duration	Percent Complete	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May
1	Discussion and Agreement of topic with tutor	Sun 30/Oct/16	Thu 03/Nov/16	4	100%								
2	Draw up proposal	Mon 31/Oct/16	Fri 04/Nov/16	5	100%								
3	Secondary research	Mon 31/Oct/16	Wed 01/Feb/17	110	3%								
4	Design, produce and distribute questionnaire	Mon 07/Nov/16	Sun 01/Jan/17	40	8%								
5	Analysis of secondary data	Wed 01/Feb/17	Tue 14/Mar/17	42	0%								
6	Analysis of data from questionnaire	Thu 15/Dec/16	Tue 31/Jan/17	34	0%								
7	Compare, contrast primary and secondary data	Wed 15/Mar/17	Mon 01/May/17	34	0%								
8	Present Findings in completed dissertation	Sun 07/May/17	Mon 08/May/17	1	0%								

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