

Panel of experts



Jonny Scott
Chief Operating Officer at
the Digital Marketing Agency
Direct Traffic Media (DTM)

Q: What are the next big elements in digital marketing?

A: For me, the widespread commercialisation of social media is going to be most noticeable. Given the explosion in Twitter and other social platforms, businesses will capitalise best if they can deliver effective messaging and influence as part of social marketing elements within their business plans. It's easier said than done – we have and continue to see plenty of misfires. Improvements in customer profiling and targeting people will also be significant; the surprise of everyday users at some of our highly targeted campaigns and feedback of “useful, helpful ads” is a personal watch for me.

Q: What specific advice do you give to clients around social media?

A: Social media, managed appropriately, can encourage behaviour with long-term benefit to all parts of your organisation. Consumer problems can be well handled and indeed this is starting to be expected in some more tech savvy walks of life. Social media has also powered some great examples of co-creation, innovation and brand interaction. My best experience of this has come from a recent sneak peek of Virgin.com's new site. All round consumers are likely to feel a stronger connection and be better served by effective social media campaigns.

Q: Your speciality is SEO, what significant developments do you see there?

A: From an industry perspective, proper measurement of KPIs and click attribution is going to be incredibly important in the next 18 months. The DTM team have a strong belief in achieving results on time and within budget; demonstrating and tracking this online is a challenge, especially with lots of different channels and long purchase cycles in play. The nature of the work we do on results-based or pay-for-performance SEO means it's good news for DTM that progress is being made here, and really that's good news for everyone.



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Sarah Brearley
Strategic Digital Manager
at Cognition Digital

Q: My marketing budget is reduced this year and I need to see a return from it. Where should my money go?

A: The only channel that allows you to track the effects of your marketing activity quickly and with any accuracy is digital. Fortunately, it can also be the cheapest. In most cases it allows you to ask for an immediate response so you'll soon know whether it's worked or not, and if it hasn't, you can refine your message with different test groups until it does.

Q: Does search marketing still work?

A: Over 40% of all web traffic is generated by search engines, so in my opinion search is an integral part of successful digital strategy. It's important to be aware not only of current search technologies but also of what's to come, including advancements in semantic web and regularly changing algorithms. You'll get the best value from your search campaigns by making sure there's not too much duplication between the search terms you pay for and the ones you get listed on naturally.

Q: How can I reduce the bounce rate of visitors to my site?

A: Your website needs to complement your brand and be as attractive, user-friendly and informative as possible to encourage visitors to act – whether you want them to make an enquiry, leave their details or place an order. Internet users are not patient, and search-driven traffic is just one click away from a list of your competitors. Implement good tracking software to test, review and refine your landing pages.

Q: Does it matter which CMS I use?

A: Content Management Systems enable non-technical website owners to alter and update their site's content. If you want a website that's scalable and adaptable but don't want to pay developers' fees every time you make a change, you need a CMS-based website. However, the market is flooded with such systems. Choosing the best one for your business can be a minefield, but a good digital agency will not be tied to one system and will be able to recommend the best one to suit your needs. They should also provide training to get you started.



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Four industry perspectives on better digital business.



Tim Walker
Managing Director
Iconnyx

Q: What should people consider if they're new to managed hosting, or are thinking of changing providers?

A: There are several points users should think about: **a)** the likely hosting performance and service level; **b)** the experience and track record of the hosting provider; **c)** the start-up and ongoing costs of the service, including analysing the total cost of ownership compared to running in-house servers; **d)** the security and robustness of the solution compared to the purposes it will be used for; **e)** the likely benefits/impact to your business and internal IT environment of outsourcing hosting to a third party; **f)** the quality control and ongoing service management of you as a customer.

Q: What should companies be asking themselves to decide on the type of managed hosting that is most suitable for them?

A: The key area which companies should be reviewing is the service level agreement (SLA), or the uptime guarantee that they require. Dedicated servers offer great service levels that are wholly appropriate for a variety of uses from website hosting, intranets, to application and database hosting. Companies looking for 100% uptime from their hosting infrastructure, in particular anyone considering hosting a busy site (e.g. ecommerce), should consider carefully the impact of any downtime to their hosting. Dedicated servers are likely to experience hard-disk failures at some point, and therefore hosting important sites or applications on a highly resilient infrastructure such as a Storage-Area-Network (SAN), would be more appropriate to achieve the peace of mind of a 100% uptime experience.

Q: What security issues are there to consider?

A: Users must think carefully about the level of security and quality of the hosting environment. In particular, the use of shared or dedicated firewalls and load-balancers to ensure that IP traffic is separate, secure and balanced between multiple servers. The overall security, reliability and efficiency of the network and data centre are also key considerations.



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Jonathan Robinson
Chief Operating Officer
NetBenefit

Q: Is there growth in the managed hosting industry? If so, why?

A: Yes. There are a number of trends driving this. Developers of Software as a Service (SaaS) all need somewhere to host their services; retailers are increasingly looking to improve their internet presence to counter the decline in high street sales and marketers are continuing to spend their budgets online because of the ability to accurately measure results. Clients are realising that it is far easier to pay somebody else to worry about their hosting.

Q: What size organisations tend to outsource their servers?

A: There is no such thing as a typical hosting client. A small business with five employees can run a service based business online with a multi-million pound turnover and hundreds of thousands of website visitors, whilst an international organisation may only have a requirement for a very small information site. What is important is what the business wants to do online and how critical the availability of the website is to their business.

Q: How do your clients benefit from managed hosting in today's economic climate?

A: Maintaining servers in the correct environment can be costly. The obvious benefit of managed hosting is clients don't need to purchase and maintain their own servers, but there are other less tangible benefits. Firstly, the client does not have to worry about keeping up to speed with the latest technology because the hosting provider invests in the best technology and technical staff to make sure it can act as a trusted advisor. Secondly, the hosting provider builds a safe and scaleable environment that takes the client from test and development to a live platform that can grow in terms of bandwidth and storage. Thirdly, it has the flexibility to offer more resources for peaks in traffic caused by seasonal or promotional activity. All of which leaves the client free to focus on its core business.



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