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A DIGITAL ACQUISITION FRAMEWORK FOR SMALL BUSINESS

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WHITE PAPER

Introduction

The digital marketing ecosystem is vast. There's certainly more to it than any one person could expect to master with the variety of channels and mediums on which you can spend your time and money growing everyday. You just can't do it all, particularly if you are a small business or a startup with limited resources, least of all time.

If you are responsible for the online marketing function in your business and you find your time and budget torn between the growing range of marketing opportunities, then this article is for you. By night I run *WP Dev Shed* (hosted by you know who), but my days are spent helping clients large and small with digital marketing.

My goal here is to present a simple digital acquisition framework to help small businesses focus on those critical few things that are most likely to attract and convert qualified visitors.

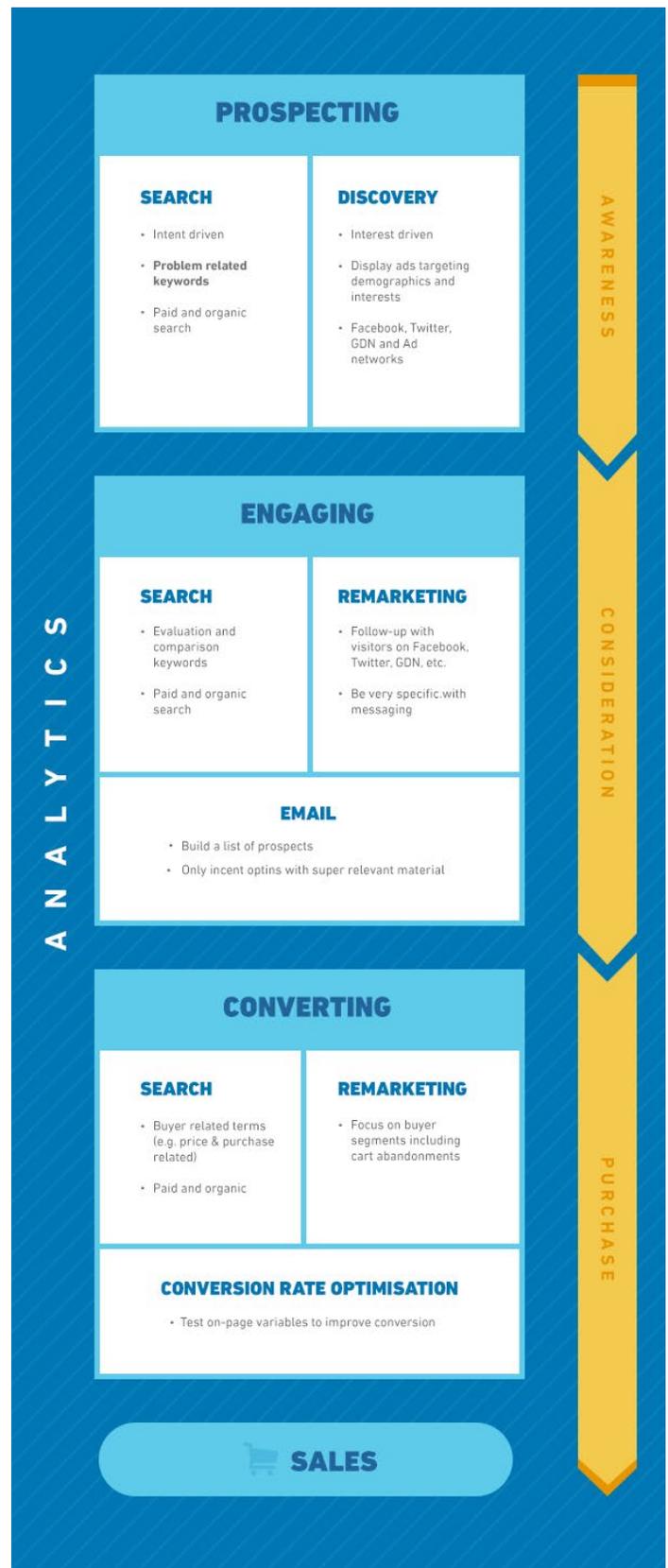
Let's start with a visual overview. Following this we'll dive deeper on the component parts of this framework...

Analytics - Setting the foundation

Before we get to the acquisition of traffic we need to start with analytics because it is the single most important thing you need to get right from the outset. You can (and will) experiment and make mistakes with the acquisition of traffic, but if you have bad data then you can't make good decisions about your marketing spend. Let's start with some practical actions...

Set up your accounts

1. Create a company Google account. This account will 'own' your various Google accounts for Analytics, Search Console and Adwords, etc. Resist the temptation to just use your personal account for this. If you are successful, you will end up handing over responsibility for analytics and you don't want to be handing someone else the keys to your personal Google account.
2. Use this Google account to setup your [Google Analytics](#), [Google Search Console](#), [Google Adwords](#) and [Google Tag Manager](#). You can also use this account for other Google products (like [Adometry](#)), but we're going to focus on these four for now. If you work with an agency for your web development or Adwords, please do not let them own your account. You can



invite them to manage your Analytics and Adwords, but you must own the account. This ownership issue is important so you have total control of the data and in case you want to move agencies in the future...if they own it then you will lose the data at some point.

3. Make sure that your Google Adwords, Analytics and Search Console accounts are connected. This will ensure good data flow between them so you get the best possible insights. [More on doing that here.](#)
4. Implement Google Tag Manager on your site and use this to control all the various tracking and ad-tech code you need to add to the site. Tag Manager is basically a bucket into which you can drop all the various codes without having to involve your developers. Here's a [great intro on implementing Tag Manager.](#)
5. While you are at it, create a [Facebook Ads](#) and a [Twitter Ads](#) account and grab their respective remarketing tags. Read [Jon Loomer's post on Facebook remarketing pixels](#), and this post on [Twitter remarketing](#). Use Google Tag Manager to add these to the site. You might not need these right away, but the sooner you do this the sooner you will start building remarketing audiences, which you can target on those platforms. We'll cover more on this below.
6. Whenever you pay for visitors, whether by search advertising, display or social ads, you must be sure to tag these campaigns by appending the proper URL variables to your landing pages. The [Google URL Builder](#) makes this easy. [Best practice](#) is to use a consistent naming convention for all your campaigns so they can be easily identified in Google Analytics.

Other important considerations

Whilst setting up the basic Google Analytics code is very simple, GA is of course much more customizable. It can be configured to pass information into GA about your customers' onsite purchases, eg. order values. In this way you can report actual ROI from your various channels. Ecommerce tracking and set up is beyond the scope of this article, but there are many excellent resources online to help you through this process...Start with [Google's own documentation](#) and this primer on [setting up goal tracking](#).

One of the other big challenges for many businesses is tracking online to offline behaviour. If you run a real estate agency, for instance, you can absolutely attract leads online, but often the conversion will be offline. You might capture an enquiry form submission, but as soon as the lead calls you lose the online tracking which makes it hard to measure the value of your online marketing.

There are solutions to this dilemma:

1. **Call tracking systems.** To help solve the issue of tracking phone call traffic that originates from website visits there are now a number of excellent call tracking solutions which will integrate with Google Analytics. Typically they work by substituting your

actual phone number displayed on the website with a special tracking number which allows the company to track the origin of the call before redirecting it to your actual phone number. This is essential if your conversions typically happen on the phone but you can drive leads using paid media such as search advertising.

2. **Loyalty systems.** The most advanced multi-channel retailers use their loyalty systems to connect their customers online to offline behaviour. By incenting existing customers to login to the website and connect their loyalty number to their account they can track what products they browse and buy, even if the purchase ultimately happens in-store.

Clearly Analytics is a huge topic on its own, so I encourage you to check out the other resources linked above. If nothing else, please heed my Google account management advice. It is vital that you own your own data.

Now, let's set about acquiring some qualified traffic...

The Buying Cycle

I like to think about acquisition from the perspective of the customer journey. In the broadest sense the buying cycle in any industry runs through an awareness by the customer of their problem, to active consideration of the available options, and ultimately a purchase.

From our perspective we can think of these stages broadly as Prospecting, Engaging and Converting, and this is how we'll frame our acquisition model...

Prospecting

When prospecting for potential customers there are two modes of operation available to us and they work together to reach prospects early in the buying cycle...

Search (intent driven)

Intent driven acquisition is all about search engines. We say it is intent driven because the searcher is signaling their intent with their search query. We can reach them either via our organic search ranking or through paid search advertising.

At the awareness stage of the buying cycle, potential customers are becoming aware of a problem they have and will start searching Google looking for information and answers to help them address

this problem. We need to understand what questions the searcher is asking to understand the problem they have, and we need to develop content which addresses these questions better than any other resource online.

To the extent that we can address the intent of searchers we may rank organically or we can pay to advertise against specific keywords in Google or any of the popular search engines.

ORGANIC (NON-PAID) SEARCH

There are many places you can go to learn all about ranking well in organic search. [Moz's excellent SEO Beginners Guide](#) is a great starting point. Ultimately though it boils down to understanding the buying cycle in your business, the keywords potential buyers are using, and ensuring that you have content that delivers on the intent of searchers in your market throughout the buying cycle.

PAID SEARCH ADVERTISING

Paid search advertising works in exactly the same way as organic search in so far as you need to have content that answers the questions that potential customers have when they search. It is different though in that it allows you to present your business to them when they search even if you don't presently rank naturally for specific keywords.

I should add that even if you do rank there is plenty of evidence to suggest that paid search ads and organic rankings work well together to drive incrementally more traffic than either can achieve alone. Like organic search, there is a whole science and art to paid search advertising and [many places to learn more](#).

Discovery (interest driven)

The other mode of acquisition is interest driven. Here we are talking specifically about display and social advertising on the Google Display Network (GDN), Facebook, Twitter and/or any of the other ad networks. To be frank though, if you are resource constrained I would recommend focusing on the GDN and Facebook unless your specific market has a particular affinity for other ad networks such as Twitter or LinkedIn. Indeed the New York Times [recently reported](#) that 85 percent of all online ad dollars will go to Google and Facebook in the first quarter 2016.

Where Google search advertising is intent driven based on keyword queries, display advertising is all about demographics and interest based targeting.

Facebook in particular know an awful lot about the interests of its users so it is possible to advertise to very specific demographics with very specific stated interests. The Google Display Network tool

allows you to target specific demographics and advertise on sites related to specific topics likely to be of interest to your target market.

Broad interest based targeting is great for brand development. You can target people specifically interested in topics related to your product or service and position your messaging in such a way as to capture their interest and awareness of your brand so they will think of you when they are next in the market. There have also been many studies to show that such display advertising increases the performance of search advertising thanks to an increase in brand awareness, i.e. the display ads pique our interest and make us aware of the brand, so when we do a very specific keyword query and see the brand advertising in Google we are more inclined to click their ad.

Like search advertising there is a lot to learn about running effective display campaigns. I suggest you start very simply, targeting interests and demographics that you know are close to your market. Make your messaging smart with compelling calls to action and you will do ok. Keep in mind that a boring banner with no clear and compelling message will go largely unnoticed...The effort you put into the campaign will be reflected in what you get out. As you learn more about what works you can get more sophisticated and experimental with your targeting. You can learn more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Engaging

At the consideration phase of the buying cycle you want to try and engage with potential customers and convince them that your solution is the answer to their problems. Potential customers will be using Google to help find suppliers and compare options, so search is again a very effective way to acquire qualified visitors...

Search

Whether you want to attract organic search visitors or pay for search ads, you must research the types of keywords that potential customers would use when considering a purchase in your market, e.g. 'compare...', 'alternatives to...', 'benefits of' and '...review' type terms. Then think about the content you can produce that addresses such questions. The business that best answers all the questions that consumers have will likely attract the most organic search traffic and will have the content to deliver an effective paid search campaign too.

Comparison pages and product reviews are a great example that apply to almost all categories of product. Reviews and testimonials from happy customers mean you can rank for such terms and also provide excellent social proof which is proven to boost sales.

Pro-tip: One of my favorite tools is [AnswerThePublic.com](#) which will scrape Google suggestions to find all the what, when, why, who, where and how questions that people are asking about your product. If you have ever had trouble coming up with FAQs this is pure content gold.

If you have been able to attract qualified visitors to your site earlier in the buying cycle then you can also re-engage with them as they move into the consideration phase.

Re-marketing (re-engaging)

Re-marketing sometimes gets a bad rap, but that's only because it is so often done poorly. You know the feeling when you've visited a website once and then you start seeing their banner ads absolutely everywhere for evermore...that's not a great experience.

It is possible to use re-marketing to great effect without annoying potential prospects. Here are some guidelines...

- Be very specific in your re-targeting. If you sell a range of products then re-target based on the specific products that a visitor was looking at.
- Offer some extra value. Don't just advertise the same product at the same price they've already seen...do something different. If they didn't buy then they are probably still evaluating options, so why not advertise your special report comparing all the leading products in the industry, or simply use messaging that addresses the likely comparisons directly? Or if you are happy to lead with price you could entice them back with a time sensitive offer.
- View limit your re-marketing. Set a limit to the number of times anyone person sees you re-marketing, and don't hammer people who are not interested, that's just annoying.
- Re-market your other channels, eg. if someone has visited your website, you could re-market your Facebook page or Twitter page to them on those channels. If you are interested in growing your social following this is a great way to build your following based on previous site visitors. Whilst organic reach isn't what it once was on Facebook in particular it is still valuable to have a solid base of followers on Facebook.

Database Building

There is literally no business that wouldn't benefit from building an email list so it would be remiss to not mention this here. If you can provide a compelling reason to opt in to your newsletter then you will have an ongoing opportunity to communicate to those subscribers more or less free.

Of course this is easier said than done. A few tips:

- Think very carefully about the content you intend to deliver. Is a regular 'newsletter' really the most compelling thing you could do? Is there some kind of industry information or time sensitive information that subscribers would continue to be interested in over time? Whatever the angle, make sure it is sustainable.
- If you are going to use an incentive (sometimes called a lead magnet) to entice subscribers make sure it is relevant to your business. If you use competitions to drive subscriptions this is doubly important. You only want a subscriber who is genuinely interested in your content and iPad or iPhone giveaways are usually too non-specific and will only drive poorly qualified signups. It is better to have fewer, better qualified, subscribers.

Converting

By the time a prospect is at the buying stage we hope to have raised their awareness of our brand and done enough to convince them already that we are the best option to address the problem they are trying to solve.

Of course many markets are characterized by broad competition and short buying cycles so you need to do everything you can to optimise for sales right up until the customer has checked out, and to this end there is still more we can do through digital channels...

Search

At the buying phase, prospects will be searching for purchase and price related terms. Buying keywords like '...discounts', 'cheap...' or price related terms will apply in certain markets, while store location terms will be important for offline purchases.

Thinking about the typical consumer in your industry will help you figure out the most appropriate content to attract the buyer and convert sales at this late stage, and you will want to optimize product pages for such buying related terms.

Optimizing product pages (or any page for that matter), will serve you both in organic search and for paid search campaigns. Of course organic rankings depend on your pages being relevant for particular terms and topics, but so too you must optimize your product landing pages for effective and efficient paid search advertising. The search engines will assess the relevance of your landing pages when you bid on specific keywords, and the more relevant your content to the keyword in question, the better your campaigns will perform, and ultimately the less you will pay for traffic.

Re-marketing

Re-marketing can also be used to great effect at the buying stage. If you've ever browsed products on Amazon and then noticed that those very same products are being advertised on Facebook then you are seeing a re-marketing campaign in action. Amazon knows that almost all their customers are Facebook users so they are running the Facebook remarketing tag across the site so to build audiences of Facebook users who have viewed specific products (but not checked out) which allows them to then advertise these same products to hot prospects. They know that people don't always buy on their first

visit to the site so they give you another nudge by advertising the same product to you on Facebook. You can be sure they get a great conversion rate from these ads, and this is why we recommended up front that you implement the Facebook remarketing tag so that you too can start building your own remarketing audiences on Facebook.

Most modern shopping cart software worth using will also enable abandoned cart follow ups. If a potential buyer has logged into your site and added something to their cart, but not checked out, this will let you follow up with them via email. In doing so you might make a special offer (free shipping perhaps) and try to incent them to complete the purchase they abandoned.

The purpose of such strategies is to catch any potentially lost opportunities to convert good quality prospects. You do want to be careful in your approach however, being sure not to remarket and follow up too aggressively lest you scare people away. Remarketing is a powerful tool, but it can also be overused and abused. Tread carefully.

Conversion Rate Optimisation

Often marketers and marketing agencies are guilty of spending too much time trying to prospect and fill up the top of the funnel, and not enough time trying to maximise the opportunities with the traffic they have. Say you have 1,000 visitors and a 3 percent conversion rate, that's 30 sales. What if you could increase your conversion rate to 3.5 percent? That would mean 35 sales, or a 16 percent increase in sales revenue.

Conversion rate optimization (CRO) is a science and an art. Indeed, there are specialists and entire agencies which specialize in doing nothing but CRO. Providing detailed guidance on CRO is beyond the scope of this article, but suffice to say if you have not done anything to test and optimize the conversion paths on your site, you are 100 percent certain to be losing sales.

Conversion rate optimization should be a constant ongoing focus. For more information I recommend [VWO's post on Conversion Rate Best Practices](#) and [Qualaroo's Beginners Guide to CRO](#).

Attribution

Like CRO, attribution is also huge topic all of its own. The main point to understand here is that attributing sales to the most recent click absolutely underestimates the value of all digital channels to your business. In other words, just because Google Analytics says a sale came from paid search doesn't mean that this was even the main channel. It might well be that a customer first found you via a link on social media, then visited your site directly and only later happened

to see your paid search ad when they were doing more research. Relying solely on last click attribution can sometimes lead to bad decisions on how to spend your marketing dollars.

Also like CRO, there are specialists and agencies which specialize in helping businesses understand attribution, but as a starter Google Analytics has a great report to help understand conversion funnels in your business. In GA go to Conversions > Multi-Channel Funnels > Top Conversion Paths. There you will see a view of what channels your customers touched before they converted. Invariably your customers will have touched more than one channel and it is important to keep in mind this holistic view of all online media channels when you plan your marketing budgets. You can learn more about the basics of attribution modeling here.

Creating the Flywheel

The promise of online commerce is the ability to track and monitor the entire process so you can know for sure what is effective. Like anything, the devil is in the details but the extent to which we have robust analytics and a good sense of attribution then we really can make good decisions about our marketing spend and actually connect spend directly to sales.

To this end the goal should be to get to a place where every ad dollar you spend turns into a bottom line profit...put a \$1 in and get \$2 back. If you can do this then it isn't a matter of how high your budget is, it is only a matter of how many people you can reach.

Wrapping It Up

As long as this post is, we haven't covered all the options and opportunities out there when it comes to digital marketing. We haven't even covered the basics in a huge amount of detail (follow the links to other great resources for more info). What we have tried to do is provide a simple framework for small businesses and startups to approach digital marketing and acquisition.

Prospecting, engaging and converting visitors to your site is a great way to think about your marketing during the awareness, consideration and purchase phases of the typical buying cycle. We've described how you can use the most popular channels to drive traffic and engagement during these phases with the goal of conversion in mind.

We've also provided some practical tips on getting your analytics set up right from the outset and we encourage you to start there and then explore some of the additional resources linked throughout the article. Start with the basics and as you get those down you can get more sophisticated and expand your reach through new channels. With consistent testing and refinement you will find what works especially well for your business.

Do you have your own model for approaching digital marketing? Did I miss anything you think should be included here? I'd love your feedback and ideas.

Want to kick your digital marketing into high gear? WP Engine is the managed WordPress platform of choice for digital marketers. [Check out our plans now.](#)

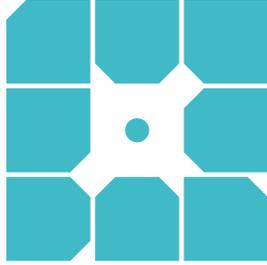


About The Author: Charles Coxhead

Charles Coxhead has been blogging and building things on the web since the late 90's. He's built news syndication and analytics tools for bloggers, lead gen platforms for online retailers, and has worked with all the major blogging platforms since the earliest versions of Blogger. These days he helps big business with digital marketing strategy, and by night develops WordPress themes and plugins at [WP Dev Shed](#).

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About WP Engine

WP Engine powers amazing digital experiences for websites and applications built on WordPress. The company's premium managed hosting platform provides the performance, reliability and security required by the biggest brands in the world, while remaining affordable and intuitive enough for smaller businesses and individuals. Companies of all sizes rely on WP Engine's award-winning customer service team to quickly solve technical problems and create a world-class customer experience. Founded in 2010, WP Engine is headquartered in Austin, Texas and has offices in San Francisco, California, San Antonio, Texas, and London, England.

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