

# Where to Start With Digital Marketing

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Higher education communications professionals need to understand and apply digital marketing as part of their toolkit in order to stay relevant in a highly competitive marketplace. Digital marketing refers to the many ways you can reach and market to your target audiences through digital channels and devices, including social media, email, digital advertising, and landing page/form strategies.

If your team has not tried to implement at least some digital marketing strategies, it is time to get in the game. Paid social media is a good place to start, and the business manager feature in Facebook makes it easy to try a number of tactics. Here are five simple ideas to help you get started.

## **1. Experiment**

You'll never find the perfect time to start dipping your toe in the water, so start with small experiments. For example, I started running \$20 to \$50 social media ads to get a sense of what a full-scale effort might take. Social media was an easy place to start. I fully managed the campaign from goal setting to content creation to analysis. I started with boosting Facebook posts, testing various amounts of money and measuring the impact. Then I tested some simple targeted ads—a story about the conservatory of music to people ages 14 to 17, who expressed a Facebook-interest in music—allowing me to measure outcomes and compare.

## **2. Measure, assess, and then test some more.**

Once you have experimented, you might need to change tactics based on what you have learned about your audience. Figuring out what to assess can be challenging, especially when there is so much data available. Developing an flexible mindset as a part of your process will go a long way into helping you step into this medium. Start with simple metrics and build up. My former team at Gettysburg College would meet on a monthly basis to evaluate the outcomes of our paid social media strategy. We reviewed what tactics were working, or not working, and what we wanted to adjust in the month ahead.

## **3. Allocate resources. Every effort takes resources.**

You can start with targeted social media advertising for a modest investment. But there is a more important question than the budget: Are you prepared to allocate a staff member's time? This includes time to train, time to plan and execute, time to track and report, and time to provide analysis to inform ongoing strategy. Your small-scale experiments will give you a chance to see where investment of staff resources best fits into your current organizational structure.

## **4. Make the case for more resources.**

Building a pilot effort with a small amount of resources allows you to make the case for investment at your institution. Your leadership will want to see the return on the investment (ROI). Showing how your digital marketing initiatives are helping meet your institutional goals is critical. If increasing visibility in a particular market is one of your institution's goals, being able to demonstrate the broad reach you had in that market segment will be important. If you can eventually tie your efforts back to specific revenue streams and business unit goals, even better. You might not be able to get to this level of detail for every tactic, but if you can link to revenue or other important enrollment or fundraising goals for a few tactics, it will help you make the overall case. For instance, track paid social reach in an admissions targeted segment and illustrate the impact on specific inquiries or applications.

## **5. Find your mentors.**

Digital marketing can be overwhelming. If you are struggling to get started with paid social media campaigns, find someone that you think is doing it well and reach out to them. Pick their brain as a way to build a connection and increase your own knowledge. There are several excellent professional development opportunities as well. The [Council for the Advancement and Support of Education \(CASE\) runs a Social Media and Community conference](#) each spring and [CarnegieDartlet runs a conference](#) in January with a focus on digital tactics. If you are looking for an opportunity that crosses industry you may want to check out [Social Media Marketing World](#) as well.

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