

Introduction

Digital in the Promotion Mix

Learning Objectives

- Be able to define digital promotion and related concepts
- Consider where digital tools fit in the overall mix of promotional tools
- Understand how digital promotion involves influencing behavior
- Recognize the importance of conducting digital promotion strategically

The Rise of Digital Promotion

Digital communications are being used today to promote a wide range of organizations, products, services, people and causes. Although promotion is sometimes described as providing incentives for people to take action (e.g. sales promotions), the dictionary defines promotion more generally as “the act of furthering the growth or development of something....”

Today virtually every organization uses some combination of traditional and digital communications tools to communicate with customers, employees, investors, donors, the media and the community at large. Some examples of digital promotion at work include:

- A direct marketer sends e-mails to customers about a new product.
- A buyer for an advertising agency purchases display ads on websites in addition to ads in newspapers and magazines and commercials on TV radio.
- A customer service representative at a customer care center responds to a question posed by a website visitor.
- A staff member in the order processing unit of an e-commerce site acknowledges receipt of a customer request.
- A publicist posts a streaming video on YouTube and then distributes the link to journalists and bloggers as part of a production introduction.
- A journalist alerts followers about upcoming news story or editorial content with a “tweet”
- A social media community manager monitors comments on Facebook or Twitter,

- A local retail store owner gives a \$3 discount to a new customer who visits the store through local programs operated by Foursquare or Facebook Place.
- A politician addresses constituents online via a webcast.
- A recruiter enables a prospective soldier to experience the thrill of combat by giving away a digital war game. .

Digital in the Age of Convergence

Digital promotion's emergence as a specialty has coincided with the melding of a variety of traditional communications disciplines and the convergence of various communication media. Although these disciplines are grounded in separate traditions and professional structures, an unintended consequence of the rise of digital media has been to make it increasingly difficult to differentiate between previously discreet professional domains.

Strategic communication is an umbrella term used today to describe the purposeful effort to promote or advance an entity's mission. Importantly, digital promotion is used by strategic communication professionals for varying purposes in at least six domains of professional communications. The principles and practices outlined in this book thus can be used by personnel listed below for the following purposes:

Management Communication

Personnel: Managerial/administrative personnel throughout organization

Purposes: To facilitate the orderly operations of the organization. To promote understanding of an organization's mission, vision, and goals. To supply information needed in day-to-day operations, including customer and vendor transactions and customer and staff training.

Marketing Communication

Personnel: Marketing and advertising staffs

Purposes: To create awareness and promote sales of products and services. To attract and retain users and customers, including intermediaries in distribution channels. Among nongovernmental organizations and other not-for-profit organizations, marketing communications can include promotion of services and participation in programs, and fundraising and development communications.

Public Relations

Personnel: Public relations or publicity, human resources, finance, or government relations staffs.

Purpose: To establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with key constituencies. This includes consumers and customers, as well as investors and donors, employees and volunteers, community leaders, and government officials.

Technical Communication

Personnel: Technical, engineering support, and training staffs

Purposes: To educate employees, customers, and others to improve their efficiency. It involves reducing errors and promoting the effective and satisfying use of technology when performing tasks important to the organization.

Political Communication

Personnel: Government affairs staffs as well as politicians and advocacy groups.

Purposes: To build political consensus or consent on important issues involving the exercise of political power and the allocation of resources in society. This includes efforts to influence voting in elections as well as public policy decisions by lawmakers or administrators. On the international level, this includes communications in support of public diplomacy and military stabilization.

Public Information/Social Marketing Campaigns

Personnel: Employees in nongovernmental, not-for-profit, and governmental agencies, as well as corporate staffs involved in promoting the social, psychological, and/or physical well-being of people.

Purposes: To reduce the incidence of risky behaviors. To promote prosocial causes important to the betterment of the community.

Digital Promotion Platforms

Digital promotion today primarily involves reaching and engaging people (referred to as users) through computer and mobile devices. However, a variety of other tools are being used, too.

Computers initially included only *desktop computers* (with full-size screens and keyboards) linked to the Internet through telephone lines and later broadband connections. Using computers for promotional purposes began with the ability the ability to transmit e-mail messages and later instant messages, but then exploded beginning in 1994 with the advent of web browsers that provided a user-friendly graphical interface with others via the World Wide Web. In the early 2000s, portable laptops or computer notebooks were widely adopted, propelled with the advent that Wi-fi systems that provided wireless connectivity within homes and offices and later in public venues.

Mobile devices first included basic *cell phones* (referred to today as *feature phones*), which

Digital Promotion Milestones

1970s

Precursor to modern e-mail launched. Portable mobile telephone invented. TCP/IP standard for communicating between computers established. Multi-player online games played. Experimental interactive TV systems tested. Bulletin boards and usenet discussion groups link PC users.

1980s

IBM popularized personal computer. Term "Internet" used for first time. Domain name system (DNS) established for Internet addresses. Apple McIntosh introduced desktop computer with graphical interface and mouse. Laptop computer introduced. Internet Relay Chat

1990s

World Wide Web launched. First Internet indexing/search system. Smart phone prototype invented. First cell phones allow text messaging. First commercial web browser (Netscape). Secure SSL encryption allowed online shopping. First banner ad. Dial-up Internet services begin. Wiki software invented. Cameras included on cell phones. Amazon, Yahoo, e-Bay, and Google began operations.

2000s

File sharing, blogging became popular. Wikipedia formed. First social networking site (Friendster) and first blog directory. LinkedIn, iTunes Store, G-Mail, Flickr, Facebook, and Twitter began. Apple iPhone and Apple App Store. Location-based services such as Foursquare begin.

2010s

Pinterest begins. Content marketing and brand journalism become popular.

operated via on cellular telecommunications networks rather the Internet. In addition to telephone calls, users quickly embraced the *text messaging* capabilities of cell phones as well as their ability to send and received photographs. The advent of smart phones brought the ability to interact with mini-versions of websites optimized for viewing on the larger screens of these devices. In addition, smart phone users were able to download and use a variety of mobile apps, small computer programs that allowed performing specific functions. Tablets later then introduced as larger-format mobile devices that featured many capabilities generally associated with full-size computers (such as reading full-page documents and books).

Other Venues. In addition, a small but growing segment of digital promotion involves using **interactive entertainment devices**, including game consoles and interactive television sets. **Stand-alone kiosks** situated in various public locations, such as airports and theaters, allow users to mostly conduct information queries but also can be used to reach the public with promotional messages. In addition, a variety of **place-based digital media** provide exposure and opportunities for interaction. These include

SIDEBAR

Checklist of Digital Promotion Tools

Messaging (Chapter 2)

- E-mail
- Text messaging
- Microblogging (Twitter)

Traditional Websites (Chapter 3)

- Product and E-Commerce Sites
- Customer Support Sites
- Specialized Organizational Sites

Mobile Communications (Chapter 4)

- Mobile Websites
- Apps

Online Advertising (Chapter 5)

- Search/Text Advertising
- Display Advertising
- Online Video Advertising
- Specialized Advertising

Multimedia (Chapter 6)

- Online Video
- Live Video Web streaming
- Still Images
- Slide Shows
- Computer Graphics and Animations
- Screencasts

E-Publications (Chapter 7)

- e-newsletters
- e-zines
- e-books and e-reports

Online Publicity (Chapter 8)

- Optimized Digital News Releases
- Multimedia News Releases
- E-mail Pitch Letters (Emails)
- Online Newsrooms
- Online Media Relations
- Articles Marketing

Social Media (Chapter 9)

Blogs and Podcasts (Chapter 11)

Social Networking Sites (Chapter 12)

Advice Sites (Chapter 13)

- Social Bookmarking
- Social News Sites
- Review Sites
- Forums and Chats

Collaboration Media (Chapter 14)

- Wikis
- Webcasts, Web Conferences, and Webinars
- Intranets and Extranets

Entertainment Media (Chapter 15)

- Games
- Online Competitions
- Virtual World Sites

tablet screens at restaurant tables and in automobile and commercial planes. Also outdoor signs and interior *electronic bulletin boards* and displays that rely on wifi and similar technologies permit showing videos or rotating promotional messages that can be controlled at the site or remotely.

Strengths and Limitations of Digital Promotion.

Digital promotion offers some obvious advantages over traditional media. These include: immediacy, fast distribution, and 24/7 access by users. The interactive nature of many digital tools enables users to respond using the same device in which messages are delivered and also to share opinions and responses with others. Digital media are also highly personal, and messages can be personalized while the experience of using them can be customized by the user. Perhaps, most valuable to the digital promoter is the fact that electronic systems upon which digital promotion allow tracking activity.

On the downside, the ubiquitous nature of promotional messages can lead to *information overload* and difficulty in capturing the attention of users who often struggle to sort out important from unimportant messages. Users are quick to delete message not readily deemed relevant. Users are often in a hurry and might not spend a much time fully contemplating a message. Many digital promotional messages – consider Twitter and text messages, for example – tend to be superficial and ephemeral. Together, all of these factors can lead to *fragmented* communication. Meanwhile, some users are *distrustful* of digital promotion because of concerns about fraud, the invasion of privacy and the potential misuse of information about them.

A Strategic Approach to Digital Promotion

Strategic Approach Critical

With the dizzying array of digital promotion options available, perhaps the biggest challenge in digital promotion today is choosing which tools best serve a client's needs.

The early development of digital promotion was characterized by a succession of innovations tools that became faddishly popular through inventors, services providers and consultants who breathlessly advocated their wonders: The parade included websites, e-mail marketing, e-commerce shopping sites, blogs, search engine marketing, online videos, social networking sites, location-based services and mobile apps, to name a few. No client organization wanted to be left behind, so many organizations embraced new tools cumulatively without much regard as to whether they could or should replace digital tools that had been only recently adopted or how these tools could be used in combination with other tools.

Developing a Strategy. Today, even the largest organization cannot afford such luxury. Organizations must thoughtfully choose which digital tools best serve their needs and invest time and financial resources to maximize both *effectiveness* (results) and

efficiency (deployment of only necessary resources). Any particular activity needs to be able to demonstrate results in terms of audience exposure and response and ultimately, return on investment. Fortunately, many of the operating systems that support these tools provide *analytics* tools that allow tracking extent of use, number of users, and responses (See Chapter 12 regarding Assessment.)

Strategy involves developing an integrated plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim. In a marketing context, strategy involves identifying clear marketing goals, including what products or services to offer, how to price, them, where to how them and how to promote them. Consistent with modern ideas about *management by objectives*, desired outcomes are clearly stated at the outset of an initiative and measured at the conclusion to assess whether they were attained.

Communication strategy is typically outlined in the context of a written program or campaign plan. While the two terms are often used interchangeably, these terms connote nuanced differences:

- A **program** is a concerted and coordinated effort involving multiple activities to achieve specified outcomes and that is ongoing in its duration. Typically results are measured periodically (quarterly, semi-annually or annually), and the effort is subject to revision or cancellation for insufficient results.
- A **campaign** involves the same kind of orchestrated effort but is limited to a comparatively short time frame specified at the outset, typically 1 week to 12 months. Campaigns usually focus on a target date by which outcomes are to be attained and results are to be measured.

Although the nomenclature varies, the typical program or campaign plan includes the following components:

- Situation Analysis – A snapshot in time of the circumstances in which an organization finds itself, including an opportunity to be exploited or a problem to be addressed.
- Goals Statement – A clear statement of the outcomes the organization wants to achieve – stated in business terms, such revenues generated, units sold, donations received.
- Communications objectives – A succinct statement of the behavioral changes that need to be effected among people to achieve the organization's goals (see section on Influencing Behavior)
- Action Recommendations – A list of actions that might need to be taken *prior to the launch* of a communications effort to assure its effectiveness. These include changes in policies or practices to assure success.
- Communication Recommendations – A focused outline of the *audiences* to be addressed, the *key messages* to be delivered, and the *media* or channels to use.
- Tactics – Details about the *tasks* that need to be performed, including a timetable and staffing requirements.
- Assessment Plan – The benchmarks upon which the success of the program or campaign is to be assessed, based on the organization's goals, the stated communications objectives, and additional measures that might serve as indicators of the effort's effectiveness and/or efficiency

- Budget

A third framework in which communication strategy is specified is a *project plan*. Whereas most communications professionals generally talk in terms of program or campaigns, *project management* is a strategic approach to reaching desired outcomes used anywhere in an organization. Thus, an IT unit within an organization might use project planning rather than program or campaign planning.

- A **project** is a one-time task, event or responsibility, rather than an ongoing activity or ongoing process. Projects can involve one person producing a single item but can be a multi-faceted activity that requires the coordination of human and financial resources across an organization.

Written project plans involving digital promotion can contain many of the same components as a program or campaign plan -- purpose, rationale/justification, goals, communications objectives, audience, message and media, tactics (tasks, schedule, staffing) and budget. A variant of a project plan is a *creative brief*, which is used once a proposed project and its budget have been approved for development. A creative brief is a detailed outline of strategic decisions that have been made to guide the creative staff in its development. In addition to a summation of the project's purpose and target audience, the creative brief addresses message themes, online and offline actions to be taken by the audience, key facts and mandatory information to be included, and creative considerations (visual look, tone, compliance with corporate identity, etc.)

Mixing Digital and Traditional Communications

The world is going digital – or so it appears. Some indicators of the shift can be seen in the decline in consumer use of postal mail, over-the-air broadcasting, telephone land lines and printed newspapers in favor of e-mail, DVRs, mobile devices and news delivered via the Web and apps. Importantly, none of these traditional are expected to become extinct. Instead, the way marketers and audiences use them will simply change. All of them have a potentially important role to play in a strategically planned, integrated promotional campaign.

Few organizations rely on digital promotion activities exclusively. As examples, for many years Apple and Microsoft produced full-color magazines intended for software developers and for users—even though they could deliver any of the same information online. Similarly, many Internet-based services use print and broadcast advertising to attract users. Facebook Place and Foursquare produce window decals and posters for merchants to display in stores to encourage member sign-ins. Effective promotion entails delivering the right message to the right audience at the right time.

Media Selection Today. In choosing between digital media – or digital media vis-à-vis traditional media tools – various strategic and tactical issues must be addressed. This includes understanding the inherent strengths or potential key uses of each medium.

The accompanying figure identifies five broad categories of media, arrayed from tools that rely largely on traditional mass communication on the left to personal

communication on the right. Each of these categories of tools has unique strengths that can be deployed in a promotional campaign.

Public media are traditional mass media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television. These are operated by third-party organizations that typically act as publishers and generate revenue by creating opportunities for exposure to targeted audiences for advertisers. (Notable exception: public television and radio.) Public media are especially good in creating broad public awareness and are generally offer an implied credibility for a promotional message.

Controlled media represent any form of message that is produced and delivered to audiences directly by a message sponsor. As the name suggest, sponsors have complete control of the length, format, design and content of the message, which can be as commercial or hard-hitting as desired. Controlled media are especially good when convincing promotional messages are required for where lengthy detailed information must be provided. Controlled media are can be delivered at any point of contact -- via postal mail, package inserts, sales counters, in doctor's offices, etc. Notably, the number of printed product catalogs circulated to at-home shoppers has continued to grow despite the option for people to shop online and the proliferation of e-commerce sites.

Interactive media (which include most digital media) involve the direct electronic delivery through devices with keyboards, keypads or touch screens that allow user to interact with an electronic database or with other people. These tools are especially valuable in responding to queries, facilitating the exchange of information, and engaging users.

Events include most forms of group communication where people gather in person (or electronically via teleconferences or webconferences). Although events can be used to convey information, they are best used to *motivate* and *inspire* participants, drawing upon the emotional contagion created among participants. In large measure, events can be most effective in reinforcing beliefs and values (including beliefs and values related to relationships with the sponsoring organization and/or with other participants).

One-on-one Communications entail an organizational representative coming into contact with a customer, employee, legislator, voter, or community. From a promotional perspective, one-on-one communications are often reserved for special situations that entail obtaining a *commitment* (such as personal sales), *negotiation* (arranging a major gift from a donor) or the *resolution* of conflicts or problems (such as lobbying proposed legislation or settling a dispute).

Effective media planning involves choosing media from these various in combination to achieve the desired the outcomes. Thus, in the typical digital promotion campaign, public media might be used to prompt people to visit a website (or to ask for a brochure, attend an event or consult an expert). In similar way, controlled media might be used to promote an online service. In turn, interactive media might used to refer audiences to other interactive media, such as when a promoter embeds a web link in an e-mail or text

message. Smart digital promoters use all these tools in combination to achieve desired outcomes.

Additional factors for choosing the best media include:

- **Audience considerations:** Geography, timing, segmentation, reach, precedence (prior experience and use), age, education, and audience expectations
- **Message considerations:** Attention-getting ability/salience, frequency, agenda-setting capability and virality, modality (use of text, images, sound), carrying capacity (amount of detail that can be delivered), ease of understanding, prestige, credibility, believability/verisimilitude, engagement, and effectiveness (ability to achieve desired outcome)

SIDEBAR

Five Major Promotional Media Groups

◀ Mass Communication <i>High-tech, perceptually based, Low social presence, asynchronous</i>		Personalized Communication ▶ <i>Low-tech, experientially based, High social presence, synchronous</i>		
Public Media	Controlled Media	Interactive Media	Events	One-on-One
<i>Key uses in a communication program</i>				
Build awareness; enhance credibility	Promotion; provide detailed information	Respond to queries; exchange information, engage users	Motivate, inspire participants; reinforce beliefs and attitudes	Obtain commitments, negotiation, resolution of problems
<i>Principal examples of media</i>				
Publicity/advertising /advertorials/ product placements in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspapers • Magazines • Radio • Television Paid advertising in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transit media • Out-of-home media (billboards, posters, electronic • Directories • Venue signage • Movie theater trailers, ads 	Brochures Newsletters Sponsored magazines Books Direct mail Exhibits and displays Point-of-purchase support DVDs.Video brochures Statement inserts Other collateral/ printed ephemera Advertising specialties	E-mail, instant, text microblog messages E-newsletters, e-zines, e-reports Telephone call systems Web sites, blogs Vodcasts/podcasts Games Web conferences, webinars, webcasts Information kiosks Internets/extranets Social networking/ media sharing sites Forums (chats, bulletin boards) Paid text/display click-through ads	Meetings Conferences Speeches/ presentations Government or judicial testimony Trade shows, exhibitions Demonstrations Rallies Observances/ anniversaries Contests/ sweepstakes Recognition award programs	Personal visits Lobbying Telephone calls Correspondence

- **Production considerations:** Control/access over distribution, deadline, personalization to users interests and needs, customization by user based on preferences
- **Financial considerations:** Total expenditure, cost per impression or response, return on investment.

Digital Media as Touch Points. Another important reason for thinking about digital and traditional media together reflects the fact that users do not separate their online and offline experience with an organization. Digital tools are merely *touch points* – one of the many points of contact or circumstances that constitute their total experience with an organization. As such, their digital expectations and experiences need to be *congruent with* and *reinforce* their real-life perceptions, knowledge, and exposure. Inconsistency can lead misperceptions, a loss of credibility, distrust and a waste of resources. Effective integration includes reasonable consistency of

- Message themes – claims, language, voice and tone.
- Facts – because users often compare information across platforms
- Graphics – including the consistent use of corporate identity standards (marks, logotypes, colors, typography, layouts, etc.) to assure visual continuity.

Influencing User Behavior

Similar to other forms of promotion, the communication objective of digital promotion is to influence people's behavior – activities found in everyday life such as *buying, investing, donating, voting, and working*. Other commonly promoted behaviors include *embracing spiritual beliefs, engaging in fun leisure-time activities, pursuing healthy behaviors* (exercise, diet) and *avoiding risky behaviors* (alcohol, illicit drugs, unsafe work practices).

Digital promotion primarily relies on *persuasion* – the use of communication to influence behavior – while various other forms of influence are possible: patronage (granting favors), purchase (offering rewards), policy (imposing rules) and physical force (violence, compulsion or constraint). Influence through persuasion involves altering what people know, how they feel, and/or how they act. These reflect the three dimensions of human behavior identified by psychologists: cognition, affect and conation

In the typical digital promotion program or campaign, the desired behavioral outcomes resolve around these same three dimensions:

- **Awareness objectives** involve making user that users are knowledgeable about a topic. Audiences must be exposed to an idea, actually see it, understand it, and store information about it in their memory (cognition).
- **Attitude objectives** involve users forming a (positive or negative) predisposition toward the idea based on their awareness. Attitudes are fostered by creating a heightened sense of psychological arousal -- either positive exhilaration and desire or negative fear or loathing of alternatives (affect).

- **Action objectives** involve taking steps that strengthen behavioral intent and facilitate ultimate adoption of the innovation. Examples abound of these intermediate action lead to the final adoption an idea: Calling an 800-number is a prerequisite to placing an order over the phone, going to the polls precedes voting on election day, etc.

Adoption is the term often used to explain how an individual engages in trial of innovation, determines satisfaction based on the experience, and then establishes a repeated pattern of purchasing, investing, voting, healthy eating, etc. The adoption process was originally conceived as a logical sequence of events where marketers captured attention, built interest and cultivated desire, which together led to action or adoption. Modern persuasion theories suggest that some level of awareness and positive attitudes must be present for people to act, but in-depth knowledge and strong convictions are not required.

Social learning theory, for example, argues that people learn by observing and repeating observing others. *Operant conditioning* posits that that people can be prompted to act based on rewards. Similarly, latter-day persuasion models contend that people process persuasive messages differently based on their involvement in the topic. People for whom a topic is highly relevant or has important consequences will take the time to scrutinize arguments and process them thoroughly to reach a judgment. By contrast, people with low involvement in a topic won't exert the effort but instead rely on simple cues embedded in messages. These cues range from discounts (a reward) to endorsements by experts and recommendations by friends.

From this brief description, two of the greatest advantages of digital promotion in the promotion mix should be readily evident:

- Many digital promotion tools incorporate features that enrich even very brief messages with cues that help sway users: testimonials from friends; summary counts of the number of users who "like" a posting; ratings or rankings by other users of particular content by others; activity reports about friends who have used a product, seen an ad or visited a store, Capitalizing on these components is a important component in effective digital promotion.
- Digital promotion can provide the interactive mechanisms through which users can respond to a message directly using the same mechanism through which a promotional message was received: keyboards and mice on computers and touch screens, and keypads and phones on mobile devices. Thus users can respond immediately and take *intermediate steps* toward the ultimate adoption of a promoted idea. Thus digital promotion tools enjoy a potential advantage over other promotional media. Although creating awareness and fostering positive attitudes might be the focus of some digital promotion efforts, prompting some form of online action is almost always a key component in the typical digital program, campaign or project.

Today's Digital Imperative

With the increased reliance on web and mobile communication, incorporating digital components in a promotional program is an imperative in today's world.

Indeed, customers, investors, donors, prospective and current employees, media, and the public-at-large *expect* to be able to locate organizations of even modest size on the major search engines. This requires at least maintaining a website, a page on a social networking site such as Facebook, or being listed on an online directory.

User expectations grow as the size and sophistication of the organization increases. This includes 24/7 access and the ability to send requests or order merchandise. Often times a person's first exposure to an organization is through digital communications. Thus many times people assess an organization based on the completeness and quality of information presented and their ability to deal with the organization online. The absence of a digital presence can draw into question an organization's viability and credibility.

This being said, digital might not be appropriate in all situations. Examples include very small businesses with a limited clientele and resources (except for online directory listing), promotional programs directed to young children or the elderly, and programs targeting audiences with limited web/mobile access. Digital programs not good for distributing information within a small geographic territory where total penetration is required (consider door hangers!).

Encouraging Engagement

Engagement is a popular concept that describes the depth or level to which users process and respond to digital messages. Engagement represents the user's message processing involvement and encompasses all three dimension of human behavior – cognition, affect and conation. To the extent possible, effective promotion involves deepening the level of message processing beyond mere recognition of a topic.

Engagement involves users thinking about a topic, forming a positive attitude toward it (based on emotional arousal) and engaging in some form of intermediate activity. Indeed, in many digital promotion programs, *intermediate objectives* involve heightening involvement in various specific ways. The two more common categories of activities are information seeking and information sharing.

- **Information seeking** represents how users search for needed facts and guidance to make a decision or take action. Information seeking is helps users to crystallize *behavioral intent*, or the probability that users will take a particular action. Users search for information only to the extent that they believe that the information obtained is sufficient to make a judgment with confidence. Examples of digital information seeking include:
 - Conduct a search engine search
 - Follow suggested links
 - Request additional information
 - Consult directories or websites providing recommendations
 - Ask for directions
 - Schedule, confirm appointments

- Book reservations
- Online shopping – Compare prices, confirming discounts
- View demonstrations on video
- Bookmark information for quick reference

Information sharing encompasses how the user shares with others their ideas, decisions or reactions to a topic, decision or experience. Information sharing includes feedback provided to an information send (replies, completion of surveys, ordering merchandise, etc.). Information sharing also involves telling others about their opinions and choices, including family, friends, and even interested strangers. Many marketers stress the unique ability of digital communications to transform users into *advocates* or *evangelists* for promoted ideas. They emphasize the importance to prompting this behavior and thus creating people to talk (“buzz”) about a promoted idea. However, sharing information and ideas also reinforces the users own understanding, emotional affinity and conviction. Examples of information sharing include:

- Forward e-mails, text, and microblog messages to others
- Create original e-mails, text or microblog messages (produce user-generated content)
- Report on current activities with others
- Rate products, articles, posts
- Assess the usefulness of information
- Social-bookmark a favorite article, product or service
- Post a entry or post comments on blogs or social networking site
- Endorse products or services, indicate “Likes”
- Create, post photos or videos on a media sharing site
- Contribute to a wiki

Enhancing Effectiveness

To the extent possible, digital promoters can increase their effectiveness by enhancing the *motivation*, *ability* and *opportunity* (MAO) of users to more fully engage in their digital experience.

- **Motivation** – *Attract users’ attention and encourage them to engage.* Create inviting, attractive, likeable messages, Use novel stimuli: images, typography, music, color. Include keywords in headlines. Use moderately complex argument – avoid being overly simplistic. Feature familiar, famous, independent or credible sources. Underscore the message’s relevance to the audience. Stimulate curiosity – use humor, metaphors, questions. Vary the language, format and source – to explain the same idea in multiple messages. Focus on the social desirability of the action.
- **Ability** -- *Make it easy to engage:* Write simply and clearly. Use direct language. Use headlines to organize content. Parse long ideas into bulleted lists. Be consistent in terms of appearance, organization and navigation. Provide exemplars and models. Demonstrate – just don’t talk about ideas. Relate to user’s self-image and self-interests. Mention that tasks are easy to perform (thus

build confidence and self-efficacy). Frame messages using culturally resonating themes and catch phrases. Suggest a clear call to action.

- **Opportunity** – *Provide multiple ways to engage*: Expend sufficient effort to provide information in through multiple media. Repeat themes, key facts throughout messages. Avoid distractions that discourage continued attention. Allow users to take their time, control the experience. Provide easy-to-use response mechanisms (links, buttons, and fill-in forms) for people to reply or take action.

Managing Digital Promotion

Digital promotion is a generic term for activities that can be conducted by the staffs of organization as well as consultants they might hire, including agencies and freelancers. Within marketing, various terms are used to describe these activities with slightly different nuanced differences in the scope of activities covered. Examples include: *Internet marketing, online marketing, online advertising, search marketing, online public relations, and social media marketing* (which should be confused with the *term social marketing*, used to describe the application of marketing principles to social causes).

Recently, several new terms have burst upon the scene:

Content marketing focuses on supplying prospective purchasers of products and services with valuable, practical, useful or entertaining information to make them better informed, engage them, and build relationships with sponsors that can generate leads or sales. Although content marketing can take place offline, the major focus today is the web and mobile arenas. Such “content” goes beyond quick plugs about the availability or benefits of a new product or service (common in advertising) to provide in-depth information about how to use the product, the story of its discovery, unusual human-interest anecdotes, comparisons with other products, testimonials, feature stories about how it has been used successfully, etc. Content marketing is largely an extension of feature publicity techniques used for many years in marketing public relations and the informational strategies in consumer education programs.

Brand journalism, a separate but related trend, involves companies employing or obtaining the consulting services of former journalists and media production specialists who are expert in storytelling. These *brand storytellers* can employ text, video or images and apply their reportorial, writing and editing skills to capture public interest in a particular brand. The informational (versus promotional) approach used in brand journalism contrasts with the hard-hitting, reason-why approach commonly associated with advertising copywriting. Public relations writers with feature writing expertise have been engaged in brand journalism for many years, but many marketers schooled in advertising have chosen to tap the experience of former media personnel (many of whom have been laid off from newspapers, magazines and TV or radio news).

Native advertising is a new publishing trend where media outlets (newspapers, magazines, websites) sell space *within* the area otherwise devoted to their own editorial or entertainment matter. Usually limited in number, spaces is allocated for the sole purpose of generating revenue. Although newspapers and many trade, special-interest and regional magazines have published sponsored *advertorials* and special *advertising supplements* for many years, media sales departments have institutionalized the process to accommodate brand-related news and feature stories, videos and images. Content is supplied by either the sponsor or by a designated third-party agency or vendors employing content marketers and/or brand journalists. The media where materials appear exercise minimal or no editorial review. At a growing number of media outlets, in to achieve scale, space is sold using automated sales systems comparable to those used to sell online search and display advertising. Emerging industry standards call for such placements to be clearly labeled as “advertising” or “sponsored content.”

Options for Going Digital

Entities wanting to promote themselves today rely on two fundamental approaches:

- **Sponsorship or creation of their own digital communications tools.** Here organizations have complete responsibility for conceptualizing and developing communications tools and operating the system that delivers the message (or arranging its operation). Examples include e-mail, text and microblog messages, websites, mobile apps, e-publications, videos and multimedia, podcasts and vodcasts, online events (webcasts, web conferences and webinars), and proprietary games.
- **Participation in public digital communications venues operated by others.** In an increasing number of instances, organizations merely join as members or participants by providing content that can included in already existing online activities. Their operational responsibility is largely limited to participating in activities/conversations or supplying content. Examples include: text- and display advertising, online publicity, blogs operated by others, forums (bulletin boards and chats), social networking sites, wikis, and virtual world sites.

Not surprising, sponsorship requires much greater knowledge of digital software, hardware and systems. Organizations pursuing sponsorship approaches, for example, often must employ the services as web developers, mobile app developers and game developers to create code to assure dependable operation. These programming professionals might be hired on staff or work as freelancers or for consulting firms. In larger organizations, digital promotion units must rely on software and hardware support from the organization’s IT unit because activities require *application program interfaces* (APIs) that tie into the organization’s databases and other computing resources. Digital promotion activities also rely on servers that are already providing support for other organizational activities. Smaller organizations often buy technical support and computing capacity from outside service bureaus, such as Internet hosting services.

Among the benefits of the participation approach are that no expertise in computer software is required and operating software and hardware are the responsibility of others. Most of these services feature easy-to-use graphical customer interfaces that

provide boxes for entering ordinary text, buttons to browse for and uploading images or other content, and settings to selecting how content will be displayed. (For examples, see blog platforms such as Wordpress.com or social networking sites such as Facebook.) This simplicity allows the content creator to both write the text and post it with no particular technical knowledge. Similarly, organizations are relieved of the need to select, program or operate hardware in a quickly changing environment in which technology is constantly changing. This reflects the more general trend for even large organizations to outsource computing requirements (including the reliance on *cloud computing*).

Organizing Digital Promotion Efforts

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, digital promotion activities are not limited to a single unit within the typical organization.

Within each of these units, organizations have several choices for how to organize themselves:

- **Staffing:** An important question is whether all staff members should be involved managing digital promotion and producing digital content. Or should digital activities should be the province of specially trained, designated staff members?
- **Outsourcing:** Should the unit assume responsibility for all required functions or obtain creative and production services from the growing legion of freelancers, consultants and agencies that now specialize in digital promotion services? Alternatively, some units might opt to share the skills of digital specialists with other units in the organization. .
- **Services:** A unit also needs to choose which support services they should buy out from others. Among the many support services that can be best provided by external services are bulk e-mail and text message distribution, mobile app and game development, online advertising distribution, and video production and distribution,

No single model for organizing digital promotion activities fits all organizations. However, over the coming years, staff members with these various units will be expected to become increasingly conversant and proficient in various aspects of managing digital programs, including the systems used to produce them. However, some elements will become increasingly specialized, as witnessed the rise of various job titles and specializations that did not exist only a decade ago.

The accompanying sidebar lists many of the traditional job titles for individuals who become involved in digital promotion – as well as some of the new positions found in organizations.

Core Skills for Digital Promotion

Successful digital promotion requires knowledge of five key sets of skills: planning, managing, content creation, content design and assessment. These skills are the focus of this book. In addition, some familiarity with programming and systems administration can be helpful.

SIDEBAR

Career Opportunities in Digital Promotion

Various traditional professional specializations in marketing and allied fields require at least some familiarity with digital promotion principles and practices. These include:

- Advertising Manager
- Agency Account Executive, Coordinator
- Agency Account Planner
- Agency Account/Client Services Manager
- Art Director
- Brand/Product Manager
- Creative Director
- Communications Editor
- Events Planner, Coordinator
- Direct Marketing Manager
- Graphic Artist, Illustrator
- Marketing Manager
- Marketing Communications Manager
- Marketing Researcher Manager, Specialist
- Media Planner, Buyer
- Media Relations Manager
- Public Relations Manager, Specialist
- Publicist
- Technical Writer, Editor
- Traffic Manager, Coordinator

The following are among the new specialist positions found within field:

- Email Marketing Manager/Specialist
- Instructional Designer
- Marketing Database Manager
- Multi-Media Designer
- Online Marketing Director/Manager
- Online Events Manager
- Online Promotions Manager
- Online Publicist
- Online/Interactive Media Planner, Buyer
- Search Engine Marketer
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Specialist
- Social Media Marketing Specialist/Community Manager
- User Interface Designer
- Web Analytics Specialist
- Web Content Manager Editor
- Web Designer
- Web Developer/Programmer

Planning encompasses how to organize digital program programs, campaigns and projects. The planning process begins by identifying desired organizational outcomes as well as the needs, concerns, interests and habits of potential audiences. Planning involves summarizing intended activities in a written plan and proposing them for conceptual and budget approval by the client.

Managing involves actually implementing the plan – establishing and meeting deadlines, establishing policies and procedures, marshaling required resources, evaluating and selecting vendors, monitoring quality, and staying within budget to maximize effectiveness and efficiency.

Content Creation focuses on planning, writing and graphical design of the promotional messages to be communicated. Some digital promotion involves individualized responses to questions posed by customers or comments made in an online

community. However, much copywriting for messages distributed via bulk e-mails and text messages, microblogs, websites, ads, blogs, scripts, wikis or online presentations.

Content Design/Development involves presenting the information in format that is appropriate to the medium but also attention-getting, appealing, readable and easily usable. Video producers, for example, often shoot, edit and upload video productions that are planned by others. Web and app developers take copy and graphic concepts created by others and use software program to actually produce the end product based on best usability practices.

Assessment involves knowledge of the skills required to analyze processes and measure the final outcomes. One of the benefits of digital promotion is that the systems used to deliver messages and manage interactions with users allow tracking activities – and can generate useful *analytics* or summary performance statistics related to exposure, activity and response. However, the volume of data available through tools such as Google Analytics and Facebook Insights can be staggering and must be thoughtfully synthesized. In a similar way, digital promoters must identify and develop measures from the organization's own databases to measure effects.

About This Book

This book provides an overview of digital principles and practices for students considering a career in this exciting field, for seasoned communication professionals who want to become familiar with best practices for using various tools, and for business people and other managers interested in deploying digital tools to promote their organizations.

This book focuses on the core skills outlined above – planning, managing content creation, content design and analytics. In so doing, it stresses how to maximize effectiveness and efficiency and addresses specific software and hardware only as required.

The perils of producing a book on digital promotion are numerous. In today's rapidly evolving environment, new tools and services are constantly being introduced. Meanwhile others are being transformed or discontinued. Thus, the book attempts to focus on well-established tools and techniques, and purposely avoids any attempt to compare and contrast competing services. Suggestions for working with specific services are limited to only a few of the largest and best-established company to illustrate how services work. The same principles apply to competing services, although nomenclature and specific requirements vary.

One of the benefits of working in digital promotion is the fact that updates and recommendations are readily available on Websites, blogs, videos and wikis maintained by vendors, consultants, agencies and others. Readers can conduct keyword searches on virtually any topic. Or look at the updates and access the links on book's accompanying website at www.digitalpromotion.info.

The text begins with the most basic topic – creating compelling messages delivered by e-mail, text and microblogs, and then addresses traditional websites and mobile websites and apps followed by advertising, publicity, publications and video and multimedia. Later chapters focus on social media used for updating, opinion, networking, advice sharing, collaboration and entertainment purposes. The final chapters examine issues pertaining to managing digital promotion programs, assessment and ethical and legal considerations.