

Utilization of Digital Marketing Tools by Small Businesses: A Case for Zimbabwe

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Abstract: A sample of one hundred small companies found in Zimbabwe was randomly selected from LinkedIn database and an online questionnaire was administered to find out the digital marketing tools and platforms they use in their organizations to market their products and/or services. From the data that was collected it was established that WhatsApp is the most popular application when it comes to daily communications that are done B2C. B2B Communication was mostly done using the email. For promotion of different kinds of products and/or services, Facebook and owned websites were the most common platforms used. Sales transactions were mostly conducted using e-commerce websites. However, organizations that practiced online selling were few. Most of the organizations used Digital Marketing tools for marketing and promotions only, while their selling would happen offline. Other Digital Marketing tools that organizations were using include YouTube and Vimeo and LinkedIn. The small businesses indicated that they face almost similar challenges, the main one being that most of them do not have marketing departments and/or marketing experts in their organizations. The result is that their marketing activities may not be consistent. Neither are they professional enough. There is need for most of them to improve by making their marketing activities more consistent and professional, and the bulk of the managers acknowledged this.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, B2B, B2C, e-commerce, Digital Marketing Tools, SMEs

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing refers to refers to various marketing activities that are carried out online and are associated with the five Ds which are digital devices, digital platforms, digital media, digital data and digital technology [1]. In this new marketing era, digital marketing has proved to be more popular than traditional marketing because it is data driven marketing. New and established businesses alike, are trying to make inroads into digital marketing. The increasing ubiquity of internet, social networking and online work means more and more people spend most of tier time online. As a result, businesses are beginning to realize that they need to follow their customers and to interact with them regularly online. Some of the modern businesses are not only interacting with customers online, but they are even selling and delivering products and/or services online. This is done by businesses with the objective of attaining defined marketing goals.

2. USE OF DIGITAL MARKETING TOOLS IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES

Digital marketing is used for many purposes by business entities. Almost all the traditional goals of marketing activities can be fulfilled using either digital marketing, traditional marketing or both [2]. Because in digital marketing there are so many platforms, applications and sites, businesses chose those platforms where their customer personas are likely to be found most. That means businesses need to model their customers before they select digital marketing channels that they will then use to do their marketing. From the data that was collected during the research, small business managers who participated in the research had the following responses.

2.1 Use of Digital Marketing in Real Time Communication with Customers.

From the business perspective, most of their customers use WhatsApp more than any other app in their daily life. As a result, each time they want to make enquiries about products

and/or services they would prefer communicating via WhatsApp. This is convenient to them as they will be having the app handy, and they will be having data that is ready for use each time they want to communicate. Thus for most business enquiries, customers prefer using WhatsApp. So businesses are quick to provide their WhatsApp numbers to customers if they are to make business easy for their customers.

Table 1. Businesses' platform preferences in real communication with customers in B2C businesses.

Platform	Number of businesses
WhatsApp	69
Websites/Blogs	1
Facebook	11
Twitter	8
Instagram	2
Email	9
TOTAL	100

Thus it can be seen from the table above that business managers prefer WhatsApp more than other marketing tools for real time communication with customers. Blogs and websites are least preferred while some would use Facebook Messenger as the app is quite familiar with customers that use Facebook in their daily life.

For B2B, the situation is slightly different. This can be shown in the table below.

Table 2. Businesses’ platform preferences in real communication with customers in B2B businesses.

Platform	Number of businesses
WhatsApp	20
Websites/Blogs	2
Facebook	7
Twitter	6
Instagram	3
Email	60
TOTAL	100

Comparison of platform preferences between B2C and B2B is shown in the graph below. WhatsApp is more popular in B2C than it is used in B2B, though its usage in both is quite high. On the other hand, the email is very popular with businesses when compared to its usage in B2C. The other platforms are not popular both in B2C and in B2B for real-time communication between the customers and the organizations in question.

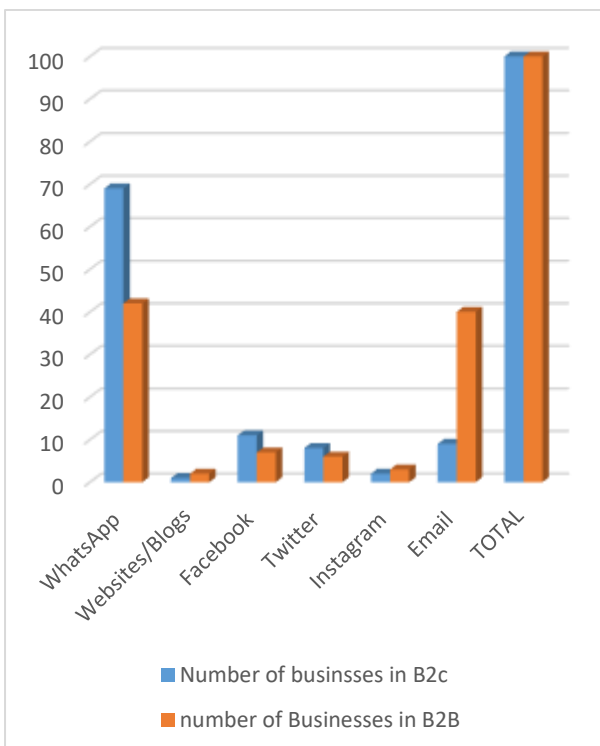


Figure 1. A comparison of platform preferences between B2C customer target and B2B customer targeting.

2.2 Use Of Digital Marketing In Developing And Implementing Marketing Campaigns And Promotions.

Most businesses indicated that their customers are mostly found on Facebook than any other platform. Thus they need to have Facebook pages, Facebook accounts and Facebook groups if they are to reach many customers online. Added to that, Facebook insights provide very pertinent information when it comes to analyzing campaign results. It is very informative and can help companies make informed decisions on their products and/or services.

Second from Facebook are blogs and/or websites. Most small businesses from which data was collected indicated that they have websites and they do most of their campaigns and promotions on their websites. Campaigns will be placed mostly on landing pages so that traffic to the site can interact with the campaigns and promotion the moment they get to the websites. Advantages sited for websites by businesses are that websites are their owned platforms and they have greater control of their multimedia campaigns and promotions when compared to that which they place on paid platforms like Facebook. Secondly, campaigns on owned websites are cheap (almost free) as they do not need to pay for publishing such campaigns. The site is already theirs.

Table 3. Businesses’ platform preferences when developing and implementing marketing campaigns and promotions aimed at B2C.

Platform	Number of businesses
WhatsApp	4
Websites/Blogs	36
Facebook	41
Twitter	10
Instagram	4
Email	6
TOTAL	100

When businesses are targeting other businesses, they mostly use their websites as indicated in the table below. Their reasons where that clients in the business category are more informed and they mostly come through either search or they will type in the actual name of the site they are looking for. They seem to do more research when wanting to purchase when compared to final consumers.

Thus making campaigns on owned sites will be more preferred for such a category of buyers.

Facebook came second there because SMEs are of the opinion that business buyers make decisions through people, and people are found on Facebook. Opinions of small businesses indicated that they find most people on Facebook, and it is those people who will make buying decisions either as individuals or in companies. So to them reaching many people is good for both business buyers and individual customers.

From the table, it can be seen that WhatsApp and email marketing is also being used by SMEs although at a smaller scale. Instagram and Twitter as unpopular for marketing and promotions, both in B2C and B2B. For Instagram, respondents proffered that their analytics is not as advanced as that of other platforms, though the number of customers found on the platform is increasing. Also, most SME owners and managers indicated that they are not yet very familiar with Instagram and they are yet to understand its marketing possibilities and merits.

SMEs opined that their clients are very few subscribers on Twitter and traffic from Twitter is almost insignificant to their businesses.

Table 4. Businesses’ platform preferences when developing and implementing marketing campaigns and promotions aimed at B2B.

Platform	Number of businesses
WhatsApp	15
Websites/Blogs	41
Facebook	25
Twitter	5
Instagram	2
Email	12
TOTAL	100

In summary, a comparison of platform preferences between B2B and B2C is shown in the chart below.

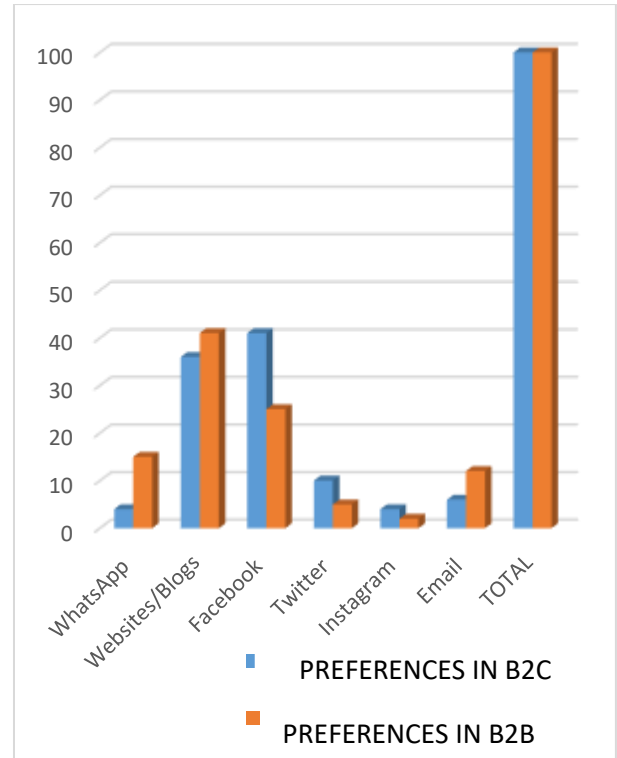


Figure 2. Businesses’ platform preferences: a comparison of target platforms between B2B and B2C

2.3 Use Of Digital Marketing in Sales And CRM

Of all the respondents, only 20% of the SMEs can sell their products online. That means 80% do their selling offline. They use digital marketing tools for communication, campaigning and promotion only. Real business transactions of buying and selling is mostly done offline. Customer relationship management is also being done mostly offline as most of the businesses do not have functional e-commerce sites. They simply have basic websites that are used for blogging, marketing and promotion. Interaction that happens on the websites is very limited. They mainly do blogging, advertising and collecting of emails through online forms. The emails will then be used for targeted email marketing where necessary.

Table 5. Respondents with e-commerce sites and those without

SMEs with e-commerce sites	SMEs without e-commerce sites
20	80

3. CONCLUSION

Digital Marketing is a marketing field that is growing tremendously with the growth of internet access in our country Zimbabwe. It presents a lot of untapped on opportunities for marketers and hence the need for organizations, small and large ones alike, to adopt it. It is data-driven marketing which provides critical information for marketing managers in many and varied ways depending on the platform used. There is need for SMEs in Zimbabwe to adopt more professional and consistent ways of carrying out digital marketing activities within their organizations.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many thanks to all respondents who contributed data to this small research project. Their insights have great impact on the way I am going to teach digital marketing in my next coming classes.

5. REFERENCES

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