



The Talent Revolution

Closing the digital skills gap

The digital skills shortage has been a hotly debated topic in recent times, with no clear end in sight to the issues affecting many businesses. At EMR, we have seen first-hand the challenges many organisations face in both sourcing and retaining top digital talent in such a competitive market.

In September 2015, the Boston Consulting Group launched the Talent Revolution Report (commissioned by Google and advised by The Knowledge Engineers), which set out to understand and address the UK shortage in digital skills.

Partnering with the Google Digital Academy and digital training experts The Knowledge Engineers, EMR held an exclusive roundtable session with over 20 senior marketing and digital leaders from a wide variety of sectors, to discuss the key findings from the report.

Opening the session, Director of the Google Digital Academy, Shuvo Saha, highlighted that the core aim of the survey was to unearth the skills gaps across the marketing and digital industries in the UK. With 65 businesses taking part from a wide variety of sectors, a total of 1,188 marketers completed the survey.



Digital Capabilities Index

As part of the report, Google and partners created a new 100-point Digital Capabilities Index (DCI), with 100 indicating best practice.

In line with the DCI, the average measure for marketers across the UK was 57. On the whole the majority of senior leaders were surprised by this result, with nearly all expecting the average would be much lower and some expecting this to lie somewhere between 30 and 40.

Whilst it was acknowledged by most of the group that there has certainly been an improvement across digital channels within

their businesses in recent years, as a whole they are still behind where they need to be and expect that most marketing teams are in a similar position.

Considering their expectations of where the average would be, all agreed that the score of 57 was in fact acceptable, with the equivalent being a C grade in the education system.

Finding the gaps

With the rate at which technology changes and the vast array of digital channels and platforms currently available, it's difficult for businesses to be strong in all areas.

This was also evident from the survey, with findings showing that businesses are particularly underperforming in the areas of mobile (advertising, web and apps) and video marketing.

Surprisingly many respondents rated themselves highly when it came to developing a digital strategy, yet when it came to the elements which make up the strategy (mobile, video, SEO,

social, etc.) execution appeared to drop. Is there a strategy; execution gap in more traditional channels?

All senior leaders were particularly surprised by the disconnect between the digital strategy and its implementation. This in fact suggests that while leaders at the top feel their strategy is working well, the business may think differently.



Whilst a number of leaders from media / tech businesses felt they were certainly ahead of the curve in terms of mobile strategy, none were surprised that mobile is suffering due to a distinct lack of skilled professionals available across this platform. This was also the case for video, where most felt their own businesses were behind in producing strong and engaging video content for their audience.

The table continued to discuss how brands should avoid wasting their time on irrelevant channels that consumers do not wish to engage with. There was a strong feeling that many marketing teams believe they should be active on all digital platforms just for the sake of it, which is particularly the case with social channels such as Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook and Google +.

Back to basics

It was agreed that going back to the basics and truly understanding your customer – where they are, what they want and how they wish to engage with you as a brand – is key to a successful marketing strategy.

One brand in particular has found that their youngest target audience only wish to engage with them through YouTube and do not visit their website. It was a similar case across other brands, where different audiences engage through different channels. Brands therefore need to be relevant to their audiences. Understanding how customers wish to engage means businesses can focus on the most important channels likely to bring the highest return on investment.

Some brands are also struggling to monetise digital as yet. To add further challenges to this, many businesses want to see strong return on investment before they're willing to invest

further, which is slowing down the rate of growth and development. Ensuring you're truly targeting the right channels first is therefore essential.

But as marketers, are we overcomplicating digital? For example, when we discuss the online customer journey and touch points, is this really just going back to good old brand awareness, just with new channels and platforms? It was also highlighted that we have a tendency to over analyse and confuse digital and that we should ensure we're not boxing off digital as something separate. It is part of our daily lives and the full marketing mix. The rules of engagement have not changed just the channels.

Whilst the information in the survey is certainly important for brands to understand how they're doing across certain digital areas, the question was raised as to whether a trick was being missed. Should our core insight about how we're doing, really come from our customers, rather than our peers and employees?

Despite this, all attendees still found that they struggle to effectively analyse their data to translate it into an actionable

marketing strategy. Good connections between the marketing and IT departments are therefore essential, but often rare.

One of the key challenges faced by nearly all businesses is to find new ways to generate innovative and engaging content for their audience. All agreed that content was and will continue to be one of the most important elements of the marketing strategy and generating new ideas will be a business-wide initiative.

Learning & Development

In the final section of the session the group discussed the need for robust learning and development.

Although it ultimately comes down to the people and talent within your business, Google's Shuvo Saha pointed out that L&D was one of the lowest scoring areas throughout the survey.

Most thought the difficulty across the marketing and digital industry was the rate at which things change, which means that courses quickly become outdated. Businesses must ensure they're providing employees with a development strategy or they face losing talent to competitors. New short online courses and video tutorials are a

good way of learning new skills and keeping up-to-date with new digital channels / platforms.

Businesses must provide continued professional development for digital professionals and there should be an industry standard expectation of marketers' capabilities. As Shuvo put it, the best approach for leaders is to ask the following questions of their teams: what do people need to learn and how can we go about teaching it? The success of many marketing teams could well lie in the answers.

