



Johnson Duan
Senior Director of SPRG Shanghai

How to achieve digital marketing success in China

-  *B2B marketers are looking toward a more digital approach following the pandemic*
-  *Short video, KOL and live-streaming marketing are among the latest trends*
-  *Easy ROI measurement is also an inducement to invest in digital marketing*
-  *Marketers in China need to have a separate strategy alongside their APAC game plan*

Now into its second year, the pandemic continues to pose challenges for APAC businesses. Lockdown measures continue to be implemented periodically in different countries, and while many enterprises are taking a wait-and-see approach, they still need to fill their sales pipeline. Brands cannot meet their clients physically, and thus need a more digital approach. Yet they are also very prudent when it comes to spending and are therefore looking for ways to save costs while generating sales leads.

The latest statistics show that while digital advertising budgets were slashed in 2020, overall ad spend will grow by 5.9% in 2021. B2B marketers are also saying that they have plans to invest in marketing technology.

And it is the same with the Chinese market.

One of the most obvious changes brought about by pandemic is the increase in digitalisation. Statistics show that 61.2% of B2B marketing staff are actively planning to invest in social media marketing. It's no big surprise, then, that marketers are utilising digital tools to create more engaging social content in order to achieve their marketing objectives.

There have been four obvious changes to the use of marketing channels which have added new layers to the digital landscape in China and APAC region:

- Firstly, vlogging and short video marketing have become more popular. With TikTok enjoying a surge in popularity, Instagram jumped on the bandwagon by launching Reels, while YouTube and WeChat have introduced the Shorts feature.
- Secondly, more investment has been made in key opinion leader marketing.
- Thirdly, more and more marketers are rethinking their private and public domain strategies.
- Lastly, live-streaming is everywhere, even for B2B companies.

In line with these changes, 50.76% of local marketers have begun adding social marketing channels to their strategy, and 48.56% of local marketers have shifted their events from offline to online, with webinars being the predominant method used by marketers.

Facing long-term challenges

B2B marketers have been up against some serious pandemic-related challenges over the past year, but some persistent challenges remain, including the accurate measurement of ROI, lead generation and an inadequate or inconsistent customer experience.

One survey of marketing professionals revealed that 44% of respondents saw “Measuring ROI” as a challenge, and, indeed, it remains one of the biggest obstacles facing B2B marketers.

This may suggest that there is an opportunity for marketers to invest in technologies and platforms that will provide a holistic view of which marketing activity is generating the best results throughout the customer journey.

All media channels have their own advantages, depending on user requirements. For the B2B industry, frequently used channels include email marketing, social media, content marketing, SEO, conference/exhibition marketing, SEM, PR, partnerships, display marketing and video advertising, among others.

In order to get the most out of these channels, the client/marketer needs to cross-check the nature of their business with the characteristics of their target audience, so as to turn challenges into opportunities.

Developing a separate strategy for China

Many enterprises still see China as a key market, and with good reason. Even during the pandemic, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that China is the only major economy expected to report growth, while the rest of the world is busy rolling out vaccines and desperately trying to contain the number of infections.

So, in China, marketers need to have a separate strategy from that of the APAC region. It will require an in-market team with a solid understanding of the digital landscape and knows how to execute the strategy effectively.

For example, Baidu is the no.1 search engine in China. In addition, due to the popularity of WeChat, an increasing number of users are using the platform as a convenient way to search for things online and B2B professionals also use it to follow public WeChat industry accounts. Thus, the platform provides a convenient way to read articles within its interface, instead of jumping from one site to another. This habit makes the whole marketing journey more complicated in China, because marketers need to think carefully about the best way to get their company’s information in front of the eyes of their target audience. To achieve this, marketers need to decide whether to set up a WeChat account, how to perform search engine optimisation in WeChat, how to leverage other WeChat public accounts and KOLs to successfully deliver company messages, and determine which format the messages should be – they need to fit the WeChat environment and be easily readable for the target audience. Also, there are quite a few things for marketers to consider before implementing their strategy.

One more thing worth highlighting is the fact that an increasing number of clients are considering Social CRM, which means rather than pushing the same content to their entire target audience, digital tools are leveraged to categorise the audience into different groups based on their interests and demographics. This then enables marketers to push localised or tailor-made content to specific groups of people, offering to solve their pain points and increasing the rate of conversion as a result. □