



# DITCH DIGITAL DABBLING

**How Small Businesses  
+ Nonprofits Can  
Master Online Marketing**

A survey  
conducted  
by



FREE  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**VENTURENEER** is a media, marketing, and research company that helps corporations build meaningful relationships with small businesses. Our strategies convert leads into loyal customers. We create content-marketing – research, social media, articles, in-person events, case studies, e-newsletters, webinars, microsites, white papers, etc. – for corporations. The content is value-added for small businesses and nonprofits and takes them from brand awareness to brand evangelists. Ventureneer founder, Geri Stengel, is a contributor to [Forbes](#), [The Huffington Post](#), American Express OPEN Forum, Women 2.0 among other sites. She also has her own blog, [Vistas](#).



**MESSAGE MEDIUM** helps companies harness the power of the Internet and launch dynamic and profitable new brands online. Maisha Walker, President, has been building and marketing Web sites for more than 14 years, has taught more than 400 classes on Internet Marketing and Web site design, and is a [featured online columnist with Inc. Magazine](#). Her column is consistently the most popular on Inc.com and has been featured by Guy Kawasaki, Rieva Lesonsky, Bnet, AllTop, The American Marketing Association and Perez Hilton among others.



© Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs CC BY-NC-ND

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overarching message from the data in our survey is that small businesses and nonprofits dabble in online marketing but most aren't sure how to use it effectively. That's the bad news. The good news is that those who invest time in learning how to use online marketing soon realize a significant return on that investment.

Lack of confidence and knowledge have far-reaching implications for small businesses and nonprofits. The interviews done in conjunction with the survey show that, when done well, online marketing can save failing businesses, create profitable new opportunities, and find talent for both small businesses and nonprofits.

To combat this lack of confidence and knowledge, small businesses and nonprofits need better, easily understood, less intimidating instruction on how to use these tools to their advantage.

Power-users – those who devote more than 25 hours per week to social media – are the exceptions. They have done their homework and are confident that their investment of time reaps benefits.

*Power-users across the board rate only 5 out of the 18 social media tactics as very effective. Find out which ones made the cut in the full report.*

Much of the skepticism about online marketing seems to come from a lack of training in using tactics effectively and from not understanding and using metrics in a way that guides good decision making.

### MAKING ONLINE MARKETING EFFECTIVE

Power-users do *not* begrudge the time spent. They have taken the time to learn how to use online marketing. In fact, they have taken advantage of almost every learning technique, from learning by doing to observing others, from taking classes to using online resources. They are more likely to talk with experts and to hire expert help. In other words, they seem to realize that this is an important investment in the growth of their organizations, not just a nice-to-have add-on.

Small businesses and nonprofits must recognize that to compete in today's world their employees need to become "digital citizens." These organizations must provide the necessary

training so their employees are confident, effective users of online marketing tools, from SEO to social media.

## **BARRIERS TO USE**

The clear message from the data is that small businesses and nonprofits are losing out due to lack of training in how to:

- choose which platform or medium is best suited to their goals and market
- use these tools efficiently to minimize time used and cost
- maximize the effectiveness of each medium
- measure the return on investment

*Which tools are right for you? Find out in our “best uses” chart in the full report. It details which social media are best for specific purposes.*

Small business owners and nonprofit leaders shy away from online marketing because it is time-consuming and costly. People have realized that while the Facebook page or Twitter feed is free, the staff time to update and monitor them are not.

It's a sad fact that small businesses and nonprofits haven't invested in maximizing the use of online marketing. It's a sad commentary on those who provide online marketing products and services that many have not provided educational support in formats that customers can use and understand.

Power-users know that a commitment of more than 25 hours per week to social media is worth it. They are least likely to complain about the time because they recognize it as an investment in relationships that can yield benefits in awareness, community, and traffic to their websites, as well as sales for businesses, and advocacy and fundraising for nonprofits. Of course, the benefits don't stop there: customer satisfaction and client services can also benefit from online marketing. And, yes, the effects of online marketing can be measured.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

No single combination of social media will be right for every business. Choosing the right combination means taking the time to understand each medium and, most importantly, to know

where your target market is spending its time. The rich variety of options lets you focus your marketing where it is most likely to bring the results you want, whether new customers or new donors. Power-users have three times more Facebook fans and seven times more Twitter followers than those who dabble in online marketing. In the full report, we cover how power-users productively manage such a large number of relationships.

*When time and expertise are invested, results show it. Access a case study showing how a \$50 million organization doubled its donation revenue using social media.*

## **EMAIL**

The bedrock of online marketing, just about everyone uses email and is relatively comfortable with it. Email is used to encourage visits to all other online marketing channels. Email is a gateway medium; it is the first step on the road to online marketing for both the organization and its customers. A majority of small businesses and nonprofits send email once a month or more.

## **SEO**

Using Search Engine Optimization requires a high degree of expertise but it is well worth the effort. Consumers use search engines to find information. Educate yourself in SEO or hire someone who can pick the right keyword phrases to put your organization at the top of the search results.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA ADS**

“Lack of guidance” and “not convinced of value” account for more than half the resistance to using social media ads. There just isn’t a lot of educational material available about how to craft ads and structure a successful campaign. Most of the remaining reluctance to using social media ads is based on their cost, which would not be a barrier if the ads deliver and if what they deliver is measured.

## SEARCH ENGINE ADS

As with SEO and social media ads, the message about search engine ads is, “This isn’t a do-it-yourself project” unless you have done some serious homework. Search engine ads require specific skills.

## MEASUREMENT

The main purpose of metrics is to show you what is working well and what isn’t, so you can improve your products, services, or programs. Very effective and easy-to-understand tools come with most platforms, but may not suite your learning style. Periodic guidance from an expert who can help you interpret your analytics data in useful ways is also valuable.

*Putting It All Together: A savvy company utilizes the right combination of tools to increase orders by 200% in just 1 day! Get the full case study to find out how this online document filing services did it.*

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Those who are confident that they are using online marketing effectively took the time to learn how to use it or to hire someone who knew how. Much as you hear about “user friendly” interfaces and easy how-tos, the fact is that online marketing is nuanced and ever-changing. Even those who use platforms such as Facebook or Twitter in their personal lives need training in using them as marketing tools.

This isn’t about technology. This is about marketing and, like many other fields – medicine, law, accounting – marketing requires continuous education.

In the 21st century, you can’t operate without an online presence. That’s where people are talking now, about your business, your service, your nonprofit, and your mission. You can’t control the conversation but you’d better be part of it. Invest the time and resources you need to take advantage of these game-changing techniques. And the sooner you start, the more time you spend, the sooner you’ll see a return on your investment.

---

For comprehensive report, go to [www.DitchDigitalDabbling.com](http://www.DitchDigitalDabbling.com).

---

## METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted among small businesses and nonprofits that are already using or curious about online marketing. We solicited responses through email, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. In-depth interviews were conducted with a cross-section of those who responded to the survey. The businesses surveyed employ 14,000 people and represent \$322 million in revenue.

# CONTENTS

- Highlights ..... 4
- Social Media..... 15
  - What powers social media success? ..... 15
  - Why are social media used? ..... 16
  - Who does what and how do they do it? ..... 18
  - How long have they used social media, how often, and how much time does it take? ..... 20
  - Resistances to use and future use ..... 21
  - The six dominant social media and their effectiveness..... 22
  - Second-tier social media: On the rise or disappearing? ..... 24
  - Which social media are best for me?..... 26
- Email ..... 34
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO)..... 36
- Online News Releases ..... 38
- Social Media Ads ..... 41
- Search Engine Ads ..... 43
- Measurement ..... 45
- Learning ..... 48
- Women-owned Businesses ..... 50
- Minority-Owned Businesses ..... 53
- Socially Responsible Businesses ..... 56
- Nonprofits ..... 60
- Demographics ..... 63
- Methodology..... 67
- About Ventureneer and Message Medium ..... 68



**Visit** [Ventureneer](#).

**Read** [Breaking Barriers: Geri Stengel's column in Forbes](#).

**Read** [Geri Stengel's contributions in Huffington Post](#).

**Sign up for** [Vistas, Ventureneer's blog](#), by email.

**Follow** [@Ventureneer](#) on Twitter.

**Like** [Ventureneer](#) on Facebook.

Talk to us: [info@ventureneer.com](mailto:info@ventureneer.com).



**Visit** [Message Medium](#).

**Read** [Maisha Walker's Inc. column](#).

**Follow** [@MessageMedium](#) on Twitter.

**Follow** [@MaishaWalker](#) on Twitter.

**Take** [Maisha Walker's Web Site, eCommerce or Internet Marketing Class](#).

Talk to us: [info@messagemedium.com](mailto:info@messagemedium.com).