

A photograph of a chef in a white uniform and hat, seen from behind, working in a professional kitchen. The kitchen is lit by several large, dome-shaped pendant lights. In the background, another chef is visible, and there are stacks of white plates on a counter. A white rectangular box with a thin border is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the title text.

Digital Marketing for NAFEM Members

by: Dennis O'Toole and Chris Baldwin

Over the past 10 years, a few foodservice dealers have truly mastered digital marketing and e-commerce. They invested ahead of the curve, and they've been rewarded with amazing growth¹.

But most FES manufacturing companies have been slow to adopt digital marketing strategies, and many seem to be hiding from the changes that are taking hold in their industry. Are they putting their companies at risk?



Winners & Fax Machines

I have to laugh and shake my head when people tell me they are working on the digital strategy for their business, or reluctantly ask me to help them figure out what they should be doing about social media – as if it's a new form of head lice or something equally disgusting, contagious, and unavoidable. It's a little like saying that you've decided you're going to spend some time each day breathing, even though you're busy with other commitments, because it seems like the smart thing to do.

Digital technologies and social-media channels, and the new degrees and depth of "connection" that they enable, are so pervasive and mission-critical these days that you have no choice but to add them to your arsenal, and the sooner the better. It's a binary situation: You can engage, or you can become extinct. You can face the facts or you can be like an old fax machine, just about ready for the scrap heap.

- Howard Tullman, writer

“You can face the facts or you can be like an old fax machine, just about ready for the scrap heap.”



Writer Howard Tullman pulled no punches in his 2014 *Inc.* Magazine² article. His message - *Deploying a sound digital communication strategy for your business is no longer optional.*

FES is not a special exception to the modern rules of business. Important universal changes are taking hold now that will make some well-prepared NAFEM members big winners, and others unfortunate losers. But based on our review of the FES digital landscape and interviews with numerous industry executives, it's clear that very few manufacturers are making the changes necessary to thrive in a web-centric environment.

Why are manufacturers letting this happen? Why are otherwise well-managed companies failing to adapt to the new realities of marketing?

¹ Webstaurant is the standout internet dealer, but others such as Central Restaurant Products and Katom have also mastered the art of e-commerce and have been rewarded with great growth.

² Howard Tullman, "Five Reasons that Digital Wins, January 22nd 2014

Top 2 Reasons FES Manufacturers Aren't Ready, and What To Do About It

1 Technology Is Overwhelming

The new world of digital marketing can be difficult to navigate. It's an always-evolving landscape of different communication methods, algorithms and terminology. Few NAFEM company executives can confidently discuss even basic digital strategies that are 10 years old in faster moving industries. Even fewer have delved into how "remarketing" works, or how digital systems allow companies to measure ROI on their marketing dollars.

Making the problem worse is the fact that bosses who don't understand digital marketing feel intimidated by the topic and embarrassed by their situation. This perfect storm of uncertainty, intimidation and embarrassment hides behind jokes about "needing a 12-year old to help with this stuff."

How To Take Action

On any key business topic, top executives need to know enough to make good strategic decisions and hire the right team or outside suppliers, while not getting down in the weeds. The same goes for digital marketing. Senior leaders need to know enough to intelligently select strategies, employees and outside providers, and then let the experts do the work. So commit to understanding the basic rules and strategies of digital.

And, yes, your best coach might be someone who's just a few years out of college. Get over it.

2 Missing the Urgency

Many NAFEM company executives seem to be thinking, "I'm okay because our industry still works on old-fashioned relationships." That thinking could not be further from the truth. Such thinking puts companies at tremendous risk of truly becoming that "old fax machine, just about ready for the scrap heap."

Traditional business relationships have an expiration date. The cost of maintaining those relationships and finding new ones using outdated strategies will price you right out of the equation. As the new generation of buyers take the lead in sourcing decisions, traditional marketing efforts will fall short vs. efficient, targeted digital communications.

How To Take Action

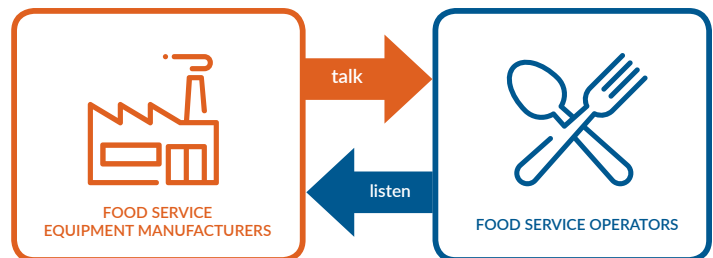
Don't kick yourself for where you might be today. And definitely don't run away from digital. Embrace it!

For executives of FES manufacturers, now is the time to turn digital marketing into a competitive advantage for your company. Going forward, digital is one of the key determinants of market share. Among your competitors, who is the best at digital marketing? Why can't the answer be YOU?

Digital Marketing Primer

Here are six basic facts that will help you grasp digital, increase your confidence, and commit to further learning and action:

- Foodservice operators research products online before they buy. This simple statement needs to be foundational to all your decisions related to marketing, sales and channel management. Online research provides the information operators need to vet out inferior products and discover newer innovative products. You should assume that EVERY TIME somebody buys your product or a competitor's, they've done some or all of their research online.
- Buyers have countless sources of information online, including each other. They will find the information they need in forums, articles, blogs and reviews. And they are extremely jaded to advertisements. So the basis of digital marketing is to create information that has real value to the buyer's decision-making process, and get it out there for them to find when they need it.
- Communications with operators can now be targeted as never before. Want to talk to female, mid-career design consultants with culinary degrees? No problem. Want to talk to them only when they are interested in fryers? Easy. Plan accordingly.
- Once a potential customer has looked at your web content, it's generally easy to find them again and again and deliver progressively relevant information to stay on their minds. Savvy companies now influence customers at the individual level with specialized messaging. We all experience this technology as consumers, so make sure your own company is using it to drive sales.
- The internet lets us track shoppers and their subsequent buying behaviors over time. This means that companies can finally calculate a real ROI for our marketing investments. The primary reason that sophisticated marketing organizations have moved from older media to the web is not because it is cheaper. It's because they can use analytics to steer their dollars to places where they result in sales. Can you say this for your marketing investments?



- Working this analytical magic is surprisingly affordable. You can get started for less than you might think, run some small tests and find the formula that works before hitting the gas. Budget is not an excuse, especially if you're still doing traditional "spray and pray" advertising.

Three Strategies for Getting Started

1 Focus on the Buyer's Journey to Your Product

Historically, advertisements were often labeled as either “call-to-action” or “brand building”. But when you think of digital marketing, focus on “supporting the buyer’s journey with information that influences his purchase decision”. With a slew of effective tactics at your disposal (SEO, data capture, tracking, remarketing), digital marketing comes down to providing information that helps the buyer select your product.

2 Start Small, Grow Smart™

Historically advertising required repeated impressions on an audience to move the needle on brand preference and buyer behavior. A good rule of thumb was “If you can’t buy at least three ads in a publication, save your money, because single ads are wasted money.” Here again, digital is a new game. Companies should always start with relatively small investments, until they find what is working to drive their business. Then, only when positive ROI has been demonstrated, should companies fund larger campaigns.

3 Chose a Partner Wisely

To handle your legal affairs, you’ve retained a good lawyer. If you are looking for a new factory building, you first focus on finding the right real estate agent. You choose service providers thoughtfully, because you rely on them to help shape your strategy, and execute it without costly mistakes.

Digital marketing is no different than your other critical business services.

Your success starts with finding the right

advisor. So as you screen potential providers, be sure to ask three important questions:

- Do you focus on digital marketing, or are you a jack-of-all-trades agency?
- Do you have a track record of helping B2B manufacturers grow their businesses?
- Do you understand the FES industry... from its unique jargon to its complex market channels?



Remember: Don't run from digital. Embrace it!

Partnering With True Digital Communications



Dennis O'Toole has been a B2B marketer for over 20 years, but says he finally found his home in foodservice. As a marketing executive for a leading equipment manufacturer Dennis studied the FES channels and buying behaviors across all market segments. In 2017 Dennis founded KES solutions, the only consultancy fully focused on helping companies to understand and optimize the FES distribution channel.



Chris Baldwin is the founder and owner of True Digital Communications. A 20 year veteran of traditional marketing agencies, Chris set out in 2009 to build a new firm, dedicated to helping companies put digital strategies to use. True Digital is now a growing team of 12 hard working people. Most are young enough to be “digital natives”. All are focused on creating client success.

KES and True Digital have teamed up to bring expert and informed digital marketing services to FES manufacturers.

Let's Talk. 888.456.0369