

**E-mail**

The book is up-to-date too — in the same enthusiastic way. E-mail is touched upon and online advertising gets a couple of pages. There is even a mention of David Beckham on page 41!

**A tract for a verbally indolent generation**

All in all, a surprise. There's no modish banging on about brand strategy or tone of voice (although the latter is implicit in many of the chapters). But this is a straightforward, well-argued guide to writing better and more successful copy. If it seems at times a rather old-fashioned tract, then that's a judgment on our own verbally indolent generation rather than on the authors. Wide-eyed this book may be, but it still imparts knowledge and inspires thought, analysis and imagination. Which is as much as you can ask of a slim volume.

*George Smith F IDM*

**Understanding Digital Marketing: Marketing Strategies for Engaging the Digital Generation**

*Damian Ryan and Calvin Jones*

Kogan Page, 2009; Softback, £19.99; 276pp

ISBN: 978-0-7494-5389-3

*Understanding Digital Marketing* declares on its cover that it will 'demonstrate, in a practical and comprehensive way, how to harness the power of digital media and use it to achieve the utmost success in business, now and in the future'. The preamble continues, 'Provides readers with tools to utilise the power of the internet to take their company wherever they want to it to go'.

**A tall claim....**

Out of recession, one is tempted to suggest.

Can this unassumingly designed and rather plain little book really live up to its own billing? Search marketing, affiliate marketing, e-mail marketing, creative online executions and digital marketing strategies are all purported to be 'explored in detail'. But against the myriad practical texts already in the marketplace — the list being headed by the near-assembly line output of the prolific Dave Chaffey *et al.* — that's a tall claim.

**...not sustained**

Despite some rather tame points of merit, it's a claim that ultimately is not sustained. With just 33 novel-sized pages on search marketing, 15 on e-mail marketing, eight pages on affiliate marketing and 11 on digital media creative, it cannot possibly deliver such detailed exploration. And therein lays my biggest gripe about such titles. In reaching for sales, publishers are forced to present such works as being everything to every person. Comprehensive. Insightful. Seminal. Life changing!

Whatever happened to a simple, smart and compelling unique selling proposition?

**Is there a USP?**

So I continued my journey through this book asking myself, is there a USP, and if so why have the publishers overlooked telling me the

one good reason — nay, imperative — to read this book in addition (and certainly not as an alternative) to the comprehensive manuals of the Chaffey genre? Could it be the quoted ‘real-world examples’ or the 17 pages exploring strategic thinking in detail? Just what is this book’s target audience?

We get off to a bad start with the preface proclamation that ‘What makes digital so exciting is that it’s happening right now’. Oh dear! But respite comes in the form of the recognition that digital natives — the first generation to have grown up taking instant digital information for granted — are entering the workplace (and, of course, acquiring rapidly maturing spending power in the marketplace). Mind you, this all smacks of a diluted regurgitation of Don Tapscott’s work in *Wikinomics* and *Grown Up Digital*.

### Radical change is coming

We’ve been talking about the digital revolution for more than a decade now. So it’s really not that exciting anymore. What *is* exciting, as the world squares up to the blackest economic abyss in living memory, is to postulate what sort of a world will emerge on the other side? As well as the structural changes needed to our financial institutions — the bedrock (if not enablers) of wealth creation and employment for all — the very people who will be doing business and running businesses will be a completely different animal. Their motivation, social manners and graces, sources of knowledge and their methods of applying that knowledge in radically altered competitive marketplaces will combine with the rebuilt shibboleths of corporate culture to create a vitally different world in which to live and work.

One final claim by the authors in setting out their stall is that ‘in your hands you hold what independent marketers around the world have been crying out for: a book that shows you how to use the internet successfully to sell your products or services’. Twice oh dear.

### Historical perspectives

Each chapter starts with a summary in terms of the authors’ pledge to the reader. Neat trick; but an unsatisfying gimmick. The first chapter allegorises the Pompeii penis (yes, you read that right) through its opening two pages. Thrice oh dear. But one thing I did learn in this opening scene-setting gambit is that ‘Musak’ was in fact a real company — incorporated in 1934 to deploy patented technology for piping audio through power lines. There are further historical perspectives that endeavour to fill in the timeline from Marconi to Berners-Lee. And to be fair, there are some mildly interesting fillers here (provided you’re not an aficionado of Steve Jones, Bill Bryson or even David Bogdanis). But it’s only when you fast forward to the section on *Consumer 2.0* that there’s anything of real value to the Luddite marketer — although even here the authors’ musings are based on previously well-aided Jupiter Research.

A chapter on *Strategic thinking* centres on a weak reinterpretation of the four Ps and an even weaker synopsis of the Dove *Self-Esteem* case history. The next chapter, entitled *Your window on the digital world*, trots through the essentials of why you need a website and how to *think* about building one; although you’d not get very far on the *doing* if the sum of your website building knowledge was that derived solely

from within these pages. The ‘Johnson box’ treatment is given to Jakob Nielsen’s *Top Ten Mistakes in Web Design* and to a limp IKEA case study. And I’m afraid that’s pretty much the pattern for the rest of the book.

### Strong on search marketing

Search is given the strongest treatment, and for readers who haven’t yet ‘found’ search marketing, it’s a pretty friendly but superficial run through the key components. I actually quite liked the gentle and non-threatening tones in which the authors skimmed this rising behemoth of marketing disciplines. One of the authors, Damian Ryan, offers some casual and undeveloped thoughts on the future of search, questioning whether search engines are actually doing anything more than reinforcing already established brand pecking orders and dominance. Do they yet provide decent visibility for subservient brands is the inference?

A goodly 27 pages are dedicated to *Website intelligence and return on investment*. Augmenting the anodyne canter through KPIs and log files is a short section on A/B split and multivariate testing. While not news to this journal’s seasoned readers, at least it provides a decent disciplinary fix for the novice digital marketer. The cameo by Richard Foan, Managing Director of ABCe, provides a gentle reminder of efforts to measure digital media audiences — although for most of us, it will be campaign direct response results that will render the most important measures.

In contrast to PPC and e-mail clickthroughs, *Social media*, *Online PR* and *Affiliate marketing* are perhaps the less easily graspable of the new stable of digital channels — certainly in terms of delivering tangible marketing outcomes. In the same ‘lite’ and superficial style as earlier chapters, these topics are introduced and the marketing opportunities summarised.

And so to the final chapter, in which the authors pledge to describe the key trends shaping the digital marketing landscape, how the relationship between consumers and marketers is evolving, and the main challenges for digital marketers over the next 3 years. The answers: word of mouth, search, mobile, behavioural tracking and measurement, in-game advertising and holistic marketing. So now you know.

### Recent radio coverage

You’ll have been rather better informed by listening to recent radio coverage (for example, 4 February 2009, BBC Radio 5) in which the next revolution in digital technology is described as moving us from ‘arms-length’ to ‘in-your-face’ applications. Rather than mice, keyboards and even touch screens with which to interact with the bits and bytes, we’ll be wearing non-opaque visors (just like sunglasses) to immerse ourselves in the cyber environment simultaneously with the real one. With such accessories, we’ll view web pages, films, live images, search results, virtual maps (in the form of in-person sat nav), as well as dynamic 3-D imagery. Sensory applications will enable us to interact with intelligent game and advertising avatars who learn and modify their behaviour through contact with external stimuli and inputs. Now that’s the *future* of digital, and thus something of the future of digital marketing.

**Try Dave Chaffey  
— or the IDM**

**A quick introduction?**

As you'll surmise, this book does not live up to its own hubris. It does not fulfil its promises. And as for that elusive USP? Well, if you are looking for detailed knowledge on how to do digital marketing, then consult the oracle in the form of Mr Chaffey and chums. Or take an IDM digital marketing qualification! If you want to 'harness the power of digital media and use it to achieve the utmost success in business, now and in the future', then you'll have to read an awful lot more books. And just what target reader will find this book useful? Perhaps the busy CEO of an SME who needs a heads up on today's marketplace and a quick introduction to the not-so new opportunities of digital marketing. In which vein, I believe this book should be entitled, 'A gentle stroll through today's municipal digital marketing park for newcomers to town who need a tourist map'.

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