

# How to create a digital marketing campaign in a virtual hotel

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**Abstract** Digital marketing has become a key factor in the business world. Its impact on various industries is visible and in tourism, it is a tool for attracting and retaining clients. An important part of digital marketing communication is implementing an online digital campaign using an appropriate tool. This paper aims to design a teaching tool to create a digital marketing campaign using a virtual hotel. We apply the best pedagogical practice method of project-based learning and data analysis from secondary sources. The contribution is the design of a teaching aid for students who master the curriculum by practically solving digital marketing tasks in study programs with a focus on tourism.

**Key words** digital marketing, virtual hotel, digital marketing campaign.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalised world, information and communication technologies help businesses to realise their business activities and objectives faster, more accurately and over a larger spatial and temporal scale. For several years now, the Internet, together with its potential uses, has been a marketing tool that can be used to reach thousands of people in a target group. It is a current worldwide phenomenon that reaches and significantly influences customer behaviour and decision-making.

If the company, in our case a virtual hotel, decides to expand to foreign markets with an offer of hotel products, it must consider many factors that affect the situation in the foreign market. Among the very important, among others, are also cultural differences. From a marketing perspective, culture creates certain differences in consumer behaviour in local markets. In this context, it is necessary for marketing to address the question of what are the needs and values of consumers in a culturally different environment. The cultural environment is the source of many aspects that cause cross-cultural differences and affect the success of marketing strategies. Differences in marketing communication in an international environment are explored by intercultural marketing.

It is a challenge for the current educational system to provide future hospitality professionals with opportunities to acquire skills in creating digital marketing campaigns with elements of intercultural marketing. To take into account the requirements of practice in the education of future professionals in the hotel industry at the

Department of Tourism of the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, we develop the key professional competencies of students through their active participation in solving projects in hotel management with a focus on the issue of creating an intercultural digital marketing campaign in the conditions of a fictitious hotel.

The article aims to propose a teaching aid for the creation of an intercultural digital marketing campaign within the assignment of the international Erasmus+ project KA220-HED-000023291 TRAIN-e-HOTEL. The activities and tasks within the above-mentioned paper are related to the project output to obtain guidelines and templates for creating a digital marketing campaign and developing intercultural competencies of the students involved. The above guidelines ensure a consistent approach for all partner institutions within the project. The added value is the design of a teaching aid for students to learn the material through practical problem-solving in the context of intercultural digital marketing. It can support the work of the teacher in concretizing the curriculum, consolidating it and developing competencies in the professional equipment of successful graduates of study fields with a focus on tourism.

### 1.1 Characteristics of the Project TRAIN-E-HOTEL

The international TRAIN-e-HOTEL project with the title "Innovation of the professional training of future tourism experts using a fictitious training hotel" solves the need to increase and expand the professional readiness of tourism students by the requirements of real professional practice. The main goal of the project is to create alternative options for professional practice in the hotel industry, supplement professional practice in the hotel industry with additional experience, develop transversal competencies, create international cooperation, connect practice with theory, create socially and culturally diverse work groups to fulfil project goals, motivate students to participate on educational and development activities. Its leader is the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra Slovakia, which coordinates the project outputs in cooperation with other partner universities in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy and Latvia. The duration of the project is from 2022 to 2024. The main idea of the project originated at the time of the global pandemic of COVID-19 when students of relevant study fields with a focus on tourism could not be properly provided with professional practice in accommodation facilities.

As a result, the project's framework plan and intention to set up so-called 'training hotels' by each partner institution was established. The fictitious accommodation facilities of the hotel category simulate a real workplace. The virtual workplace – the virtual hotel, thus created and established, provides a space and opportunity for the development of professional and transversal competencies of tourism students. In the fictitious hotels, concrete educational and development activities are carried out focusing mainly on the areas: hotel information systems, intercultural communication, intercultural digital marketing campaigns and strategies. During the project activities, as a result of the cooperation of students and the professional pedagogical staff, about the need to build the infrastructure of the training hotel the above-mentioned outputs as well as various educational materials will also be created. New educational materials, such as work with a training hotel, will be included in the educational process of partner institutions - universities, by innovating the relevant curriculum documents.

## 1.2 Literature review

Currently, the global research on digital marketing is very intense and dynamic. This topic, including the application of elements of the intercultural approach, is emphasised in the works of various university scientific research collectives. At the same time, commercial institutions such as marketing agencies also dominate this professional topic to capture trends in information technology and constant changes in the market.

Recent scientific outputs include research from Mirwani and Karmani et al. (2023) on the analysis of effective digital marketing strategy. The authors analyse the key components of effective digital marketing strategies for online merchants and provide insights and practical recommendations for online merchants to optimize their digital marketing efforts.

A common method of targeted and effective tourism marketing campaigns is to ensure that potential customers receive a response that matches the cultural background of the target group. This area is the main focus of the paper by authors Beták, Bíziková and Gergelyová (2023). Their present study aimed to investigate tourism students' attitudes towards intercultural online marketing in the following areas: Knowledge of intercultural marketing, Stereotypes about potential customers, Methods of targeting potential customers, as well as students' intercultural knowledge/skills.

Beták and Sandorová (2022) publish in their textbook an essential and comprehensive overview of the aspects of intercultural digital communication in the tourism context since it is generally acknowledged that intercultural communication plays a crucial role in tourism and hospitality management and marketing, their work deals with digital marketing, in particular, with its elements, possibilities and tools. The work is complemented by case studies in the field of creating an intercultural digital campaign and interesting examples of good practice.

A detailed literature analysis of digital marketing methods that are connected with the e-business model is provided by Saura, Palos-Sanchez, and Correia (2019). The writers investigate many facets of digital marketing, such as consumer involvement, mobile marketing, online advertising, and social media marketing. In addition to this, they talk about the difficulties and potential benefits connected with using these tactics. The results of the research identify and define the main actors of the electronic commerce ecosystem, as well as their typologies and the main techniques of digital marketing used in this field of research.

The publication by Kingsnorth (2019) is also very valuable. This essential book provides an accessible, step-by-step framework for the planning, integration and measurement of each digital platform and technique, all tailored to achieve overarching business objectives. The author's work includes featuring cutting-edge updates on social media, SEO, content marketing, user experience and customer loyalty.

## 2. METHODS

This paper uses secondary data for theoretical concepts and reviews literature. We apply the method of proven pedagogical experience also. It is based on specific practical experience with creativity and innovation in the educational process. It is elaborated for one framework topic, which deals with the creation of an intercultural digital marketing campaign. Proven pedagogical experience shows that approaches, procedures, techniques and activities that lead to desirable outcomes and the fulfilment of objectives enable effective problem-solving with fewer contingencies. It is based on replicable practices that can be proven in a different pedagogical situation, applied by a different teacher in a different group of students. The objective of the paper is to propose a learning guide for the creation of a digital marketing campaign using a fictitious training hotel. The proposal of a teaching aid consists of two steps in the division of work. A description of the procedure further specifies each step to achieve the results.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The creation of a digital marketing campaign can be practically trained in several courses within a study programme with a focus on tourism. Cross-curricular relationships should be respected. In the conditions of the Department of Tourism at the Faculty of Central European Studies of the Constantine the Philosopher of University in Nitra, these can be the following courses: Tourism Marketing, Marketing Communication in Tourism, E-tourism, Hotel Management. The main objective of the assignment within the taught subjects is to create an intercultural digital marketing campaign. The target group is current and future students who use the virtual hotel within the project to implement theoretical knowledge into practice. The importance lies in the development of soft and hard skills, and professional competencies. The solution of this assignment is suitable for full-time study. It is possible in terms of pedagogical creativity to use different didactic teaching methods such as design thinking, peer instruction, project-based learning, discovery learning, and creative learning. Group work is recommended, which promotes teamwork, cooperation and division of labour. To meet the educational objective, tools and technology are also needed, namely computer, data projector, internet. As a result of the training, the student has professional theoretical knowledge of marketing and marketing communication, knows the individual tools of marketing communication and knows how they work in the tourism market. The student can critically evaluate current approaches and marketing practices within marketing communication in both offline and online environments recognises the different categories of digital marketing and can apply them in an intercultural environment.

In today's extremely competitive market, hoteliers need to use effective digital marketing tactics to grow their brand, attract website traffic, generate leads and increase conversions. It's the only way they can hope to compete effectively. Search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, social media marketing, email marketing, influencer marketing, mobile marketing, and paid advertising are just some of the tools of digital marketing. To

achieve their goals using a strategy, a digital marketer must first carefully figure out how to put that strategy into practice and then carefully implement it. Making data-driven decisions about digital marketing initiatives is very important. By monitoring and evaluating key performance indicators (also known as KPIs), a hotel can evaluate the effectiveness of its marketing tactics, locate weak spots, and arrive at well-informed judgments that will improve the overall performance of its campaigns.

It should be added that content personalisation and audience targeting are essential elements of successful digital marketing strategies. Successful digital marketers can deliver more personalized experiences that resonate with their customers when they segment their audiences and customize their marketing messages to specific audiences. This ultimately leads to higher customer engagement and conversion rates. In addition, the ever-changing characteristics of the digital landscape are creating both new opportunities and new obstacles for businesses and therefore hotels. New technologies such as artificial intelligence, chatbots, voice search optimisation and immersive technologies such as artificial reality and virtual reality offer new methods to interact with customers and differentiate themselves from other businesses in the industry.

### 3.1 Workflow

Creating a digital marketing campaign consists of the following tasks, which are divided into two steps. A specific tool or method is recommended to accomplish each task. The first step is to form a working group. Creating a working "Digi" group consisting of students and one lecture. It is recommended to form a team of students led by a teacher to develop this part of the project. They are the participants of the project who are interested in digital marketing. Its role is to manage the market using the online space with the support of modern technology to achieve the hotel's strategic objectives. The task is to identify and meet customer requirements respecting cultural differences and anticipate them to bring benefit. The Digi Group should focus on the following goals of the marketing communication of the virtual hotel:

- to provide information about the company and products to presentation in the online space,
- to put the value of the product first,
- to know and respect the cultural background of the target country for successful intercultural marketing,
- create a digital marketing campaign for the virtual hotel based on the cultural specifics of the selected country
- create an appropriate digital marketing campaign with intercultural aspects in mind,
- build trust in the product brand and the hotel brand name
- collect permitted customer data.

Before you start, it is important to motivate students, emphasize the importance and necessity of digital marketing in today's hospitality industry, introduce the objective and workflow, also answer basic questions:

- Deeply get to know the virtual hotel for which you need to create a digital campaign.
- Get to know in detail the cultural specificities of the chosen country (see other results of the project).
- Explain the reasons for changing from traditional marketing to digital marketing.
- Discuss the benefits of digital marketing.
- Discuss the disadvantages of digital marketing.
- Learn the different digital marketing categories, tools and methods, their advantages and disadvantages.

- Choose a teaching method. It is possible to use different innovative methods of solving tasks in teaching, e.g. design thinking, peer instruction etc. (Bíziková, 2023).

The second step in the workflow is the creation of the intercultural digital campaign in the virtual hotel. As part of the development of the business plan part of the project, attention was also focused on marketing (market research, communication strategy, and package development). It is important to follow up on the already solved parts of the assignment to avoid duplication of work. Use the results already achieved in further work. Similarly, this also applies to the "Cultural Diversity" section. In the proposed digital marketing campaign, it is necessary to implement the findings about the cultural specificities of the selected country and its target customer group.

Phases	Procedure
Phase I	<b>Definition:</b> Market, Target Audience, SMART objectives, KPIs, Budget Content
Phase II	<b>Survey:</b> Tactics and methods to achieve goals, analytical tools, specificities of the target group include cultural specificities - justify
Phase III	<b>Planning:</b> checklist, steps, deadline, name of the responsible person, time diagram, implementation of the budget, campaign keyword suggestions, draft campaign text
Phase IV	<b>Creating a marketing campaign:</b> format, content, settings
Phase V	<b>Campaign optimisation:</b> monitoring and optimisation
Phase VI	<b>Reporting, evaluation of the campaign:</b> evaluation of successes, failures, evaluation of KPIs

Table 1 Template of the Digital Campaign Development

Several models for developing a digital marketing campaign are presented in the literature. The choice of a particular approach is arbitrary. The whole process could be simplistically divided into 6 key phases, which are illustrated in the following diagram (kremša.sk, 2023).

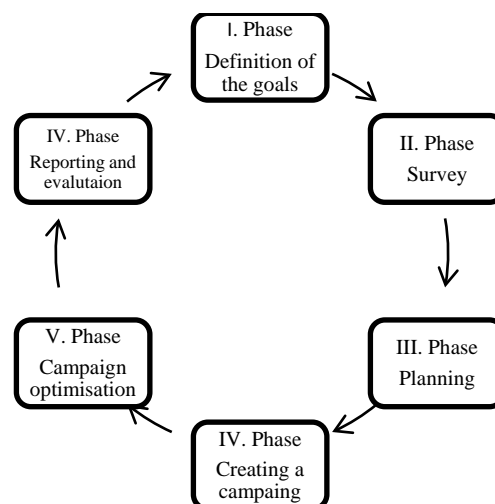


Figure 1 The process of developing an intercultural digital marketing campaign

### 3.2 Commentary and recommendations on the phases

**Phase I:** Even before you start planning and implementing a campaign, you need to be clear about the basic goals you want to

achieve with the campaign, i.e. it's very business sense. We recommend moving from more general goals to more specific ones and trying to make sure they all meet the SMART principle - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely, e.g.:

- a. getting 200 email addresses during the summer event 2024,
- b. 5% increase in visitor numbers at the hotel during the off-season 2024.

In addition to the goals and purpose of the campaign, we also set KPIs, or Key Performance Indicators, at this stage. Whether it be the number of visits brought to the website, the number of times an advertising spot is played, or in the best case, the number of measurable actions taken by users on the campaign landing page, KPIs need to be set before the campaign is launched and set realistically and, like the campaign's mission, according to the SMART principle. Defining the goals will help you in determining the relevant target audience, tactics and appropriate budget allocation.

**Phase II:** The survey aims to find the most appropriate method and tactics that will lead to the aforementioned campaign objectives. You should also think about appropriate analytical tools that can make your work easier and more efficient at this stage. We draw on Google Analytics, Google Webmaster Tools (now Search Console), Facebook Insights, Social Bakers, Twitter/ Pinterest/ LinkedIn/ Google+ Analytics. A very useful tool in the research phase is a Facebook tool called Audience Insights:

[facebook.com/ads/audience\\_insights/people](https://facebook.com/ads/audience_insights/people), which tells you a lot about your target audience. Even more so if you are just planning to run an ad on Facebook, it is appropriate to use primary and secondary sources on the cultural specificities of the target group (hard facts, soft facts, etc.).

**Phase III:** After the initial definition of the objectives and the research phase, the actual campaign planning process follows, in which we build on the findings with the objectives in mind. Plan clear business objectives and the tactics needed to achieve those objectives. Established KPIs will help you determine if and how you are meeting those goals. If it is a more complex campaign, it is a good idea to follow a pre-prepared checklist that includes all the steps, the deadline for completing each of them, the status and the name of the person responsible. A campaign timeline with a clearly defined beginning and end is also appropriate. Especially if it includes multiple communication channels or planned changes. We recommend preparing all URLs in advance along with the necessary parameters, and it is also advisable to have all campaign texts, claims and other components of the ads together, which can save you a lot of time later in the campaign creation phase. In the case of a search campaign, this phase also includes the design and preparation of keywords and appropriate match types. The planning phase also includes obtaining any management approval for the proposed budget, timing and other planned campaign components.

**Phase IV:** The creative phase of the campaign is the implementation of the plans according to the scenario and settings - to create, set up and deploy the campaign according to the prepared scenario.

1. Campaign creation involves preparing all the necessary ad formats and advertisements that you have planned in the previous phase.
2. Building on the previous phases, the process of setting up targeting, budgets, frequency of impressions, timing and other campaign features, as well as keywords and their associated match types also occurs.
3. Once we have all the adverts and ad formats prepared and set up in the system according to the set plan, the only thing left to

do is to launch the campaign and hope that we haven't forgotten anything. In this context, it is always a good idea to double-check everything, and by that we mean 4-5 times, to avoid unnecessary problems with overdrawn budgets, wrong creatives and similar complications.

**Phase V:** The successful launch of the campaign is not the end of the story, on the contrary, it is the beginning of the key phase of the campaign - its ongoing regular monitoring and optimisation. Because if you just let the campaign run its course, you're depriving yourself and maybe even the client of the opportunity to influence its performance and get the most out of it. Right from launch, you need to constantly monitor whether the campaign is succeeding in meeting its goals and KPIs. In addition to monitoring basic indicators such as the number of visits, frequency of displaying advertisements, click-through rates, quality or relevance scores, etc., it is constantly necessary to look at the behaviour of visitors that you manage to bring to the landing page due to the campaign - conversions. Campaign optimisation is then based on the performance of its components and tracked conversions. On-page conversions can be considered as purchases, adding a product to the cart, viewing a key page and similar actions that can be conveniently measured and evaluated on your website - there are many tools available for this on the Internet, in addition to Google Analytics. Therefore, the campaign needs to be monitored daily to ensure that it is delivering adequate value for money.

**Phase VI:** In the report, we will summarise all the successes, failures, recommendations for improvement, knowledge gained and other important insights that we have been able to glean about the campaign from all available sources. An evaluation of the KPIs should also be included (kremsa.sk, 2023).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The use of digital marketing in the hospitality industry opens up an incredible amount of opportunities. As the world is constantly changing, it is essential to constantly design new strategies and not forget to educate the next generation of tourism professionals. In the current competitive environment, where supply exceeds demand, it is not easy for tourism businesses such as hotels to maintain a favourable position. The solution lies in digital marketing, which holds a huge innovation potential. More and more hotels are digitising their business. The goal of a business is therefore not only to win customers but also to retain them. At the same time, it is important to realise that in a virtual world, it is efficient to spend time, energy and money on digital marketing activities that appeal to customers in the context of their cultural background. Through the internet and digital marketing tools, it is possible to communicate effectively with the customer, finding out their preferences, needs and requirements for the hotel product.

Influenced by the development in the field of modern information and communication technologies and the change in consumer behaviour of hotel guests, it is impossible to ignore the requirements of the current real practice in the field of hotel management, which puts more and more demands on graduates of study disciplines with a focus on tourism.

The paper presents a proposal for a methodological aid for the work of the teacher and the student in the context of the creation of an intercultural marketing digital campaign. It points out the possibilities of linking theory with practice by using a fictitious hotel and practising such marketing trends that cannot be ignored in the education of the young generation. The design of the methodological aid is part of the project solution and fully relates to the other project outputs, from which it is complementary in content.

The final goal is to innovate education in the field of digital marketing in tourism.

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