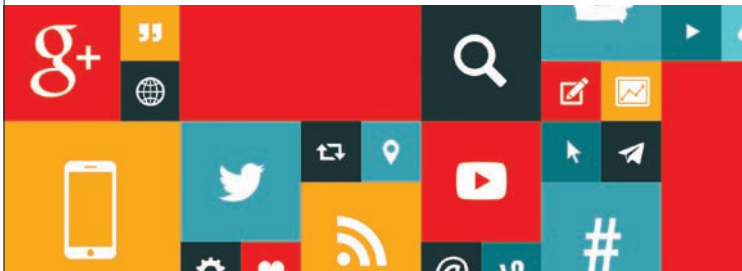


# Digital advertising landscape is evolving

More than ever, businesses in Oman are investing more of resources and budget to improve their digital capabilities which are extremely important to their organisations, says Kishor Cariappa



Reaching out to the millennial consumers through digital marketing is growing at an incredible pace across the globe. In fact marketers at top companies and brands in Oman are increasingly opting to use social network as a marketing tool as they witness the digital marketing landscape continuing to grow at a rapid pace. It makes perfect sense to tap the large percentage of the forever 'online' consumer.

Online advertising spending which totalled at US\$300mn in the MENA region in 2013 is increasing at a 37 per cent growth rate per year and is expected to reach an astounding US\$1bn in 2017. Though figures may not be available locally, you can feel the presence of local brands all over the social network indicating they are spending quite a bit in the digital media space.

More than ever, businesses in Oman are investing more of resources and budget to improve their digital capabilities which are extremely important to their

organisations. The nation is witnessing the evolution of communications and content from analog to digital, and from digital to mobile and social.

Automotive brands, telcos, banks, hotels and restaurants, plus travel and tourism companies are investing and engaging in innovative digital marketing space. This could be converting the website in to responsive ones, investing in search engine optimisation, search and display ads on Google, and social media marketing on popular channels like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Even as early as in 2012, not many companies had realised the importance of digital marketing in Oman. However, in 2016, the scenario is very different. Brands want to push their content and communication through digital, rich media, video and mobile. Consumers in Oman, like their counterparts across the globe, rely more on digital messages of brands to guide them through their purchase journey. It is estimated over 80 per cent of online consumers consume content via websites, online ads, videos of the brand that is relevant to them to research about a product or making a purchase.

The Internet has provided the marketers with a great opportunity to reach the right consumer, at the right time and with the right message. The scope of digital marketing has changed drastically over last four years. A mere cosmetic presence for the sake of being there in 2012 is making way for brands launching more targeted campaigns in 2016 with an objective to increase sales and get better ROI.

Businesses in Oman are running social media campaigns on Facebook and Instagram using the full potential of its robust advertising platforms. For marketers, digital provides a challenge in terms of improving the efficiency in reaching the right consumers and also the relevance of messages.

According to a report, 80 per cent of smartphone users in UAE take a quick decision on purchases when their interest is triggered through digital marketing.



## KISHOR CARIAPPA

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Around 75 per cent of consumers in UAE decide to purchase a product they would not normally even consider – because of relevant information easily available on their smartphone. This trend is not only limited to UAE, but also a universal phenomenon.

With a mobile brand band penetration of over 70 per cent, Oman is an opportune land for marketers to effectively target customers. They have to capitalise on the fact that when consumers buy a product, they use digital tools to know more and also do a comparative analysis of the item with competitors.

Mobile is emerging as a great platform to acquire new buyers. In Oman, a host of businesses have invested in iPhone and Android apps to reach their audience in the platform they prefer. Using a few simple taps, a consumer can book a flight ticket, pay bills or order food. A study says an average person looks at his smartphone 150 times a day. This should be music to the ears of marketers to deliver relevant content.

In sync with the global digital marketing trends, 2016 will be the year of video in the region. Thanks to explosion of smartphones, the popularity of online videos is increasing by the day. Around 75 per cent of internet users in MENA watch online videos once a week on their smartphones since they are aware there is a YouTube video for every subject in this planet. Over 63 per cent of premium consumers refer to videos in their purchase decision-making process. It is not surprising brands are investing heavily in producing high quality video content for distribution on YouTube. Auto companies, hotels, telecoms and banks in Oman have made significant investment in online video if their YouTube channels are any indication.

Even though marketers in Oman are becoming more cautious as they are more concerned about global and local economy performances, some of them expect a positive year ahead. It is a fact that even in tough times consumers spend on clothing, dining,

travel and out-of-home entertainment, indicating that consumers are still willing to spend. However, it might take some enticing to get them to open their wallets. This provides a great opportunity for marketers and advertisers to explore innovative digital strategies and tactics to connect with the right consumers.

Oman is a growing digital market and marketers are facing challenges in ‘understanding customers’ interactions across channels’ and ‘calculating the return on investment’.

The digital advertising landscape is evolving at an extraordinary pace as media proliferation and technology are charting newer ways of connecting with consumers. Marketers are coming to terms with understanding how consumers engage with an ads served on various media platforms. The need of the hour for marketers is to better collaborate with agencies to co-create new content and media strategies to drive resonance and purchase decision of consumers.

The challenge for brands and agencies is to master online word-of-mouth marketing techniques, the results of which can go viral very quickly. Marketers must transform to evolve the relationship from a one-way sales pitch to a two-way conversation.

Reaching the right audience, generating brand lift and driving a customer reaction is what is required for digital success in 2016. Identify your target audience and much of your digital marketing will take care of itself. And, remember; think of digital marketing as a long race and not a sprint. ■

