

DIGITAL MARKETING IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

Digital marketing represents a new concept that can be implemented in public administration in order to enhance the services provides and to establish proper relationships with citizens. The digital tools can be used by civil servants for a better understanding of the people they serve, making the carried-out activities become more efficient. The principles of digital marketing, used in the economic space, can easily be transferred to the area of public services and adapted to the requirements of this particular market.

Keywords: *digitalisation, marketing, public administration, online services, public servant, citizen.*

The new technologies and software systems should represent, for the Romanian public administration, evolution and progress, with the priority of changing the interaction between citizens and the governmental, regional or local institutions.

The large-scale usage of the new software by most citizens proves the usefulness of these online services, with benefits for both parties: the time, energy and money saving represent the main advantages, but one should not overlook the other benefits: the transaction history is easier to analyse, the documents are no longer lost, but digitally saved, accessibility is at one click distance.

Moreover, public administration employees have a series of immediate advantages: all data is electronically available and this facilitates the adoption of strategies regarding the evolution and the tendencies of different fields, forecasts can be made, the less-used services can be identified, problems can be explained. Last but not least, the use of e-Government services represents an efficient solution against the existing evasion in the public system (BUȚIU, 2005).

The pandemic experience adds to all this, with states of emergency and alert, with restrictions

when it comes to "face to face" communication and with strict social distancing measures, and it proved the urgent need to virtualize public administration services. These are just some of the obvious advantages that online electronic public services should possess and this should represent the most important means of interaction between citizens, companies and other organizations.

We should, however, be realistic and accept the fact that this evolution of public services in an online system cannot be efficiently performed with specialists on different levels: technological, organizational, administrative, legal and political. Technological development in public administration triggers an increase in the citizen's level of involvement in the community decisions and his desire to be more active, at an online level, in everything that takes place in the locality in which he lives.

In this context, the need for public administration marketing appears, a scientific tool used to persuade citizens to respect the laws and regulations, and also a science which helps plan, organise, coordinate, manage and control the activities involved in the development of services that satisfy public interest (FLORESCU et al., 2003).

Therefore, marketing in public administration imposes a new conduct on the civil servants, which refers to being receptive towards the needs of the citizens, the ability to adapt to the evolution of the demands and requirements of the society, innovation, transparency, availability to reduce bureaucracy, flexibility in the functioning of public institutions, a unitary vision regarding the activities which are carried out, as well as maximum efficiency.

The concept of public administration marketing aims at identifying, achieving and quantifying the

needs and desires of the tax-paying citizens and duties and satisfying them by the various state institutions. Marketing should become a priority for every employee or public servant. Any interaction with the services provided by an institution will influence the way in which people relate to the public administration on the whole.

This is why all public servants should use marketing: the secretary who may answer the phone or not, who may be polite or aggressive, the public relations staff, the public guards, the doorman etc. Their attitude should refer to the idea that "the civil servant is in the service of the citizen."

At any time and in any situation, they should be informed, kind and motivated to help citizens. Reality proves that the Romanian public administration is still full of hard to overcome prejudices, the idea of marketing being one of them, oftentimes confused with an activity particular to the private sector, used to identify the target market for one's products.

The concept can be perfectly applied in the area of the public services which have to be present to people, promoted and explained, both for a better communication and tax collection. And let us not forget that the term "administration" comes from the Latin word "administrare," which means "aimed at serving."

Therefore, public administration marketing targets the citizen and, in this context, here are some marketing principles that can be applied:

- Public administration is in the service of the citizen and all the resources and the tools used by the administration system are subordinated to this purpose.
- The principle of flexibility: it is necessary to adapt the activity of public institutions to the environment in which they carry out their activity. The administrative apparatus should be ready at any time to deal with the continuous changing circumstances (ANDRONICEANU, 1999).
- The dynamic of social life triggers:
 - the promotion of active territorial development strategies which aim not only at adapting the institution to the environment, but also at influencing it;
 - the increase in the capacity of public institutions' leaders to quickly adapt to social transformations;

- the administration's exact knowledge of the social environment in which it carries out its activity (MUNTEANU, 2003).

It is necessary to form the mentality of the entire staff of a public institution on "a marketing culture", whose goal is to satisfy the needs of the citizens. Each civil servant is able to positively or negatively influence the perceptions of the citizens regarding the image of the public institution. This is why the following code of conduct should be present in every public institution:

- The citizen is the most important person for the civil servant, in any of the following situations: when communicating via phone call, mail, e-mail, online, social network or directly (face to face).
- The citizen does not depend on the public servants, they depend on the citizen.
- The citizen does not interrupt the servant's work. He is exactly the aim of the servant's work. The civil servant does not make the citizen a favour by serving him, it is the citizen who makes the servant a favour by offering him the change to serve him.
- The citizen is not outside the activity of the public servant, he is a part of it.
- The citizen is not a statistical figure, he is a human being with feelings and emotions, with preconceptions and preferences, just like the public servant.
- The citizen is not someone the civil servant has to start a fight with. No one has ever won a fight with a citizen.
- The citizen is the person who tells the civil servant his desires. Various administrative issues that may appear, such as the lack of sufficient staff, the working conditions, the wages, or the problems which appeared in the information system of the public organisation, should not negatively influence the citizen.

When speaking of marketing in public administration we must also take into account the technological development of the field. In other words, when conducting a survey of the needs and wants of the citizens it is recommended to use digital channels such as search engines, web sites, social networks, the e-mail and mobile apps. We

therefore get to digital marketing. Consumers, in our case the tax-paying citizens use digital tools in order to find out details about public services.

Digital marketing can help getting to know the citizens from a certain community, finding out important data about them and therefore offering them some public services which hit the target. It is not enough to threaten the citizen that if he does not honour his financial obligations, he will be punished, because by using such an attitude the public servant forces him to look for way to elude the law or to sue that particular institution for various reasons, a situation from which nobody stands to gain anything (POPESCU, 2003).

The planning, implementing and optimisation of the digital marketing programme is achieved in several stages:

- Identifying the target segments;
- Establishing objectives and the measurement strategy;
- Configuring the adds and the communication channels.

An institution's civil servants have to know the profile of the citizen they serve: his standard of living, purchasing power, education level, the history of the citizen-public administration interactions, the economic situation of the community he is part of, his culturalization degree etc. This global image can easily be obtained through online search tools (ZAIȚ, 2007).

This is why it is necessary to optimize the search engines (SEO). This process consists in the technical configuration and coverage of the website. The use of SEO can attract visitors to the website taking into account the fact that 90% of the people who look for a certain information have not yet formed an opinion about a certain public service.

Nowadays, the marketing analysis also refers to a socialization strategy. Regardless of whether or not it is an organic social media strategy, a paid social media strategy or a mixture of the two, it is important to use a form of social marketing. While social media is excellent for branding and involvement, it can also represent a useful channel for the digital marketing advertisement. One can promote or even advertise a tax service so that the citizen performs this duty without feeling threatened in any way.

Digital marketing stretches over a massive network of contact points whom clients and citizens interact several times during a day.

Another strategy refers to content marketing which does not necessarily have a promotional character, but it is used to educate and influence citizens-consumers who look for information. In the era of the self-taught consumer, content marketing gains three times more potential customers than the paid search advertising, for example, and therefore it is worth the additional effort.

Another analysis and promotional method is the social media marketing. The key to an efficient social network marketing is a high coverage of active accounts. As many social elements as possible must also be linked in order to create as many opportunities for sharing as possible. The more motivated the target audience is to interact with the content offered, the more likely it is to share it, attracting new customers (STANCIU, 2002).

Digital marketing also means the use of e-mail. After three decades the e-mail still remains the fastest and most direct means of reaching the clients and of offering them critical information. Nowadays, successful e-mail companies have to be extremely attractive, relevant, informative and fun in order not to become hidden in the clients' e-mail boxes. In order to succeed, e-mail marketing should fulfill five basic features. They have to be reliable, relevant, conversational, coordinated on various channels and strategic.

Mobile marketing draws attention to the mobile devices which have become a prolongation of the human being and which are constantly verified throughout the day. This is why mobile marketing is extremely important – two thirds of consumers can recall a brand or a particular service offered by a public institution that they saw advertised on the mobile phone during that particular week – but mobile phone is also very nuanced given its intimate nature. SMS, MMS and in-app marketing are all options to reach customers, on their devices (BUȚIU, 2006).

In this context, the need to automatize marketing is obvious. This consists in an integral platform which connects all the elements of digital marketing. In fact, companies which automatize the management of potential customers record an increase of 10% or more in income, in six to nine months.

For public administration, this could be translated in a faster and more efficient tax collection and also the achievement of a high degree of satisfaction for the citizens that it interacts with. The marketing automatization software makes marketing tasks and workflow more efficient and it calculates the return on investment of that particular institution.

Digital marketing can be used to purchase, grow and retain citizens, as well as to improve the image of a service or public institution.

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