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ENGAGING MARKETING MINDS

MARCH / APRIL 2025

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BEYOND THE DEVICE

The world has changed a lot. And while we can lean into the mantra that change is the only constant, the reality is that technology, spearheaded by AI, has never been more ingrained in our lives. In fact, according to Statista, as of the second quarter of 2024, internet users worldwide spent an average of six hours and 36 minutes online daily. Assuming a 16-hour waking day, this equates to approximately 41%.

That should be a jaw-dropping stat for all of us, underscoring the need for marketers to engage on a more human level.

Having a marketing mindset is not about generating a barrage of emails, tweets, and AI-generated content. A true marketing mindset should be anchored in authentic intention, discipline, and a relentless focus on what truly matters to the people you aim to serve. You could argue that a genuine sense of care, in this day and age, is a competitive advantage.

"A TRUE MARKETING MINDSET SHOULD BE ANCHORED IN AUTHENTIC INTENTION, DISCIPLINE, AND A RELENTLESS FOCUS ON WHAT TRULY MATTERS TO THE PEOPLE YOU AIM TO SERVE."

Marketing starts with curiosity—the drive to understand clients, make them feel valued, and anticipate their needs. It's about asking: What's best for them?

But curiosity alone isn't enough. True marketing means prioritizing clients over quick wins, building trust, and fostering relationships—knowing success follows when people come first. Clients can sense when you're focused on them versus your bottom line. In a digital world, genuine connection requires listening, empathy, and finding joy in their stories.

Curiosity is human. In a device-driven world, it helps us stand out. As marketers, we must first understand, then serve.

This issue's cover story, "Beyond the Click," explores the evolution of marketing through print and digital integration. The feature article, "Listen Up," examines how to better engage customers. We hope these insights inspire deeper connections beyond the screen.

Warmest regards,



Gina M. Danner
CEO, NextPage



09 *Seizing the day—and what it offers*

- 02 Feature Listen Up
- 05 In Focus More Than (Just) Print
- 06 Cover Story Beyond the Click
- 10 Tactics Strategies You Can Use
- 12 On the Record Dave Charest

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LIS TEN UP!

HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND
ENGAGE YOUR CUSTOMERS BETTER

“ I’VE ALWAYS FOUND THAT A BLEND OF METHODS HELPS PAINT A FULLER PICTURE OF THE CUSTOMER VOICE AND CREATES BETTER STRATEGIES FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS. IT’S IMPORTANT TO GET OUT IN THE FIELD AND ENGAGE WITH OUR CUSTOMERS ON A REGULAR BASIS.”

— BRIDGETTE O’BRIEN,
SENIOR DIRECTOR BRAND & CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE, COLDER PRODUCTS COMPANY



As part of efforts to solicit general feedback from sales and other Voice of the Customer (VoC), Bridgette O’Brien, Senior Director of Brand & Content Strategy for CPC (Colder Products Company), conducts an annual Net Promoter Score (NPS) survey that is distributed to all current customers. The feedback offers insights into the brand experience like whether the company is easy to do business with, how customers view their relationship with CPC and what support areas they value.

During the past survey, O’Brien and her team recognized an opportunity to enhance customer relationships and grow them from a more transactional style to a more intimate and strategic customer relationship. Based on this data, she developed an engagement and reinvigoration strategy to deploy immediately into the market.

Part of the strategy involved a multi-channel engagement program to communicate with, educate and strengthen relationships with its existing

customers on a more frequent basis, including an e-newsletter, webinar educational series, and a three-day, in-person training event. Overall, the success of the program helped increase engagement across the board, with higher open rates on CPC e-blasts YOY (year-over-year), stronger attendance for webinars and more than 150 attendees for its in-person event.

“It was important to hear from our customers not only in what areas we succeed, but also areas where we can improve, and that they were willing to build upon our relationships for future growth,” O’Brien says. “And did that pay off. We ended the year with strong commitments heading into 2025 and renewed energy, and our customers saw and appreciated the effort and dedication we poured into communicating and engaging with them in 2024.”

In an age of extreme data overload and continual technological advancements, the art of listening to your customers is becoming both a challenge and a necessity for today’s marketers. This is making strategies that O’Brien implemented even more important for being able to pinpoint customer needs and preferences. The voice of the customer is extremely important to the success of any company—from

the marketing and brand, to product development and, ultimately, sales. The key is to go in with an open mind.

Understanding your target audience and optimizing customer experiences is critical to helping drive results. In her quest to capture what customers want, O’Brien employs myriad VoC strategies, including customer interviews, surveys, in-person meetings, online engagement metrics, social media and reviews, and others. “I’ve always found that a blend of methods helps paint a fuller picture of the customer voice and creates better strategies for long-term success. It’s important to get out in the field and engage with our customers on a regular basis.”

One of O’Brien’s priorities is to go through the customer journey from the consumer’s viewpoint, which helps her understand the experience and identify service gaps that need optimization. “Marketing is both an art and a science. Data is extremely helpful in conveying trends and activities, and it is important information for marketers to build strategies from. But, at the end of the day, we are all consumers. Every one of us buys things every day. And while you may not be the target audience for your brand’s products, it’s your job to put yourself through their journey.” ■

THE HUMAN-CENTRIC DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM



he University of Montana (UM) views its digital platforms as a human-centered digital ecosystem to best meet market demand. In that ecosystem, the university focuses on personalization, building trust and making sure the digital experience is consistent for its visitors. That means regular

evaluation and improvements are needed to create and compete with consumer-grade experiences.

The shift presents an opportunity for the university to lead the charge in transforming not just its processes, but the overall experience, which Jenny Petty says ensures students are met with a frictionless, future-forward institution that prioritizes their needs. "Listening to the voice of the customer requires a thoughtful mix of qualitative and quantitative tools," says Petty, UM's VP of Marketing Communications, Experience and Engagement.

Some of the most effective methods Petty and her team uses are surveys and focus groups (platforms like Qualtrics and in-person engagements); social listening platforms (tools like Campus Sonar, Sprout Social and Meltwater); CRM Analytics (HubSpot and Slate); and third-party research, including partnering with organizations to provide a broader view of industry trends and student needs.

"We don't often like to think of our students as consumers or customers, but we need to shift our mindset on this," Petty says. "We all have expectations for consumer journeys. Gen Z responds well to quick, mobile-friendly surveys and interactive platforms like Instagram polls. Different tools are optimized for various stages of the enrollment funnel—for example, chatbots for early inquiries and personalized email flows for later stages. The tools we use must align with the digital habits and preferences of today's students."

Petty recalls the "Nike N7" campaign, where UM prioritized listening sessions with Indigenous students, alumni and community leaders. Their feedback emphasized the need for authentic representation and highlighted cultural symbols with deep meaning. This collaboration led to the university partnering with Indigenous artists for custom designs, and ensuring campaign imagery and messaging celebrated the diversity

of Indigenous cultures in Montana. "The campaign achieved record-breaking engagement on social media and earned national recognition for its authenticity and impact. To date, it is our highest performing retail collection and has sparked a new campus tradition of celebrating our Indigenous communities through multiple avenues beyond athletics."

Each winter, the "N7"-inspired events include guest lectures, special visit programs for prospective Indigenous students, and new artwork that celebrates Montana's Indigenous artists and 12 recognized Tribes. "Listening goes beyond collecting feedback; it's about co-creation," Petty says. "By involving customers as collaborators, campaigns become more meaningful, building trust and long-term relationships. Authenticity is built through collaboration, not assumption."

In today's ever-shifting consumer landscape, truly listening to your customers' wants and needs is the key to building trust, fostering loyalty and delivering meaningful experiences. By embracing active listening and leveraging insights to shape your strategies, you can create deeper connections that drive lasting success. ■



Alissa Pili | Samoan & Ifupiat | Professional Basketball Player
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“THE TANGIBLE CONNECTION BETWEEN PRINT AND DIGITAL HELPS GENERATE THE KIND OF DATA THAT SUPPORTS MEASURABILITY, AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION, GRANULAR TARGETING AND PERSONALIZATION.”

— TANYA FRETHEIM,
CEO, STREET LEVEL STUDIO

BEYOND THE CLICK

THE POWER OF PRINT IN A DIGITAL WORLD



During a campaign Street Level Studio conducted for Canon, Tanya Fretheim and her team created an interactive direct mail piece tying the brand's inkjet technology to the five senses and real business results. After opening an individually addressed envelope, recipients found a personalized note from their Canon sales representative and a collection of full-color cards showcasing the remarkable print quality of a Canon sheetfed inkjet press.

Each card connected a single sense to a key benefit of the inkjet press, while the messaging on the back presented data on the press' features and benefits, and an engaging call to action (CTA). The engagements included QR codes to order print samples; enter a sweepstakes and watch a video; smart speaker prompts to get more information; plus a link to the award-winning interactive varioPRINT iX-series online experience.

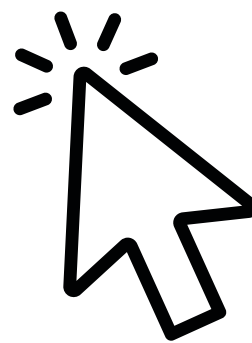
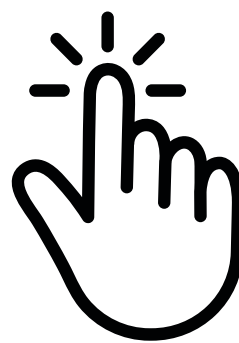
"Adding interactivity to print via the technology built into the devices most of us use every day is an obvious choice," says Fretheim, CEO of the full-service marketing firm. "Giving audiences an easy and immediate way to act on an emotion or personally participate in the exchange of information adds even more value. The ability to graphically demonstrate the innovation of its digital production printing presses via vibrant colors, stunning images, media flexibility and creative possibilities was an obvious added advantage."

The campaign not only won several industry awards for creativity, but also has become a staple go-to move for Canon's sales and marketing team, which continues to lean in to direct mail as part of their engagement strategies.

"Providing visibility as well as additional touchpoints and impressions across channels and throughout the buyer's journey is critical," Fretheim says. "The tangible connection between print and digital helps generate the kind of data that supports measurability, audience segmentation, granular targeting and personalization."

As the marketing landscape continues to evolve, the seamless integration and creativity of print and digital strategies like the one Street Level Studio employed is helping unlock new opportunities for brands to engage audiences in meaningful ways. The marketing world continues to not only be a bastion of proof of print's staying power as a marketing and communications medium, but also a vital complement to digital tactics.

Despite the digital hype, the current reality is that customer experiences have become commoditized, as brands continue to swim in a sea of sameness via



digital and customer experience initiatives that lack emotional connection and brand relevance. Print, on the other hand, offers a unique opportunity to provide the tactile, memorable, hyper-personalized experiences that viscerally connect, engage more deeply and effectively convert—without sacrificing interactivity or analytics, thanks to advances in digital printing technology.

"Today, print can target specific audiences, flex the media to your message, track your print marketing results, send and trigger printed ads the same way you send emails, and more," Fretheim says. "That is why we tell all our clients that including print in their omnichannel marketing mix is always the right decision."

Ask Fretheim and other marketers and they will say that the best way to balance print and digital marketing efforts is to create dynamic, personalized content based on individual behaviors, needs and technology preferences. Some examples include using ads or printed catalogs to drive traffic directly to e-commerce platforms via QR codes; delivering custom direct mail featuring unique images, text and calls-to-action based on real-time user data; or capitalizing on the virality of social media by connecting posts to other campaign assets. Each is the kind of seamless cross-channel experience consumers have come to expect.

"There is no question that variable data printing is changing the game for personalization," Fretheim says. "Brands can now offer highly personalized and customized printed products at scale, tailoring messages, images, designs and URLs not only to specific customer segments, but also to specific individuals. That kind of hyper-personalization is powerful, especially in print where it's less expected. With everyone carrying a smartphone, QR codes have become another way to provide both connection and customization."

For example, a quick scan can instantly connect from a printed brochure to a unique website landing page, video or piece of gated content. Augmented Reality (AR) offers an even more interactive level of engagement, where consumers can scan a printed piece to reveal everything from a 3D image to a product demo or an immersive video experience, fusing the physical and the digital worlds.

"Coming up with marketing strategies that maximize print's power in tandem with the impact of digital requires calculated judgments and refined strategies is the next challenge," Fretheim says. "Understanding the strengths of print—as well as the challenges related to its design parameters, physical attributes, cost-effective production, personalization potential, and environmental sustainability—is critical." ■



SEIZING THE DAY-AND WHAT IT OFFERS

Marc Lyncheski can clearly see the play. Sure, there are those who believe that print has become an “old school” marketing practice—ones who say you can reach more people, with more frequency and at a lower cost per touchpoint via digital strategies. For example, with digital comes a host of other challenges: more competition, more messaging and more clutter for your people—and your brand—to sift through.

It is in that digital tidal wave of messaging bombarding people at every turn that the true power of print reveals itself as the ultimate complement to any marketing campaign. Attention spans are getting shorter. AI-generated messaging is becoming more prevalent. And the battle to outsmart the constantly changing digital media algorithms is today’s new frustration.

“Print can significantly enhance a digital campaign when it becomes a supplemental element that not only complements the digital campaign, but also can exist as a stand-alone if needed,” says Lyncheski, CEO of Running Gecko Communications. “The messaging and delivery channels of printed components must be more closely monitored and budgeted. Fundraising campaigns, for example,

“PRINT CAN SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCE A DIGITAL CAMPAIGN WHEN IT BECOMES A SUPPLEMENTAL ELEMENT THAT NOT ONLY COMPLEMENTS THE DIGITAL CAMPAIGN, BUT ALSO CAN EXIST AS A STAND-ALONE IF NEEDED”

— MARC LYNCHESKI, CEO
RUNNING GECKO COMMUNICATIONS

that appeal to multiple generations and levels of wealth, must find ways to reach not only the tech savvy generations, but also the boomer and Gen X generations, that still seem to appreciate a tangible element or hard copy with which to interact.”

A few years ago, during the height of the pandemic, Running Gecko Communications led the creative and tactical fundraising strategy for a nonprofit in the higher education sector. With the world on literal lockdown, Lyncheski and his team were challenged to explore creative, non-traditional ways to not only reach various audiences, but also ensure donation and participation methods were as user-friendly and intuitive as possible for each audience segment.

For example, along with people using digital money transfer services like Venmo, PayPal, Zelle, etc., many others still were sending in handwritten checks, money orders and, time be forsaken, delivering cash by hand at the front door. What Running Gecko knew, more than anything else, is that for the campaign to succeed, people needed options. So, it tested various methods internally and externally, including surveying a series of questions about technical problems during peak donation times.

“We were able to identify several top-tier donors that we contacted personally to offer support every step of the way,” Lyncheski recalls. “The process helped minimize frustrations, encouraged a higher transaction completion percentage and discouraged drop-offs due to various levels of technical knowledge.”

Lyncheski continues to witness how technological advancements can greatly improve marketing efficiency, tracking capabilities, information gathering and data analysis for better decision-making and adaptation, and real-time adjustments. “Everything



Mock poly-bag mailing package for the higher-education sector, created by NextPage.

comes down to the objectives and budget of the campaign, the identity and consistency that fits the brand, and the desire for trackable data and audience engagement. Digital channels, with quicker response times, one-click purchases, and better demographic and psychographic targeting offer great solutions for managing impressions, but once the user swipes up, down, left or right on their device, that image is quickly forgotten.”

Today, with digital paving the way, a quality-produced printed piece can offer a bit more permanence in the consciousness of the audience every time they pass by it. “A marketer must take into consideration the amount of impressions desired, the decision-making process for their product or service, and the costs that each potential mix of print vs digital components and tactics will require,” Lyncheski says. “The magic happens at the crossroads of art and science, sprinkled with a touch of luck.”

The convergence of print and digital marketing demonstrates how today’s marketers are combining the tactile impact of print with the agility of digital to create powerful, integrated campaigns that engage audiences across multiple touchpoints. By leveraging the strengths of each, marketers are delivering seamless and personalized experiences that amplify their message and drive measurable results. ■

TACTICS

TAKING NOTE

5 TRENDS TO KEEP TABS ON

1. Advertising Industry Growth

The global advertising industry was projected to surpass \$1 trillion in revenue for the first time in 2024, with five major companies—Amazon, Alphabet, Meta, Alibaba, and ByteDance—capturing over half of the global ad spend.

SOURCE: INVESTORS.COM

2. AI Integration in Marketing

Artificial intelligence is becoming integral, with 64% of marketers already using AI and an additional 38% that planned to start in 2024. Marketers believe benefits include improved content quality (87%) and more efficient content creation (84%).

SOURCE: MARKETING SCOOP

3. Content Marketing Investment

Content marketing remains a priority, with 50% of marketers planning to increase their investment in this area in 2024.

SOURCE: WEBFX

4. Social Media Engagement

There are over 4.8 billion social media users worldwide, with users spending an average of around 2 hours and 29 minutes on social media every day.

SOURCE: WPBEGINNER

5. Influencer Marketing Shift

There's a notable shift towards micro and nano influencers, with 43% of marketers increasing their use of these influencers for authentic audience engagement and higher ROI.

SOURCE: INFLUENCERMARKETING HUB



“The history of every dead and dying ‘growth’ industry shows a self-deceiving cycle of bountiful expansion and undetected decay. There are four conditions which usually guarantee this cycle: belief that growth is assured by an expanding and more affluent population; belief that there is no competitive substitute for the industry’s major product; too much faith in mass production and in the advantages of rapidly declining unit costs as output rises; and preoccupation with a product that lends itself to carefully controlled scientific experimentation, improvement, and manufacturing cost reduction.”

- THEODORE LEVITT, PROFESSOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AT HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL (HBS).

READING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

HOW GEN Z AND MILLENNIALS ENGAGE WITH MEDIA

A new report took a peek into the reading habits, media preferences, and book discovery trends of Gen Z and millennials. Surveying over 2,000 respondents aged 13-40, a new study from American Library Association (ALA.org), reveals how digital formats dominate their reading habits, how they find books in a hybrid world, and the platforms they trust for recommendations. From texting to TikTok, this data provides insights into how these generations consume and discover content, redefining the traditional notion of reading. In addition, it demonstrates that printed books are becoming more popular, possibly due to digital fatigue.



54% OF GEN Z AND MILLENNIALS VISITED A PHYSICAL LIBRARY WITHIN A 12-MONTH PERIOD.

MEDIA USE:

MOST POPULAR READING FORMATS (PAST 12 MONTHS)

TOP 5 FORMATS:

- › Text Messages
- › Email
- › Social Media
- › Websites
- › Print Books

BOOK DISCOVERY:

HOW & WHERE

TOP METHODS OF BOOK DISCOVERY:

- › Recommendations from friends (59%)
- › Streaming TV/movies adapted from books (41%)
- › Browsing online bookstores (30%)
- › Recommendations from talent (e.g., authors, actors) (32%)
- › Browsing brick-and-mortar bookstores (31%)

PREFERRED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

- › GEN Z: TikTok (23%), Snapchat (13%), Instagram (21%)
- › MILLENNIALS: Facebook (33%), Instagram (21%), YouTube (17%)

BOOK PURCHASES VIA SOCIAL MEDIA ADS:

- › TIKTOK: 34% of Gen Z
- › INSTAGRAM: 35% of millennials

TRENDS IN CROSSMEDIA CONSUMPTION

- › MEDIA OMNIVORES: Gen Z and millennials follow stories across multiple formats, including TV, books, and social media.
- › SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT: Instagram and TikTok dominate book-related conversations, with physical books often featured in visually creative ways (e.g., #BookTok trends).



On the Record

What is it about this time of year that inspires new ventures, and how can marketers tap into this mindset to help businesses kick off successfully?

The new year comes with this natural sense of a clean slate. People are thinking about new goals, fresh ideas, and making changes for the better. It's like the ultimate 'Monday' of the year—a chance to reset and start something new. Despite the sacrifices and challenges, a recent study from Constant Contact found that 95% of small business owners would do it again and 82% say owning a business has exceeded their expectations compared to when they first started their entrepreneurial journey, underscoring the rewards of taking the leap. But here's the thing: That excitement is only half the battle. What really matters is how you channel it into action.

Marketers can tap into this mindset by recognizing that people are already motivated to do something new—they just need a clear plan to get started. Your job is to help them take that first step. Simplify things. Focus on easy wins and early results. Show them how to set up a system that works without taking over their life. If you can do that, you're not just riding the wave of new year enthusiasm, you're building momentum that lasts beyond January.

It's about meeting people where they are, in this moment of possibility, and giving them the tools and confidence to turn those resolutions into real results. Because starting something new is exciting, but sticking with it—that's where the magic happens.

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

A CONVERSATION WITH DAVE CHAREST,
DIRECTOR OF SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS
AT CONSTANT CONTACT



Marketing often feels like a daunting, time-consuming task. Enter Dave Charest, Director of Small Business Success at Constant Contact. With a passion for empowering entrepreneurs, Dave has dedicated his career to making marketing simple and accessible for those who wear multiple hats. As a speaker, host, and advocate for small businesses, he brings a wealth of insights and practical strategies to help business owners achieve success without losing focus on what they love most. In this Q&A, Dave shares his mission, tips for streamlining marketing efforts, and advice for small business owners looking to make a big impact.

With the current entrepreneurial boom, what are the biggest challenges you see businesses facing as they get started?

Starting a business in today's economy can be both exciting and daunting. While the entrepreneurial spirit is thriving, especially with almost 5 million new businesses recorded in 2024, the biggest challenge many entrepreneurs face is marketing—specifically, how to effectively reach and engage customers. Many new small business owners are not marketing experts or struggle with content creation, choosing the right channels, and measuring ROI.

The best way to overcome this? Start small and stay consistent. I always tell business owners to focus on building their audience early. Your business doesn't exist if people don't know about it. So, start simple: Build a list. Create consistent content that provides value. And don't worry about being everywhere at once—just show up where your audience is and keep showing up.

For marketers within existing businesses, adopting an "intrapreneurial" mindset can be transformative. How can they

leverage this approach to innovate, take risks, and create new opportunities within their organizations?

Intrapreneurship is all about bringing that entrepreneurial mindset into an existing business—being willing to take ownership, think creatively, and drive new initiatives as if the company were your own. It's not waiting for permission to innovate; it's about seeing opportunities and acting on them.

For marketers, this starts with solving real problems for your customers. Pay attention to what they're asking for, what they're struggling with, and where they're going for information. Then, think about how you can meet those needs in new ways. It might mean experimenting with new marketing campaigns or channels or even creating a new product or service offering to push the business forward.

The key to making this work internally is to start small and show results. You don't need to reinvent the entire business overnight. Identify one area where you can add value and take action. Test a new idea like embracing emerging technologies like AI or exploring creative customer



engagement strategies.

The beauty of an intrapreneurial mindset is keeping things fresh. It challenges the status quo and keeps businesses moving forward. And for marketers, that's essential—because if we're not constantly looking for new ways to connect with customers, we risk getting left behind.

From email and text marketing to social media and print, what's your advice for small businesses on integrating these diverse marketing tools effectively to build a cohesive and impactful strategy?

The biggest mistake I see small businesses make is trying to do everything at once without a clear plan. The reality: You don't have to be everywhere—you just need to show up consistently where your audience is. And the best way to tie everything together? Start with email. It's the one channel you truly own, and it's where you can build

deeper relationships over time.

Here's the key: Keep it simple. You don't need complicated funnels or dozens of tools. Focus on creating consistent, valuable content that helps your audience solve their problems. And don't overthink it—done is better than perfect. When your tools work together and you're showing up regularly, you build trust. And trust is what turns followers into customers.

What advice would you give to those who might feel overwhelmed or unsure about how to start leveraging AI in their marketing efforts?

Like every industry, AI is rapidly changing the marketing landscape, but that doesn't mean businesses have to be intimidated. While it might seem overwhelming at first, AI and automation offer huge opportunities to simplify and streamline marketing efforts and deliver better results with less time and effort.

For example, AI can help you write

emails faster, create social media content, or even personalize customer interactions automatically.

The key is to think of AI as your assistant—not a replacement, but a way to handle the repetitive tasks so you can focus on what you do best.

For those feeling overwhelmed, my advice is simple: Start small. Pick one task you find time-consuming—like writing subject lines or planning social posts—and try an AI tool to help with that. Test it, tweak it, and see how it works. Once you get comfortable with one use case, you can explore more.

The beauty of today's technology is that it's designed to be user-friendly, even for those who don't have a tech background. And the best part? It's available at a fraction of the cost it once was. By embracing AI, small business owners—regardless of their marketing expertise—can make their marketing more efficient, effective, and data-driven, giving them a competitive edge in today's tech-savvy world.

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