Lost in Digital Wonderland?
Finding a Path in the Global Knowledge Society

By Ananthanarayanan V   (2,963 words)

A dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world ~ Oscar Wilde

Back in high school, one of my teachers asked our class, 'what do you want to be when you grow up?' Majority of the class roared together with answers, most of which revolved around becoming a doctor, engineer or a businessman. I was quite and was deeply lost in thought. Well, it was an important question, something that was going to decide the rest of my life. The teacher noticed this and asked me, "So Ananth, why are you so quite? Don't you know the answer?" I looked at her and then my class and scratched my head as I spoke with my eyes closing in with a befuddled look and said, "Mam, I want to be happy when I grow up".

I still remember that day very clearly because it took the teacher almost 10 minutes to stop most of the class from laughing out aloud at my answer but it was difficult, because she too was laughing. But strangely enough though, my answer never changed.

I always loved being a part of anything creative and innovative. I enjoyed planning and developing new ideas at work place, especially when I got to plan new strategies and techniques to add value to the company's business where I was employed. For me, it asserted my role in contributing something of value as an employee of that organization. Slowly I realized that to be 'really happy', I needed to do something different than what I was already doing. So I finally ventured into becoming an entrepreneur. Digital platforms and technology tools were changing the way we lived and communicated each day, so I was very sure it would impact massively how we did business too. Every other individual I met was on facebook or twitter. They were exchanging reviews of movies, products, opinions about brands and so much more.

So I started my new venture, a digital marketing agency, I created a set of rules, guidelines and life lessons which incorporated my beliefs of where I would see myself ten years from now and what value would I add using the tools of tomorrow.

<u>**Future as I see it & what it holds for individuals & organizations:**</u>

Past lessons, coupled with today's technological breakthroughs and digital resources & a future filled with improved quality of conversations & relationships eased with technological innovations:

> **1.<u>Dreams:</u>** The idea is to build a pathway that encourages, simplifies and adds a real-world incentive to use digital tools by end users for their daily value-add. In a country like India, where digital is still at its infancy stage, it can help users share their dream, irrespective of the magnitude of the dream, right from scoring well in your term papers to losing weight to buying that dream house. At the end of the day, the idea is using these tools to contribute something meaningful to help them by creating a platform that will encourage them to share more openly and engage into real-time conversations. At the same time gain more insights and meet those already successful in the respective fields.
> **2.<u>Employment:</u>** *Drucker was the first to assert in 1950s that workers should*

be treated as assets, not as liabilities. I envisioned a future wherein using digital tools and media I would be able to build the greatest asset of employees & skilled professionals from across the globe using the power of digital. Technology has been since ages seen as being responsible for creating job cuts. As a start-up, I in fact ended up with a completely different experience. *I hired skilled homemakers, doting fathers whose domestic pressures kept them away from their previous jobs due to the pressures of time and travelling in this chaotic city, for graduate students who wanted to pursue further studies but were unable to gain flexible access to work timings and it was an amazing opportunity, for both, them and me.* I needn't bother anymore about setting up a swanky office for a set-up that was anyway to be run by delivering only online / digital services. Because **my business asset was not the infrastructure, but the skilled workforce**. Neither did I have to bother about bringing in huge sums of investment for starting up my business. I hired skilled professionals with good experience in their respective fields who were more than happy working from the comforts of their own home. Not only this, but it also enabled me to offer services at a genuinely affordable rates in the field of digital marketing as there were very few operational costs. Yes, there have always been two major concerns expressed in telecommuting over the years. The first one being the "trust factor" of whether the employees are really doing their jobs and the second one being the "human connect" which is a missing link as compared to working in a set-up face to face. It was my personal experience that by starting with an approach that each individual hired for his or her skill will do their jobs with sincerity (yes, I also used tools that help them update their progress, login from their desks remotely etc) but at the same time, it allowed me to develop a quicker and more acceptable "trust-factor" that seemed to only grow mutually between us. This form of set-up in-fact helped us to connect with our team members from time to time even face to face online using digital video and technology communication tools that never gave us a feel of disconnect or as though working with strangers. And in the coming years, I see this only growing higher and as a more acceptable work style.

3.<u>Digital can transform lives of anyone from anywhere:</u> As part of our services, we were also designing websites for clients. During one such process, we came across an amazing NGO whose goal was to give "traditional Indian artists" from deepest regions of rural India exposure to help them sell their art and crafts. We used digital and social media tools and process to further boost their already amazing efforts and soon enough through our small value-add too, we made a difference by helping more and more users of social networking sites learn about these talented artists. Even though the NGO was doing the most important part of all, we kept sharing our ideas and process to reach for gaining more exposure to these already brilliant artists from rural India. In the coming years I see more such immensely talented creative individuals from places which are still hidden and completely untapped, coming to light and getting the recognition they deserve.

4.<u>Social revolutions:</u> Digital can revolutionize and in true sense of the term empower users to safeguard themselves against products or services or brands and most importantly groups or individuals who cause them harm in any manner. We have in the recent few years seen global revolutions taking place with users empowered with social media and technology tools. Capital crimes that were unnoticed across millions around the globe now have a voice to gain justice with support from millions who share their pain. On a global front, I definitely see myself investing time and resources in building a platform that can authenticate and ease up the process for such violent crimes to be noticed and at the same

time create a safety connect for the victims by helping them reach out using technology tools with the right authorities on time. For eg, a tool as simple as "a woman sharing her location and or a photograph of an individual who is harassing or teasing her while walking in a lonely and deserted street or a bridge" can pave way for a great way to safeguard oneself. We have recently seen a sudden rise of such apps and with more safety enabled features like for eg these apps dialing the local cops helpline numbers in emergency etc the growing crimes of rapes and domestic violence might get curbed.
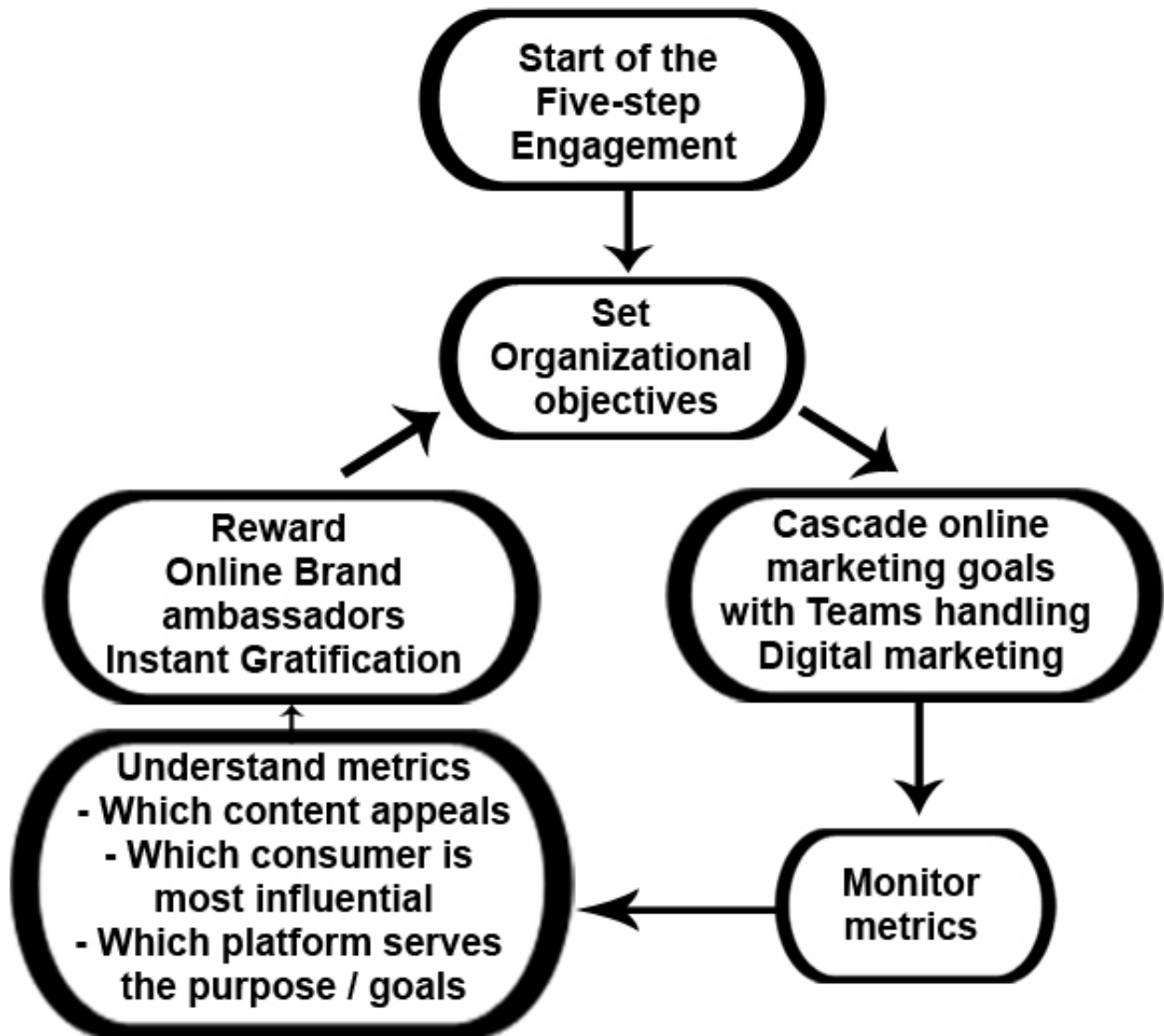
5. <u>Drucker originated the view of the corporation as a human community</u> built on trust and respect and not just a profit-making machine. We have built our complete digital marketing process under the concept of "**Humanize your Brand**". We have always wanted consumers to talk to them in the real sense of the term. In the near future, more and more brands will be able to understand the power of "humanizing their brands" and moving over branding as a strategy and instead integrating both, marketing and branding using digital tools and platforms to actually create meaningful and healthy brand relations with end users.

Brands today have a role more important than ever before, i.e. to connect with the consumer within. Social or digital media revolution is not about websites or tools. It was, is and will always be about people. People buy from people they trust.
Humanize your BRAND.

We even used the five-step MBO by tweaking it for Brands & digital process online as under: (Img 1)

The Five-Step Engagement for BRANDS Online

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          │    Five-step    │
          │   Engagement    │
          └─────────────────┘
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          ┌─────────────────┐
          │       Set       │
    ┌────▶│  Organizational │────┐
    │     │    objectives   │    │
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┌───────────────┐    ┌─────────────────────┐
│    Reward     │    │   Cascade online    │
│ Online Brand  │    │   marketing goals   │
│  ambassadors  │    │  with Teams handling│
│   Instant     │    │  Digital marketing  │
│ Gratification │    └─────────────────────┘
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│  Understand metrics    │  │ Monitor  │
│ - Which content appeals│◀─│ metrics  │
│ - Which consumer is    │  └──────────┘
│   most influential     │
│ - Which platform serves│
│   the purpose / goals  │
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Taming the dark side of digital and technology:
Of course, no boon is without bane. With immensely rapid developmental strides in the digital realm, there are also the ever increasing threats of:
- Cyber Crimes
- Privacy concerns and issues (especially with the recent NSA surveillance programs)
- Nanorobotics and drones that have done both, reduced costs while safeguarding human lives with massive reduction of manned military vehicles and at the same time, causing grave concerns of such threats coming from anywhere across the globe at any point of time due to its comparative "identity security issues" and lower costs
- Quantum cryptography issues
- Identity thefts, both in genetics and on a daily basis across social profiles, passwords being misused to misrepresent with intent to fraud etc.
- Excessive organizational control over its employees using digital tools & restricting what they share and say online (Fear of using social media while at work)

The idea is to make use of the digital revolution while at the same time making sure the

users are genuinely well educated about the impacts of misuse and on 'how to safeguard oneself' on a daily basis.

A company "must never be allowed to consider its relationship to the individual member as an indissoluble union; it must treat it as existing only for a specific purpose and therefore revocable." ~ Peter Drucker

Today while discussing the freedom of an employee in an organization, there are so many restrictions and legal agreements the said individual is made to sign that restricts his / her right to express or even at times use "social networking" sites and applications while at work which is in today's scenario is for most part of the week. The fear of the organizations being, he or she might indulge in what might result to be a catastrophic impact on the corporate communication front. Instead of restricting access to "social sites", it would be of a much larger value if the company educates them on the How and Why of using social networking sites while at work. Organizations need to give them the freedom to enjoy the right to express, responsibly and I am very positive that this would in fact result in a much larger branding and marketing initiative for the company than any other form of paid advertisement or marketing activity.

At the same time, while discussing about "digital threats" efforts have to be clear with intent to 'confirm' that such education reaches users appropriately. Due to the seriousness and the pace of such crimes, we need to give uncompromising thoughts to introduce "digital safety" as a course curriculum across every board right from school levels and make it a mandatory course & not an elective.

When you're at work, it's crucial to always be aware of the terrain you're on—or even your strengths may become counterproductive ~ Drucker

The above quote applies very well even in the day to day activities of life. Educate the masses.

Why introducing "digital threats" as a subject across every board and field of study should be mandatory?

We all know driving without seat-belts, helmets, without a valid license, driving while being intoxicated with alcohol or drugs is the cause to millions of deaths globally in a year, but still the numbers keep piling on. Though, by putting down laws and making it a punishable offence has for sure helped curb the rates to a great extent. Similarly, making study of "digital threats" at every stage and level in any field of study as a compulsory curriculum would to a great extent ensure the reduction of such threats too.

Let's face it, its not just about someone stealing your identity on a social networking site to defame you, but rather towards a larger and more grave concerns of such individuals imposing as friends and family to commit crimes like kidnapping, burglaries and even murders.

So the first step is to understand the gravity of the situation and take well planned steps to ensure their safety.

Every problem has a solution and every solution creates a new opportunity for growth:

I see myself by using digital and technology tools, generating meaningful relationships between brands and their users and at the same time, empowering users with a power packed knowledge resource that are both affordable and easy to learn and implement into their daily lives. It has its own limitations and problems for eg. "Why would or How do we make users actually use them?" In the field of social media and digital, we have seen that by adding instant gratification as an incentive, users tend to make use of the said tools, process and systems more consistently as they see the larger picture here, which is the "hope of getting something better and more". (We have even added this as part of the five-step process. Refer Img1.)

Imagine, being able to implement this process and style of working across any field for every user, especially on a day to day basis across their lives too. We all would end up first seeing the positive of things rather than the problems that it could pose.

Let me illustrate this with an eg. E-skin or bionic skin is a marvellous technological breakthrough but the challenges of applying it directly to the human body would require them to provide more sensitive and lifelike prosthetics that will ensure it to also be flexible and adaptable to body movements, which is a massive challenge.

I am not comparing the technological breakthrough of bionic skin to using different forms of digital tools for users, but the bottom-line being, every breakthrough and success is built on the road filled with obstacles that make things seem impossible. But if there is anything that history has taught us, it's that, it is only impossible till someone makes it happen.

Such and similar ideas and styles can also be expanded to provide support to teenagers and many individuals with even suicidal tendencies etc wherein they can be trained to see the positive of things as they learn to "find solutions" rather than looking at circumstances as merely final results. Digital can actually pave way for such quick & free self-help tools.

The reach and possibilities are limitless.

Few weeks ago, I attended a conference by "India Social Good" in Mumbai, wherein key speakers were from Gates Foundation, UN, Mashable etc.

There were some remarkable creative innovations which I discovered were being implemented by upcoming entrepreneurs with a simple dream of creating a better world using technology. Someone from India had designed an ATM which provided clean drinking water to some of the most rural areas of India.

All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them ~ Walt Disney

As we struggle today to keep together the umpteen questions posed by the great minds and thinkers of today's generation about the future we are about to leave for the next generation, I am reminded of this quote from Peter Drucker, "There's a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstance permit. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results."

I strongly believe that if you exist as a brand, there is already someone talking about you somewhere online, so make sure to be a part of the conversation prism. Now as an organization, it's not easy to implement every aspect of digital and technology into the company or organization's systems. This brings us to another powerful concept from

Drucker – 'Decentralization and simplification' wherein Drucker discounted the command and control model and asserted that companies work best when they are decentralized. According to Drucker, corporations tend to produce too many products, hire employees they don't need (when a better solution would be outsourcing), and expand into economic sectors that they should avoid.

These things become very simplified with implementing digital and technology tools into the daily activities of an organization. It helps them to reduce the costs for the company by outsourcing it to those who are already specialized in the respective fields thereby also creating another growing business opportunity for other organizations.

"No one should abandon duties because he sees defects in them. Every action, every activity, is surrounded by defects as a fire is surrounded by smoke"
~ Bhagavad Gita

The threats from digital also have the power to enrich our lives, professionally and socially. The idea is to learn and harness this power with a controlled and more disciplined daily life. Stay connected and stay online.