Handbook

Strengthening Business Digitization and Production Promotion among MSMEs for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sri Lanka
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1. Evolution of Digital Marketing and eCommerce

1.1. Introduction

By 2040, the majority of all purchases are expected to be made through eCommerce merchants, making it crucial for every eCommerce business owner to be well-versed in digital marketing. In a world where over 4 billion people regularly use social media, understanding the fundamental principles of digital marketing is imperative. Over the years, digital marketing has undergone significant transformation since the early days of the internet. Marketing strategies have evolved dramatically to align with the contemporary shape and requirements of eCommerce stores, transitioning from production-centric promotions to specialized services. These strategies, born from marketing's evolution, have given rise to newer trends and concepts, including business development. This handbook delves into the progression of digital marketing and its now indispensable role within the realm of eCommerce businesses.

1.2. Fall of traditional marketing practices

Decades ago, traditional marketing reigned supreme, targeting consumers through limited mass media channels such as television, magazines, and newspapers. While these traditional methods were highly effective, their prohibitive cost made them inaccessible for many brands. However, with the rapid advancement of media technology and the increasing tech-savviness of consumers, a paradigm shift occurred. This shift heralded the rise of digital marketing in the eCommerce sphere, marking a significant evolution in how brands connect with their audiences.

1.3. Digital marketing eCommerce evolution and history

The history of digital marketing in eCommerce traces back to the 1990s when brand promotion entered the digital realm. This shift was primarily instigated by the emergence of the internet and the development of the web 1.0 platform. Initially, this web version offered users access to information but lacked the functionalities for sharing ads and other promotional content online.

During this nascent phase, marketers harbored doubts about the online platform's potential success, given the limited internet adoption by users at
the time. Predicting the extent of digital marketing's evolution was a challenging task as the technology and its potential impact were still in their early stages.

The birth of search engines and their impact on website traffic can be traced back to 1993 when the first clickable banner made its debut. HotWired, recognizing the potential of banner ads, incorporated them into their digital marketing strategies. This marked a pivotal moment in the shift towards digitalization, setting the stage for the emergence of new technologies and marketing techniques.

**EVOLUTION OF DIGITAL MARKETING**

In the same year, Yahoo came into existence and quickly garnered nearly one million visits within its inaugural year. This milestone catalyzed a wave of transformation in the realm of digital marketing, prompting companies to reevaluate and revamp their websites to attract higher volumes of traffic.

The year 1996 witnessed the introduction of several new search engines, including Alexa, LookSmart, and HotBot, further reshaping the digital marketing landscape.
1.4. **Emergence of top web search**

On September 15, 1997, Larry Page and Serge Brin, the founders of Google, swiftly trademarked the name and registered the domain google.com. Just under a year later, on September 4, 1998, they formally incorporated the company and officially launched the Google search engine.

Interestingly, in its early stages in 1996, the founders had originally named their search engine "BackRub." Fortunately, this name didn't stick, and "Google" emerged as the final choice. It's safe to say that "Google" has a far more appealing and less dubious ring to it compared to "BackRub." Imagine trying to explain to a board meeting that you were "BackRubbing" information for the Chief Revenue Officer.

Around the same time, Microsoft introduced the MSN search engine, and Yahoo was at the forefront, pioneering the Yahoo Web Search.

![Web Search Engines](Source: The Digital Biography)

1.5. **The tech bubble burst in the digital marketing evolution**

A few years later, the internet bubble burst, and during this tumultuous period, Google stood out by consistently optimizing its search algorithms. In contrast, smaller search engines struggled to survive as they failed to attract substantial traffic. The resulting shutdowns created an opportunity for major players to enter the market and claim a significant share.

It took nearly a decade for the digital marketing landscape to mature. In 2006, a pivotal turning point occurred when traffic from search engines reached a staggering 6.4 billion users within a single month, marking the first substantial growth in the field.
In a bid to stay competitive, Microsoft revamped its MSN algorithm and introduced Live Search to rival the offerings of Yahoo and Google, underscoring the fierce competition within the search engine industry.

## 1.6. Web 2.0 introduced to the public

In January 1999, Web 2.0, the web we know today, was launched. It allowed users to load information into the browser window. People were no longer passive users and could interact with each other.

Businesses felt the change in digital marketing evolution, too. They became more independent and had the freedom to interact with their audience directly. The internet became an information superhighway, creating channels for digital marketers to leverage, and emphasized the importance of brand building.

By 2004, digital marketers and the advertising industry in the US alone had recorded $2.9 billion, along with the first-ever steep surge that came in when Google’s traffic grew by about 6.4 billion.
2. Advent of social networks

As the internet became an unquestionable presence in people's lives, the rise of social networks became inevitable. The inaugural social media platform, MySpace, made its debut in 2003, followed by Orkut and Facebook in quick succession.

The significance of these platforms wasn't lost on businesses, leading to the emergence and evolution of new avenues. With these platforms, businesses found fresh opportunities for growth, while digital marketing and eCommerce continued to expand and evolve.

Naturally, as new technologies emerged, businesses had to adapt their strategies to leverage the power of social media platforms, marking another pivotal chapter in the ongoing evolution of online marketing.

Advertisers began searching for innovative methods to make the most of the technology, and one of the methods involved analyzing the typical web
browsing habits, frequency, and patterns of users. Hence, cookies found their way into digital marketing and helped marketers with tracking user habits.

Although the purpose of cookies has evolved over time, nowadays, they’re programmed to gather in-depth customer data.

2.1. Progression of digital advertisement

Digital advertising has come a long way since its inception in the early 2000s. By 2004, the industry had already generated nearly $3 billion in advertising revenue in the United States. YouTube's launch in 2005 opened new possibilities for video marketing, and social media platforms like Google+ and Google Panda began to shape the landscape.

The shift from traditional media to digital became apparent in 2011 when internet usage overtook television viewership. Social media advertising budgets also saw a significant 64 percent increase. The rise of personalized advertising on platforms like LinkedIn and the introduction of wearable and predictive technologies in 2015 marked further milestones.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on digital advertising, resulting in a significant surge in eCommerce. This highlighted the importance of businesses continuously adapting to meet changing customer needs.

In summary, the digital advertising industry has evolved significantly, with key developments including the rise of YouTube, the dominance of social media marketing, the growth of personalized advertising, and the transformative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on eCommerce.

2.2. Enhancing artificial intelligence

Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital marketing has transformed eCommerce. It offers tons of benefits and securely lets business owners scale their online stores.

Besides this, it helps predict and study customer purchasing habits, optimize inventory, capitalize on chatbots for better customer support, utilizes voice shopping, and optimize social media campaigns. Businesses can automate tedious and routine tasks with AI to reduce workforce needs.
2.3. **New shopping experiences**

Augmented reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) have more practical applications than just super fun filters used on Snapchat. AR features appeal to younger generations and allow businesses to recreate in-store shopping experiences on smart devices. They are quite beneficial in creating interactive ads for better engagement, allowing customers to virtually try-ons before buying and judging product dimensions through 3D visualizations.

2.4. **The future of Digital Marketing eCommerce evolution**

The future of digital marketing and eCommerce is dynamic and transformative. Digital marketing, encompassing strategies from social media to search engine optimization, plays a pivotal role in our daily lives.

This realm of marketing provides a level playing field for small businesses and entrepreneurs, allowing them to compete effectively in the online landscape. To stay ahead, companies need to employ integrated techniques, adapt to evolving SEO practices, and embrace smart digital technologies.

The evolution of digital marketing and eCommerce has revolutionized traditional approaches. It has driven businesses to create personalized content, stay up to date with SEO rules, and embrace advanced digital tools. Even well-established marketing practices have quickly become outdated.

In this ever-changing landscape, adapting to the digital marketing eCommerce evolution is essential. Businesses that have done so are witnessing increased returns on investment. If you haven't kept pace with these changes, now is the time to reassert your brand's presence, digitize your marketing efforts, and experience the growth and success that this evolving digital era offers.

2.5. **Amazon and other early e-commerce giants**

Amazon was founded in 1994 and quickly became one of the leading e-commerce companies. Other early e-commerce giants include eBay and Alibaba.
Amazing journey of Amazon

Amazon, founded by Jeff Bezos in 1994, started as an online bookstore. It quickly expanded to become a leading online retailer, offering various products and services, including cloud computing and streaming video. Today, Amazon is a global giant known for its customer-centric approach, constant innovation, and extensive reach in over 200 countries. Its success stems from a focus on customer satisfaction, a culture of innovation, and a significant impact on the retail industry by pushing the boundaries of e-commerce and making online shopping more accessible.

Journey of Alibaba

Alibaba.com, founded in 1999 by Jack Ma and a group of friends and students, began as a B2B marketplace connecting Chinese businesses with global buyers. It swiftly rose to become China's leading B2B marketplace and expanded its global presence. Today, it stands as the world's largest online B2B marketplace, with over 200 million registered members across 200 countries, offering a wide array of products and services.

Alibaba.com has played a pivotal role in facilitating international trade for Chinese businesses and foreign buyers. Its success can be attributed to being an early entrant in the market, a dedicated focus on assisting small businesses, and its extensive global reach.
This platform has transformed global trade, making it more accessible and efficient for businesses of all sizes. Examples of its impact include Chinese businesses expanding their customer base worldwide, foreign buyers sourcing quality products from China, and U.S. small businesses reaching Chinese buyers without the need for physical stores.

In summary, Alibaba.com's journey has revolutionized international trade by empowering businesses to succeed on a global scale, exemplifying the power of online B2B marketplaces.

**Story of eBay**

eBay, established in 1995 by Pierre Omidyar, quickly transitioned from a personal project to a thriving online marketplace. Its remarkable success can be attributed to its focus on convenience, affordability, and a diverse range of available products.

The platform's convenience was a primary driver of its popularity. eBay simplified online buying and selling, allowing sellers to list their items for free and giving buyers the ability to browse and bid on listings from across the globe.

Affordability was another hallmark of eBay. Buyers could hunt for bargains as sellers set their prices and engaged in competitive bidding, ultimately resulting in mutually agreeable prices.
eBay also stood out for its extensive selection of items, offering everything from antiques to electronics, catering to a broad spectrum of shopping needs.

2.6. E-commerce today

E-marketing, the use of digital technologies to promote products or services, has undergone a remarkable evolution since the early days of the internet. Initially, e-marketing relied on email marketing and search engine optimization (SEO). Email marketing involved sending promotional emails to subscribers, while SEO aimed to enhance website visibility in search engine results.

The early 2000s saw the advent of social media platforms, ushering in the era of social media marketing. This approach revolves around using these platforms to engage potential customers and promote products or services. Social media marketing became a powerful tool for businesses to connect and interact with their audiences.

Content marketing emerged as a key e-marketing strategy in recent years. It entails creating and disseminating valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and engage a defined audience and drive profitable actions. Content marketing's effectiveness lies in providing information that resonates with consumers.

Presently, e-marketing is a multifaceted and ever-evolving field. Businesses employ diverse strategies to reach their target audiences effectively. These strategies encompass email marketing, SEO, social media marketing, content marketing, and pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. E-marketing has become an essential component of a comprehensive marketing strategy, adapting to the dynamic digital landscape to engage customers and drive business growth.
2.7. The future of e-commerce and e-marketing

The future of e-commerce and e-marketing looks promising with expectations of continued rapid growth. New technologies will continue to emerge, transforming how businesses reach and engage their target audiences. Some key trends expected to shape this future include the ongoing growth of mobile commerce, the rise of innovative payment methods like digital wallets and cryptocurrencies, the increased use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to personalize the shopping experience, and the emergence of new e-commerce platforms within the metaverse.

E-commerce and e-marketing are essential for businesses of all sizes. Understanding the evolution of these fields and staying updated with the latest trends will be crucial for businesses to maintain their competitive edge and reach a wider customer base.

In the realm of e-commerce marketplaces, some significant statistics underscore their importance. Global e-commerce marketplace sales are projected to reach $6.3 trillion in 2023, marking substantial growth from 2022. Amazon is the largest player in this space, commanding over 37% of the market share, with other notable platforms like Alibaba, eBay, and Walmart. E-commerce marketplaces are outpacing traditional retail, with robust growth in 2022 compared to the more modest growth in traditional retail.

Figure: Global eCommerce Sales 2023 - 2027 (Source: eMarketer)
E-commerce marketplaces offer numerous advantages for consumers and businesses alike. Consumers benefit from a wider product selection, competitive pricing, and convenient delivery options. Businesses, in turn, gain access to a global customer base and the opportunity to sell products online without the need for substantial infrastructure investment.

Additional insights into the e-commerce marketplace reveal that popular categories include electronics, apparel, and home goods. Mobile devices are the preferred means for making e-commerce purchases. Free shipping significantly influences consumer purchasing decisions, and product reviews remain a critical factor in their online buying choices.

2.8. Sri Lanka – e-Commerce

E-commerce in Sri Lanka has witnessed rapid growth in recent years, attributed to various factors. The increasing penetration of the internet and smartphones, with over 50% of the population having internet access and more than 70% owning smartphones, has made online shopping more accessible. Additionally, the prevalence of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram has enabled businesses to effectively promote their products and engage with potential customers. The availability of online payment options, including credit cards, debit cards, and mobile wallets, has further facilitated the e-commerce surge.

The COVID-19 pandemic also played a pivotal role in boosting e-commerce in Sri Lanka. Lockdowns and restrictions confined people to their homes, resulting in a significant uptick in online shopping activities.

Leading e-commerce marketplaces in Sri Lanka, such as Daraz, Kapruka, Ikman, Kaymu, and MyDeal, offer a diverse array of products, spanning electronics, apparel, home goods, and groceries. While e-commerce is still in its early stages of development in Sri Lanka, it is rapidly expanding and is expected to assume an increasingly crucial role in the country's economy in the years ahead.
E-commerce presents a host of advantages for both consumers and businesses in Sri Lanka. Consumers benefit from the convenience of shopping from anywhere at any time, competitive pricing, and an extensive product selection, including items not readily available in physical stores. Businesses,

3. Web Presence of a Business

3.1. Web Hosting Services

Establishing a robust web presence is crucial for businesses, and web hosting plays a pivotal role in ensuring a professional and dependable online presence. A well-hosted website is synonymous with speed, security, and global accessibility, offering a wealth of advantages for both businesses and their clientele.

Web hosting providers are equipped with the infrastructure and expertise to maintain websites, ensuring optimal performance. This swiftness and reliability are instrumental in delivering a positive user experience and attracting new customers. Moreover, these providers offer enhanced security measures, including firewalls, malware scanning, and intrusion detection systems, safeguarding websites against cyber threats.

High uptime is a hallmark of reputable web hosting providers, as they strive to keep servers operational 24/7, ensuring constant accessibility for website visitors. Technical support is readily available from these providers, helping businesses, particularly those without dedicated IT staff, in addressing any website-related issues.

Web hosting also extends to providing businesses with professional email addresses that align with their domain names, enhancing their credibility and image. Beyond these benefits, web hosting enables businesses to expand their reach, connect with a global audience, and enhance brand awareness. Websites can serve as powerful tools for generating leads and sales through various channels like contact forms, e-commerce platforms, and online advertising.

In essence, web hosting is an indispensable investment for businesses striving to thrive in the digital realm. It empowers businesses to create custom websites that reflect their brand identity, allowing them to maintain control over their online presence and effortlessly update website content.
Furthermore, it provides a platform for online sales, enabling businesses to tap into new customer bases and stimulate growth.

If you're a business owner, it is strongly recommended to invest in a professional web hosting service. It stands as one of the most beneficial steps you can take to bolster your online business endeavors.

Example for Web hosting services.
   a) HostGator
   b) BlueHost
   c) Hostinger
   d) GoDaddy
   e) Web.com
   f) DreamHost
   g) A2 Hosting
   h) Inmotion Hosting

For businesses looking to establish their online presence, the process involves a few fundamental steps. First, selecting a web hosting provider is paramount. Comparing various providers based on factors such as pricing, storage capacity, bandwidth, customer support, and uptime guarantees is crucial to determine the most suitable choice.

Subsequently, the selection of an appropriate web hosting plan is essential, one that aligns with both your needs and budget. Following this, registering a relevant and memorable domain name through a domain registrar like GoDaddy or Namecheap is crucial.
The next step involves pointing your domain name to your chosen web hosting provider, known as DNS propagation, a process that may take up to 48 hours to complete. Once your domain is connected to your hosting provider, the final step is to either create a new website using a web builder or upload existing website files to the provider's servers.

Completing these steps ensures your website is live and accessible to a global audience. Additional tips for a seamless web hosting experience include choosing providers offering money-back guarantees, ensuring 24/7 customer support availability, regularly backing up website files for security, and keeping website software up to date to mitigate vulnerabilities.

### 3.2. Publish the Website with WordPress

WordPress is an open-source content management system that empowers users to create and manage a variety of websites and blogs. It is well-regarded for its user-friendly interface and extensive customization capabilities, making it a widely embraced platform for website development. With an open-source nature, WordPress is freely available and its source code open for modification, catering to a broad user base. It's designed to be user-friendly, making it accessible even to individuals with limited coding or web development experience.

*Figure: Most Popular Hosting Services (Source: Finances Online)*
One of its defining features is its flexibility through themes and plugins. Themes dictate the website's design and layout, while plugins offer additional functionality, including e-commerce tools, search engine optimization (SEO) aids, and more. WordPress originated as a blogging platform and remains a top choice for bloggers, offering intuitive tools for publishing and managing blog posts.

What sets WordPress apart is its scalability, adapting to different website needs, from personal blogs to substantial e-commerce platforms. Additionally, it boasts a robust community, with developers, designers, and users actively contributing to its development and offering support through various resources, such as forums and tutorials. WordPress includes SEO-friendly features and plugins, simplifying the task of enhancing a website's search engine visibility. Regular updates are released to enhance security, functionality, and overall performance. In essence, WordPress is a versatile and approachable platform for website and blog creation, serving the needs of individuals, small businesses, and large enterprises. Its comprehensive customization options, strong community support, and diverse set of features make it a compelling choice for web development.
Unlocking the Potential of WordPress

WordPress provides an accessible platform for users with varying technical backgrounds. You don't need advanced programming skills to start building your website. Whether you're a beginner or an experienced developer, WordPress allows for gradual expansion with additional features and designs while maintaining the core site's stability.

The user-friendly interface of the WordPress Dashboard and Editor simplifies content creation and management. This accessibility attracts a broad user base, offering ease of use to non-technical users. The WordPress Admin Dashboard empowers you to oversee all aspects of your site, from creating posts and customizing menus to managing users and extending functionality. The Gutenberg editor, built on the React JavaScript library, ensures a modern, mobile-friendly, and responsive design, benefiting both website owners and developers.

One of WordPress's standout features is its vast library of themes, allowing you to create a professional and user-friendly site without the need for coding.
skills. These themes facilitate customization, enabling changes in colors, logos, backgrounds, sliders, and more. Whether you run a business or are involved in creative arts, you'll find a theme to suit your needs. WordPress.org offers thousands of free themes, with countless others accessible through third-party marketplaces and developers. Changing your theme is hassle-free, offering a fresh look with a few clicks, all without coding expertise.

WordPress's origins as a blogging tool remain evident, making it simple to add new content. However, it's important to note that WordPress is not limited to blogging. Adding new pages and connecting them via the built-in menu system is a straightforward process. You can easily manage content, much like drafting a document in a word processor.

The realm of customization in WordPress is boundless thanks to a wide array of plugins, many of which are free. Think of these plugins as site apps, allowing you to enhance both design and functionality. Various plugins cater to specific tasks like backups or customer forms. The options range from those developed by the official WordPress team to businesses and even individual users. Exploring the WordPress Plugin Directory reveals extensive possibilities.

3.4. **How to Install WordPress**

Installing WordPress involves two important actions. You must first create a MySQL database and database user. WordPress will use this database to store the content of your site. The second movement consists of downloading the WordPress core files and running through a brief installer program. These actions are covered in more detail below.
Creating the Database and User

Log into cPanel

Under Databases choose MySQL Database Wizard.

Fill in the name of your database and click Next Step.

Fill in a database username and secure password, then click Create User.
Step 1: Create A Database

New Database:
example_ wordpress

Note: 56 characters max.

Next Step

Step 2: Create Database Users:

Username: example_ dbuser

Note: 8 characters max.

Password:

Password (Again):

Strength

Create User

Place a check for All Privileges then click Next Step.

Step 3: Add user to the database.

User: example_dbuser
Database: example_wordpress

ALL PRIVILEGES

Next Step
Click **Return Home** to exit the Database Wizard.

You have successfully created a database and database user. Take note of the database name, database username, and password. During the WordPress installation, you will be asked to provide this information. You are now ready to download the WordPress core files and complete the installation.

**Downloading the WordPress Core Files and Linking to Database**

Go to [https://wordpress.org/download/](https://wordpress.org/download/) to grab the current version of WordPress.
Click the **download** link.

Log into cPanel.

Under *Files* choose **File Manager**.

Go to your public_html directory.
(Optional) If you want WordPress in a subdirectory (e.g. https://example.com/blog/) you can create this directory now by clicking + Folder.

Click **Upload**.

Upload the WordPress file from your local computer.

Click the **Go Back** link to go back to the File Manager.
Uncompress the file by highlighting it and clicking **Extract**.

Select **Extract File(s)** at the dialog box.
Move all critical files from the WordPress folder to your desired location by opening the folder, selecting all files and choosing **Move**; **public_html** is the ideal move location if you are using the primary domain as opposed to a subdirectory.

Visit your domain in any web browser.

Begin the WordPress installation walkthrough by choosing your language and clicking **Continue**.
At the next screen, click **Let’s Go**.

Fill in the requested information about your **database name, user, and password**; you can leave Database Host and Table Prefix as they are; then click **Submit**.

If WordPress was able to communicate with your database, then all is well and you may click **Run the install**.
Fill in the fields with the requested information; make sure to remember your **Username** and **Password**; the email address you submit will be used for important notifications and password reset (should you ever require it); then you may choose **Install WordPress**.
Allow a few minutes for the installer to run. After the installer runs, click **Log In** to log into WordPress for the first time.

Now you will have a working WordPress installation.

### 3.5. Install a Theme

Once you have familiarized yourself with the various WordPress operations such as posting and writing pages, you can start customizing the look and feel of your installation. Adapting WordPress to your preferred style does not require a vast knowledge of coding; rather, you can use pre-built themes to completely change the look of your site.

WordPress arrives with a default theme already installed, but you can search a wide database of other themes right from within your WordPress Dashboard.

Log into WordPress Dashboard.

Click **Appearance** from the left panel.
Within the *Themes* section, select **Add New**.

Search through the available themes.

When you see a theme you like, hover over the image and choose **Install**. Once installed, you can **Preview**, **Activate**, or **Return to Theme Installer**.
3.6. **Moving Forward with WordPress**

To enhance your WordPress website, it's essential to understand the key elements of content creation: Posts and Pages. These are the primary content forms within WordPress.

As you progress in your WordPress journey, it's beneficial to familiarize yourself with common troubleshooting techniques. These not only aid in resolving potential issues down the road but also deepen your comprehension of WordPress functionality.
Additionally, gaining proficiency in installing WordPress plugins is highly recommended. Plugins extend your site's capabilities beyond the default features of WordPress. The extensive library of free plugins covers a wide range of functionalities, allowing you to tailor your website to your specific needs as you become more experienced with WordPress.
4. Email Marketing Tools

4.1. Choosing the Right Email Marketing Tool

Numerous email marketing tools are available, each offering unique features and benefits. Some of the popular choices include:

- Mailchimp, known for its user-friendly interface and free access.
- Constant Contact, valued for its reliability.
- Convert Kit, favored by bloggers and creators.
- Active Campaign, a versatile option for businesses of all sizes.
- Get Response, offer a comprehensive suite of features.

When choosing an email marketing tool, it's essential to consider your specific requirements. Factors like pricing, the range of features, ease of use, and customer support should be considered. Exploring different tools before making a final choice can help you find the one that best aligns with your needs.

Additional tips for selecting the right email marketing tool include evaluating the size of your email list, seeking automation capabilities to save time and improve campaign effectiveness, considering essential features such as email landing pages, segmentation, and analytics, and reading reviews to gain insights into each tool's strengths and weaknesses.

Once you've made your selection, you can begin creating and sending email campaigns, harnessing the power of email marketing to grow your business and connect with your customers.

4.2. Spam Filters of e-mails

Spam filters employ several techniques to identify and block spam emails, including content filtering, which scans for common spam-related keywords. Header filtering detects suspicious activities, while Bayesian filtering uses machine learning for accuracy.

These filters can be adjusted for aggressiveness and rely on user feedback to improve accuracy. They are regularly updated to counter evolving spam tactics.
4.3. Avoiding Spam Filters in Email Marketing

To ensure your marketing emails bypass spam filters, consider these best practices:

a) Obtain Permission: Always get consent from subscribers before sending emails. Collect email addresses through various channels, like your website, social media, or in-person interactions.

b) Use Reputable Providers: Choose a trusted email marketing service provider with experience in dealing with spam filters.

c) Email Authentication: Add a digital signature to prove your emails' authenticity and reduce the chance of being marked as spam.

d) Watch Your Language: Avoid using common spam trigger words in your email subject lines and body copy.

e) Clarity in Subject Lines: Craft clear and concise subject lines that accurately represent your email's content.

f) Personalization: Personalized emails are less likely to be marked as spam, so use subscribers' names or relevant information.

g) Segment Your List: Segmenting your email list allows you to send targeted emails to specific groups of subscribers.

h) Testing: Test your emails before sending them to identify and fix issues that may trigger spam filters.
4.4.  e-Mail Marketing Tutorial - Mailchimp

a)  Learn how to use the different sections of Mailchimp.

Once you've set up your account and logged in, you'll find yourself on the dashboard. The dashboard is divided into five distinct tabs located at the top left of the screen, each serving a specific purpose.

- The "Campaigns" tab is where you create and manage your emails, landing pages, and other elements of your email marketing efforts.
- "Templates" is the section designed for crafting the design and content of your campaigns, a topic we'll explore further in step three.
- The "Audience" section, formerly known as Lists, is dedicated to managing your mailing audiences.
- In "Reports," you can assess the performance of your campaigns, allowing you to track engagement and optimize your strategies.
- The "Content Studio" is a relatively recent addition since the start of 2019. This section offers a comprehensive view of your creative assets, such as uploaded images, gifs, logos, and more, making it easier to manage your resources.

b)  Build your lists and set up your signup form.

Once you've completed the initial setup, including tasks like connecting your website and social media accounts, you're ready to dive into the heart of Mailchimp. One of the primary tasks is to build and organize your mailing
lists, which consist of your valued customers, leads, and business contacts with whom you wish to engage.

Creating and maintaining these lists is crucial, as the very purpose of using Mailchimp is to effectively communicate with your customers and potential clients. You can begin with a single list, but feel free to create multiple lists according to your needs. However, it's important to note that if the same contact appears across several lists, each occurrence will count individually towards your subscriber limit, as the lists are not interconnected. It's possible to further organize your lists by using segmentation and tags.

Mailchimp's pricing structure is based on the number of contacts you have, so adding the same contact to multiple lists can quickly become complex. If you don't have any contacts yet, don't worry – Mailchimp has you covered. It automatically generates a signup form for each list you create which you can use to gather more subscribers. These forms can be shared on your website and social media channels, or anywhere else you see fit. You even have the option to customize these forms using the Form Builder.

Here's a step-by-step guide on accessing the signup forms:

Navigate to the Audience page.

Select the appropriate Audience from the top left corner, then click "Manage Audience" in the top right and choose "Signup forms."

- Select "Form builder."

Click the "Forms and response emails" drop-down menu and choose the form you want to edit.

Click the "Design it" tab.
Navigate through the "Page," "Body," "Forms," or "Monkey Rewards" tabs to review the customization options. Use the fields and drop-down menus to make any desired changes to styles, colors, and fields. Mailchimp will automatically save your changes.

Once you're satisfied with the design, click "Save & Close." You're all set! Copy the code for your form and share it across your various online channels.

c) **Create your first email template.**

When it comes to email marketing, it's essential to understand the difference between templates and campaigns.

Mailchimp's templates feature is primarily used for designing reusable layouts for your email content, while campaigns are the actual messages you send out to your audience. While Mailchimp allows you to reuse campaign designs or replicate existing campaigns, it's generally the best practice to store reusable content in templates and message-specific content in campaigns.

Now, let's dive into how to use Mailchimp's templates. You'll find a variety of preset template options provided by Mailchimp, which you can use while learning how to create well-designed templates. Alternatively, you have the option to start from scratch, allowing you to build templates that align with
your brand and style. Furthermore, Mailchimp conveniently stores uploaded images in your account, making it easy to reuse them in future templates.

Creating a beautiful email template is a straightforward process with Mailchimp. The platform offers a drag-and-drop feature, allowing you to add content blocks to your newsletter. This gives you an array of options, from explainer videos to images to call-to-action buttons, enabling you to create dynamic and engaging email content. Mailchimp automatically saves your work as you progress, and once your template is complete, you can save it and exit the editor.

A helpful tip to remember is to incorporate merge tags. These are data points you've added to Mailchimp, such as logos and your business address, saved under merge tags. They facilitate the process of branding your emails without the need to re-enter information each time. Mailchimp provides a handy merge tags cheat sheet to assist you.

Once you've designed the perfect email or landing page, the next step is to send it out to your audience!

**d) Create your first campaign in Mailchimp.**

Creating your first campaign in Mailchimp is a crucial step in sending out your message to your audience, whether it's an advertisement, landing page, or an email newsletter. Here's how to create an email campaign:

- Navigate to the Campaigns tab and click on "Create Campaign."
- Choose "Email," provide a campaign name, and click "Begin."
- In the "To" section, click "Add Recipients" and select the list you want to send the email to. You can also pick specific segments or tags within the list if you've organized your audience in that manner. Click "Save" and proceed.
- Move to the "From" section. Enter the name and email address from which you want the message to be sent and click "Save."
- In the "Subject" section, click "Add Subject" and enter your subject and preview text for the email. Craft something that will make your email stand out. Click "Save" and move on.
- In the "Content" section, click "Design Email" and choose the template you want for your email. Mailchimp will display the editor page, allowing you to review the content and make any last-minute
design changes. Alternatively, you can use this step to add content and design your email from scratch if you didn't use a template earlier. It's a matter of personal preference.

- Once you're satisfied with your content, you have the option to connect your Facebook and Twitter accounts to the message. This enables Mailchimp to automatically share your campaign with your social media followers, but this step is optional.
- At the bottom of the page, you'll see a bulleted list summarizing the elements included in your email. Review this list to ensure you're tracking everything you want in the email.

Click "Send" and confirm, or if you prefer to schedule the email for a later time, click "Schedule" and select the desired delivery time.

e) **Utilize automation, save more time.**

Mailchimp offers valuable email automation features that can help you save time and streamline your email communication. Here's how to access this feature, specifically for welcoming new subscribers:

- Navigate to the Campaigns tab.
- Create a new campaign and choose "Automated Email."
- You'll find a range of automated workflows to choose from. For welcoming new subscribers, select "Welcome new subscribers."
- Provide a name for the campaign and select the list you want to use for the automation.
- Design your email and adjust all the settings to match your preferences. You can also add additional emails to the workflow if, for example, you want to send onboarding emails. To access these settings, click "Use advanced settings" at the top left.
- Once everything is configured, click "Next" and review all the settings before clicking "Publish."

With this setup, you'll automatically send emails to new subscribers without manual intervention, making your email marketing more efficient.
f) Experiment with A/B testing

Mailchimp provides a useful feature for conducting A/B testing in your email campaigns. This enables you to experiment with different subject lines, from names, content, and send times to determine what works best. Here's how to set up an A/B testing campaign:

- Begin by going to the Campaigns section in Mailchimp.
- Select "Email" just like you would for creating a regular email campaign.
- Opt for "A/B test" as your campaign type.
- Name your campaign and choose the list you want to send the email to.
- Click "Begin."
- Pick the list or segment you'd like to target.
- Now, you start selecting variables to test, such as the subject line, from name, content, and send time.
- Use the Plus or Minus icons to add or remove variations of the selected variable. You can test one variable with up to three variations.
- Each variation generates a campaign combination, as displayed in the Summary section. For example, testing three subject lines requires creating three campaign combinations.
• Under "How should we split your recipients?" adjust the slider to set the percentage of recipients receiving the test combinations. Review the recipient numbers for each combination in the Summary.
• Depending on your variable type, choose a winning criterion based on open rate, click rate, total revenue, or manual selection. Set the duration for the test.
• At the end of the test phase, Mailchimp will automatically send the winning combination to the remaining recipients.
• Provide variation content in the designated field and send time variations settings appear in this step.
• Select your preferred settings or tracking options, including Subject Line, From Name, or Send Time.

For testing Subject Line, From Name, or Send Time:
  a. Choose your layout using the Template step in the Content Builder.
  b. On the Design step in the Content Builder, design and test your campaign.
  c. When everything is satisfactory, click "Confirm" before sending.

For testing Content:
  a. Click "Add Content" for a variation of your campaign.
  b. Choose your layout on the Template step in the Content Builder.
  c. On the Design step in the Content Builder, design and test your campaign. Click "Next" when you're satisfied.
  d. On the Description step of the Content Builder, enter text to describe the content variation. Subscribers won't see this, but it helps you differentiate between variations.
  e. Click "Continue to content" to return to your content variations.
  f. Repeat steps 16a-16e for each content variation. On the Template step, use a different template or select a previous variation from the tab.
  g. Click "Next" when you're ready.
Review all campaign information and then schedule or send it.

Mailchimp users with a manager-level or higher access level will receive an email when a winner is automatically selected, or after four hours if a manual choice hasn't been made.

**g) Use MailChimp reports to learn more about your campaign performance.**

Mailchimp’s Reports feature lets you see how your audience is engaging with your content.

Simply go to Reports and select the campaign you’d like to see a report for. From there, you’ll be able to see everything in greater detail and get a better idea of how well a certain campaign performed.

There are quite a few metrics you can look at, so here’s a breakdown:

- Recipients: Number of subscribers the campaign was sent to
- Delivered: Date and time the campaign completed sending from Mailchimp servers
- Open rate: Percentage of successfully delivered campaigns that registered as an open
- Click rate: Percentage of successfully delivered campaigns that registered a click
- List average for opens and clicks: Average percentage of opens or clicks on previous campaigns sent to this list
• Industry average for opens and clicks: Average percentage of opens or clicks for campaigns in the selected industry set for your account
• Opened: Number of recipients that opened this campaign any number of times
• Clicked: Number of recipients that clicked any tracked link any number of times in this campaign
• Bounced: Number of recipients that registered as a hard or soft bounce
• Unsubscribed: Number of subscribers that opted out of your list using the unsubscribe link in this campaign
• Total opens: Total number of times the campaign was opened by recipients; this count includes multiple opens from individual recipients
• Successful deliveries: The number of recipients that didn’t hard or soft bounce on this campaign
• Clicks per unique opens: Percentage of recipients that registered as an open who also clicked a link in your campaign
• Total clicks: Total number of times tracked links were clicked by recipients; this count includes multiple clicks from individual recipients
• Forwarded: Number of times the campaign was forwarded using the Forward to a Friend form; this stat considers forwards only through the Forward to a Friend form and is not able to detect when a subscriber uses the forwarding function in their email program
• Forward opens: Number of times the campaign was opened by someone who was forwarded the campaign using a Forward to a Friend form
• Abuse reports: Number of recipients that reported your email as spam; subscribers that report a campaign as spam are automatically unsubscribed from your list
• Last opened: The most recent instance of a recipient opening the campaign
• Last clicked: The most recent instance of a recipient clicking a tracked link in the campaign
• 24-hour performance: A graph detailing subscriber activity (opens and clicks) for the first 24 hours after the campaign was sent
• Top links clicked: The URLs that were clicked the most in the campaign.
• Subscribers with most opens: Subscribers that opened the campaign the most times
• Social performance: Provides a bird’s eye view of how well your campaign is doing across different social media outlets
• Top locations: Displays where in the world your subscribers are opening your campaigns

There are a lot of metrics here, so just take some time to review all of them and get a better idea of which metrics you’d like to focus on improving over time.

A/B testing, as mentioned in step six, is perfect for testing different variables and determining the best formula for successful email campaigns – the stats for all A/B testing are also included in campaign reports.

4.5. Using PHPList as a e-mail Marketing Tool

a) How to install phpList

Step 1. Create your phpList email account

The first thing you’ll need to do is create an email account. This email account will be used to handle any bounce back messages. An email will bounce back if you have an invalid email address subscribed to one of your mailing lists. In our example, lets create a yourcompany@outlook.com

• Install and configure phpList

You have to have a Apache, MySQL and PHP enabled server to install PHPList application. This can be installed using WAMP server software given to you on windows machine or LAMP version of server enabled on web hosting server (such as Hostinger, GoDaddy etc.).

Step 2. Install phpList

After you have created an email account, you’ll need to do is install phplist. We’ll be installing phpList into a subdirectory call phplist, so it will be located at phplist.

www.your_website.com/phplist.
b) **Unzip phpList**

Once you have downloaded phpList to your computer, unpack it to a temporary folder. You can usually do this by right clicking and choosing **Extract Here** (Linux, as in screenshot), double clicking the folder (mac) or right click "extract all" (Windows).

c) **Upload to your server using FTP**

Start your favorite FTP program, in this case we are using FileZilla.

Browse through to your temporary folder in the FTP program, then open the public HTML folder to find the lists folder.

Upload this /**lists** folder into your public HTML file on your server. This folder may have lots of files in it already. In the image below you can...
see the public HTML folder on the server contains folders for a WordPress site.

This upload may take some time, you may even have to split it over a few partial uploads depending on your connection speed, time outs and upload limits.

d) Local Windows installation

If you do not own a server or want to develop locally, you can also install phpList on your Windows machine. First, you need to download the WAMP package and install it in your PC. After installing, copy the /lists folder as stated in the previous section and paste it in the htdocs folder of WAMP.

Next up, you must run the WAMP Control Panel and start the Apache and MySQL server. Now we are ready to create a database for phpList on which to save the data.

e) Create a database using your control panel.

Once you have uploaded the /lists directory, go to your hosting control panel or to the localhost from your browser and create a database. If you need help, your web hosting company can help you with this.

Whatever the process, you will always end up with three things:

- A database name, for example cl52-phplist
- A database username, for example phplist
- A password for your database, for example T!LcDaM/4
f) An example of creating a database

These screenshots provide an example. This may or may not be like the way you can create a new database on your server. That depends entirely on which software your hosting company uses.

First click MySQL Databases.

Then type in the new database name (we used the name phpList) and enter or generate a strong password. Make sure you keep a copy of these details!

This system creates a user automatically, where the username is the same as the database name (a common preference). In other software you may need to add a new user separately and you may also need to allocate this user to your database.
Your database is now ready. Copy down the details because you will need them in a moment.

**g) Edit the phpList config.php file**

Next, you need to put the details of your new database into your configuration file.

Browse your temp folder on your computer and go to lists > config > config.php. Load and edit this file in a text editor, such as Notepad (windows) TextEdit (mac) or Geany/Kate/Gedit/etc (Linux).

*Never* use a word processor program (like Microsoft Word), it will only generate formatting and disruption.

Your freshly downloaded config.php should look something like this:
h) Difference between config.php and config_extended.php

phpList only uses config.php so if you change any settings, please do so in this file. config_extended.php is there as that has pretty much every setting you can change stored within it.

If you wish to use the full configuration file you can rename config.php to config.old.php and then rename config_extended.php to config.php and use this file to make your changes.

To summarize, config.php is there as basically “a quick start” file, this contains the minimum settings you need to set phpList up and if a setting is not set, phpList uses a predefined value that “fits most”.

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If your setup needs more tweaking, or you have specialized needs, then either

- use the extended file, renaming as described above
- copy and paste the relevant settings into the smaller config.php file

There are four places where you need to replace the word in "quotes" at the end of a line of code with something specific to your server:

i) **What is your Mysql database server hostname**

```php
$database_host = "localhost";
```

If you do not know what to enter here, you will either need to use trial and error, or ask your hosting provider what to put here. *If you want to keep things simple, ask your hosting provider.*

**Trial and error:**

You may be lucky in that your server allows "localhost" for your $database_host entry, in which case you don't need to make a change (this was true in our example below). The second option to try is "127.0.0.1".

Replace the phplist with the password you created. The password in the example below is obscured.

```php
/*
 * what is your Mysql database server
 *
# what is your Mysql database server
$database_host = "localhost";

# what is the name of the database
# what is the name of the database
$database_name = "phplist";

# what user has access to this database
# what user has access to this database
$database_user = "phplist";

# and what is the password to login
# and what is the password to login
$database_password = "phplist";
*/
```

j) **Test mode in phpList: ("TEST",0)**

One other thing you will need to do, either now or at some point in the future, is to change the value of TEST in this file. Until you do this, your install is essentially in "sandbox" mode, and will not fully function.
By default, test is defined ("TEST",1). Change this to define ("TEST",0) to be able to send messages out.

This is done automatically in the auto installers.

Note that subscribers cannot confirm themselves while Test is enabled, as they will not receive confirmation emails, and therefore neither campaign.

**k) External SMTP servers**

Often you will want or need to use an external mail server for handling phpList email, instead of your local machine (by default phpList uses PHP's built-in `mail();` function).

To use an external SMTP server with standard STARTTLS settings, customise, then add these lines to your `config.php` file:

```php
define('PHPMAILERHOST', 'mail.server.hostname');
$phpmailer_smtpuser = 'user@login.com';
$phpmailer_smtppassword = 'user_password';
define("PHPMAILERPORT","587");
define("PHPMAILER_SECURE","tls");
```

You may need to add some extra lines to your `config.php`. These extra lines are ready made for you in `config_extended.php`, which is in the same directory as `config.php`. Simply copy the lines you need and paste them below the others in `config.php`.

**l) Save and upload**

Once you have edited the `config.php` file you need to save it and upload this new version to your server. This can be done in the same way as your initial
upload: open your ftp client, find the **lists/config/config.php** file on your pc and then upload it to **lists/config/config.php** on your server.

m) **Go to your installation.**

Open your web browser and go to your installation. This is located at http://mywebsite.co.uk/lists/admin.

If you get an error saying that the database has not connected, then check your config.php file again: a tiny error such as a space before/after your database name/password will stop this from working.

When you see the grey and black interface with the phpList logo at the top, you are in the right place.

![phpList interface](image)

Or on your right, choose **Initialize database** under the Config option.

After version 3.6.6, as an administrator you are also able to initialize your database from the command line.

The final steps

Click **Initialize Database** and fill out the form.
Click **Continue**

Finally click to continue with **phpList setup**.

You have now finished installation, and the next step is configuration.
5. Social Media Marketing and Crafting Engaging Content in Sri Lanka

5.1. Introduction to Social Media Marketing in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has experienced significant growth in internet penetration over the years. In 2021, internet penetration in the country was estimated to be around 32%, which means that a substantial portion of the population had access to the internet. The government and private sector had been actively working to increase internet connectivity, especially in rural areas, through initiatives like "Smart Sri Lanka" and expanding the national broadband network.

Social media usage in Sri Lanka had also seen substantial growth. Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram were popular among Sri Lankan internet users. As of 2021, Facebook was one of the leading social media platforms in the country, with a significant user base. Social media was commonly used for various purposes, including communication, sharing content, and business promotion.

Figure: Social Media Stats Sri Lanka September 2023
(Source: Statcounter)
Mobile device prevalence in Sri Lanka was high. The widespread availability of affordable smartphones had led to a significant portion of the population using mobile devices for accessing the internet. Mobile phones were not only used for communication but also for various online activities such as browsing the web, using social media apps, and online shopping.

5.2. **Importance of social media for Businesses in Sri Lanka**

a) **Cost-Effective Marketing**
MSMEs in Sri Lanka often operate with limited budgets. Social media provides an affordable and cost-effective marketing platform. It allows businesses to reach a wide audience without the high costs associated with traditional advertising methods. This affordability makes it accessible to even the smallest businesses.

b) **Brand Awareness**
Social media platforms offer MSMEs the opportunity to create and boost brand awareness. Consistent and strategic social media presence helps businesses to establish their brand identity and reach a larger audience. It's a way for these businesses to tell their unique stories, showcase their products or services, and communicate their value proposition to potential customers.

c) **Customer Engagement**
Customer engagement is crucial for building a loyal customer base. Social media platforms enable direct communication between businesses and customers. MSMEs can respond to inquiries, comments, and feedback in real-time, creating a more personalized and engaging customer experience. Engaging content such as polls, surveys, and contests can also foster interactions and relationships.

d) **Targeted Advertising**
Social media platforms provide robust advertising tools that allow businesses to target specific demographics, interests, and behaviors. This precise targeting ensures that MSMEs can focus their advertising efforts on their ideal customers, maximizing the return on investment.

e) **Local and Global Reach**
Social media has the power to connect MSMEs in Sri Lanka with both local and global markets. Businesses can use platforms like Facebook,
Instagram, and Twitter to tap into international markets and expand their customer base beyond the country's borders.

f) Sales and E-commerce
Many social media platforms offer integrated e-commerce features that allow businesses to sell products or services directly to customers. MSMEs can set up online stores, showcase their offerings, and facilitate seamless transactions through these platforms. This feature is particularly important in the digital age where online shopping is on the rise.

g) Analytics and Insights
Social media platforms provide analytics and insights tools that help MSMEs track the performance of their campaigns. They can gather data on user engagement, demographics, and behavior, which can be used to refine marketing strategies and make informed business decisions.

h) Competitive Advantage
Given the prevalence of social media, having a strong online presence can give MSMEs a competitive advantage. Businesses that effectively leverage social media can stand out in their respective industries, attract more customers, and stay ahead of competitors who are not as active on social platforms.

5.3. Setting Clear and Measurable Objectives for Social Media Marketing:

a) Start with a Business Goal
Begin by identifying your overarching business goals. These could include increasing website traffic, generating leads, improving brand visibility, boosting sales, or expanding into new markets. Your social media objectives should align with these broader goals.

b) Use SMART Criteria

![SMART Image]

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Timed
Ensure that your objectives are SMART

- **Specific:** Clearly define what you want to achieve.
- **Measurable:** Set quantifiable metrics to track progress.
- **Achievable:** Make sure your objectives are realistic within your resources.
- **Relevant:** Ensure that the objectives are relevant to your business and broader goals.
- **Time-bound:** Set a timeframe for achieving these objectives.

c) **Examples of Social Media Objectives**

- **Increasing Website Traffic:** "Increase website traffic from social media by 20% in the next six months."
- **Generating Leads:** "Generate 100 new leads per month through social media sign-up forms."
- **Improving Brand Visibility:** "Increase social media engagement rates by 15% within the next quarter."
- **Boosting Sales:** "Achieve a 10% increase in social media-driven sales in the next year."
- **Expanding into New Markets:** "Increase social media followers from the target market by 25% in the next six months."

d) **Track Progress**

Use social media analytics tools to monitor your progress regularly. Adjust your strategies and tactics as needed to ensure that you are on track to achieve your objectives.

**5.4. Choosing the Right Social Media Platforms**

There were 7.20 million social media users in Sri Lanka in January 2023.

The number of social media users in Sri Lanka at the start of 2023 was equivalent to 32.9 percent of the total population, but it’s also important to note that social media users may not represent unique individuals.

Meanwhile, data published in the ad planning tools of top social media platforms indicates that there were 6.85 million users aged 18 and above using social media in Sri Lanka at the start of 2023, which was equivalent to 43.2 percent of the total population aged 18 and above at that time.
More broadly, 49.4 percent of Sri Lanka’s total internet user base (regardless of age) used at least one social media platform in January 2023.

At that time, 37.3 percent of Sri Lanka’s social media users were female, while 62.7 percent were male.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Ad reach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>6.55 million</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>Decreased by 6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>7.04 million</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>Increased by 5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>1.40 million</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>Decreased by 6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messenger</td>
<td>3.55 million</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>Decreased by 6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>1.80 million</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>Increased by 5.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-sri-lanka](https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-sri-lanka)

### 5.5. Setting Up and Optimizing Social Media Profiles

Here's a step-by-step guide on creating and optimizing profiles on popular social media platforms, including tips on profile images, cover photos, and bio descriptions:

**a) Facebook**

- Profile Image: Use a high-quality logo or a professional headshot as your profile picture. Make sure it's clear and easily recognizable, as this image will appear next to your posts and comments.

- Cover Photo: Your cover photo is an opportunity to showcase your brand. Use an image that represents your business, product, or values. Ensure it's the right size to avoid cropping.

- Bio Description: Write a brief and engaging "About" section that describes your business, its mission, and the value you offer. Include a link to your website and contact information if relevant.
How to create a Facebook Business Page

Step 1: Choose or create a personal Facebook account.

Facebook Business Pages aren’t the same as Facebook profiles or users. They’re assets managed by a personal account, known as the Page administrator. A Page can have more than one administrator.

You can either use your personal Facebook account or create a new one with your work email address if you want to fully separate your personal and work lives.

Log in to Facebook with your account, then create a Facebook Page. You can also click on the menu icon on the left, then click Page under the Create section.

Step 2: Enter your basic information.

Fill in your business information. You can add more business details later, but you only need 3 things to create a Facebook Business Page:
• Name: This is the public name and title of your Page
• Category: Start typing a word to describe your business and Facebook will suggest options. Choose what fits the best.
• Description/Bio: Your elevator pitch. Write a one or two-sentence summary of your business.

Then, tap Create Page.

Step 3: Complete your Facebook Business Page info.

Follow the prompts to enter more details, like your business hours, website, phone number, and all that good stuff. All these fields are optional, so if you don’t want to advertise your phone number or address, leave those blank.
Step 4: Add profile and cover photos.

Besides adding style to your Facebook Page, your profile and cover photos should feature recognizable branding, so your customers know they’re in the right place.
Social media image sizes occasionally change, but,
- Profile picture: Square format, at least 170px x 170px,
- Cover photo: 851px x 315px

**Step 5: Add an action button.**

The action button at the top of your Page serves as your main call to action. You can link to your website, a special landing page or offer, or connect to business-specific services, such as online ordering for restaurants, and more.

Tap on the Add Action Button.

Then choose what you want to promote: Link to a website or app, get people to contact you, or connect a specific action, like buying tickets or booking an appointment.
Step 6: Optimize your Facebook Page

You could stop here and start posting content on your new Page, but for best results, take the time to do the following:

Add your website: Ensure your website URL is there and fill in a brief description.

Connect WhatsApp: Have customers reach out directly to WhatsApp instead of Facebook Messenger by connecting your Page to WhatsApp Business.
Add your location and hours: If you have a physical business location, add your address and opening hours in the About section.
Turn on reviews. Build trust with new visitors by featuring ratings and reviews on your Facebook Page. When using this feature, ensure you’re keeping an eye on reviews to ensure they’re from real customers and not spammers trying to ruin your reputation. And, if any customers are unhappy, ensure you’re reaching out to make it right.

Turn reviews on under Settings -> Privacy -> Page and tagging.

Edit your Page tabs: Choose to hide your Likes or Reviews, plus irrelevant sections like Music, Sports, Books, and more. From your Page management dashboard, tap More, then Manage sections.
Step 7: Create a post.

People won’t start discovering your Facebook Page, or have a reason to follow it, until you post some great content.

Step 7: How to add an admin to a Facebook page

Log in as your Page.
Log in to Facebook.
Switch to using Facebook as your Page.

Click on your profile photo at the top right, then tap the circle icon to switch to the last Page you used or see all profiles if you manage more than one Page.

Go to your Access settings.

From your Facebook Page, click on Professional dashboard in the left menu.
Go to Page access.

There are 5 types of access you can give:

- **People access**: Personal Facebook profiles who can log in as your Page with full access to manage it.
- **Task access**: Personal Facebook profiles who can’t log in as your Page, but have access to a specific task or set of tasks to do for your Page.
- **Community managers**: Personal Facebook profiles who can moderate comments and live chat discussions and suspend or remove Page fans. They cannot change your Facebook Page settings or post content.
- **Business account access**: Grant access to a Meta Business Suite account to fully manage your Page, add or remove administrators, and even delete your Page.
- **Partner access**: Business Manager accounts with access to specific assets or tasks, such as helping run Page ads or analytics.

Add a Facebook administrator.
From your Page’s Professional dashboard, click Add New next to whichever kind of Page access you want to give.

For example, to add a staff member to post content for you, you’d choose either the People option (for full access), or Task (for specific access).

You can search for them by name or enter an email address to invite them.

Add a partner to your Meta Business Suite

This adds a person to your entire Meta Business Suite account, not only your Facebook Page. This is helpful to give your staff access to all your Meta assets, including Facebook and Instagram profiles, analytics, ads account, and more. Log in to Meta Business Suite and go to Settings, then click Add People.
You have to invite business partners by email address. Then, choose which roles you want this person to have.

On the next screen, choose what this person has access to. If you want them to only have access to your Facebook Page, check that.
You’ll see a summary of who you’re assigning to what, and what they’ll be able to do. Click Send Request. After accepting the email invitation, they’ll be in your Meta Business Suite account.

Step 8: How to delete a Facebook Page

You can either temporarily deactivate your Page, or delete it, by clicking your profile photo in the top right corner, then going to Settings & privacy -> Settings -> Privacy -> Facebook Page information -> Deactivation and deletion.

Option 1: Temporarily deactivate your Facebook Page
Whether you’re taking an extended break, or just want to hide from search results, temporary deactivation accomplishes the same goal — no one can find your Page — but it’s still reversible.
You’ll have to enter your Facebook password to proceed.
You also have to choose a reason for deactivating. The first option — “This is temporary.” — comes with the ability to automatically reactivate your Page after a set time. This is helpful to really unwind during a vacation, for example. (Although a better practice would be to leave your Page up and simply delete Facebook from your phone for a week instead.)

Choose a reason and click Deactivate to finish. To reactivate it, follow the same steps as above to go to your Settings & privacy area and you’ll see an option to reactivate there.
Are you sure that you want to deactivate your Page?

Your Page name will be removed from most things that you've shared on Facebook but will still appear in friends lists and messages that you've sent.

Reason for leaving
(required)

This is temporary. I'll be back. Automatically reactivate my account in 7 days

Would you like to log out instead of deactivating your account?

If you're deactivating your account, make sure that you still have access to the email address or phone number that you use to log in to Facebook. That way, you can easily reactivate your account by logging back in.

I spend too much time using Facebook.

I don't find Facebook useful.

I receive too many emails, invitations and requests from Facebook.

My account was hacked.

I don't understand how to use Facebook.

I have another Facebook account.

I have a privacy concern.

I don't feel safe on Facebook.

Other (please explain further):

Please explain further

Email opt-out

Opt out of receiving future emails from Facebook

Even after you deactivate, others may still invite you to events, tag you in photos or ask you to join groups. If you opt out, you will NOT receive these invitations or notifications.
Option 2: Permanently delete your Facebook Page

Settings & privacy -> Settings -> Privacy -> Facebook Page information -> Deactivation and deletion.

Before deletion, download or transfer your data. There’s no way to get it back if you change your mind later (which is why you should deactivate instead of deleting, friend).

Clicking Continue prompts you to enter your password then shows you this warning message. This is it! Clicking Continue here will delete your Page. (!!!) Facebook gives you 30 days to change your mind and reactivate your Page.
b) Instagram

1) Username: Your username should closely resemble your business name, or a concise, memorable variation. If your ideal username is taken, consider using punctuation or adding descriptive words. Aim for brevity as you're limited to 30 characters.

2) Profile Photo: Your profile photo should ideally be a clear version of your brand logo or a professional headshot if you're the face of your brand. Ensure it's crisp and well-focused. The photo will be cropped to 150x150 pixels.

3) Name: Your Name is searchable, so consider adding relevant keywords if you're not a widely recognized brand. With a limit of 30 characters, keep it concise and impactful.

4) Category: In a business account, you can select a general category for your business (e.g., Art, Consultant, Restaurant). It’s not searchable, but it provides additional information to profile visitors.

5) Bio: Your bio is a creative space to convey your brand's essence. Provide a brief version of your mission, what you do, who you serve, and how you serve them. Include a call to action or promotional offer to drive website clicks or messages. You have 150 characters, so be
concise yet personable, use your brand voice, and consider adding emojis.

6) Contact Info: You can add a website, phone number, or physical address. At the very least, include your website.

7) Action Buttons: The default buttons are Message and Follow. Email becomes a button if you add your email to the Contact Options. Additional buttons like Donate, Gift Cards, Order Now, and Book Now can be added if they align with your business offerings.

How to Create an Instagram Business Account

Instagram brings together more than 28% of the world’s internet users. Among those people are your future customers.

Setting up an Instagram professional account only takes a few minutes, and you’ll gain access to features that will help you run ads and promote posts for years.

Switch to a professional account from your Instagram personal profile to analyze and increase the number of people who see your posts.

Create an Instagram Account

It’s free for iOS and Android devices.
Switch to a Professional Account

New users have personal accounts by default. The switch to a professional account isn’t permanent – you can switch between personal, business, and creator accounts at any time.

Navigate to your Instagram Settings by tapping on the hamburger menu at the top right corner of your Instagram profile.

Tap Account and Switch

Scroll down and click Account → Switch to professional account.
Later, you’ll be asked to select a creator account or business account.

A creator account is for public figures, content creators, artists, and influencers working on their brands, while Instagram business accounts are for retailers, local businesses, brands, organizations, and service providers.

Remember that all business accounts are public, so you won’t have the option to have a private business account.
Switching back to a personal account will erase data from your business account. The system will turn off all in-app insights and permanently delete your content and ad insights.

**Choose Your Category**

Instagram will ask which field or profession best describes your business. If you don’t know how to define it, browse the suggested options to find the closest match. Categories help the Instagram algorithm show your page to other Instagram users. You can change it anytime.

**Add Contact Details**

Your business page needs to include contact details in case shoppers have questions about your services or have encountered a problem. Openness to communication cultivates customer trust and helps secure loyal shoppers in the long run.

Add your website address, business email address, phone number, and working hours. There’s also an option to link Instagram with WhatsApp Business for faster communication.

**Connect a Facebook Page**

Link your Instagram business account with your business Facebook Page to increase your brand’s exposure and access different audiences.

These two social media platforms go hand in hand, offering organic post-scheduling and content sharing with your customers.
Remember that your Instagram business account can only connect to one Facebook Page.

**Finish Setup**

You’ve completed the Instagram business profile setup. Now go and try out all the features in your brand-new account.

The professional dashboard provides a complete overview of your account and post-performance. It offers other account management tools like hiding your business category and adding contact information.

**Benefits of Having an Instagram Business Account**

The Instagram business profile has several features that will help grow your business but are unavailable on a personal profile.

If you already have a presence on Instagram through a personal account, a business profile could be your way to gain more followers and reach new audiences.

Content interactions display the number of likes, saves, comments, and shares your posts have generated.

Profile activity shows profile visits, follows, and direct messages you’ve received in your inbox.

Audience insights break down demographics like gender, age, and approximate location of the people interacting with your posts. These insights will help you create more successful content.

**Create Instagram Ads**

Advertising is an effective way to reach people and have them Buy Now or Learn More about your product or service.
Be Trustworthy

Use Instagram for business to gain the trust of your audience and translate it into sales.

Create content that resonates with your followers and engages them with your promoted posts.

Become a verified Instagram business profile – it’s the fastest and most secure way to build trust.

Tag and Sell Products

Instagram provides the necessary advertising tools for your products and makes buying them easy. Instagram business accounts and other qualified public accounts in select countries can add shopping tags to their Instagram posts.

Schedule Posts and Use Links

Head over to the Creator Studio of the Facebook/Meta Business Suite and log in with your Instagram credentials to access various services for busy business owners.

Here, the most useful feature is post-scheduling, which is not something you’re currently able to use through your Instagram business account.

The Creator Studio dashboard gives you a clear timeline view for creating and scheduling posts and reviewing your current, past, and future scheduled posts. Don’t forget to add photos, videos, and any relevant links.
c) Twitter

- Profile Image: Similar to Facebook and Instagram, use a recognizable profile picture that represents your brand or a professional headshot.
- Cover Photo: Customize your cover photo to align with your branding. It's a large, horizontal image, so use it to convey your business's identity.
- Bio Description: Twitter provides a limited character count for your bio, so be concise. Describe your business, use keywords, and include a link to your website. Add hashtags or mentions if relevant.

d) LinkedIn

- Profile Image: For professional networking, a high-quality headshot is essential. Dress professionally and ensure your face is well-lit and visible.
- Cover Photo: Use a cover photo that represents your industry or work. It can be an image of your office, product, or a relevant professional image.
- Headline: Your headline is your digital business card. Use it to summarize your role and your company's name.
- Summary: Write a comprehensive summary of your business, its services, and your professional background. Showcase your expertise and achievements.

e) YouTube

- Profile Image: Use your logo or a recognizable image. This image will also appear as your video channel icon.
- Channel Art: Customize your channel art to match your branding. It should be visually appealing and reflect the content you create.
- About Section: Fill in your channel's about section with a brief description of your business and the type of content you create. Include links to your website and social media profiles.
How to Start a YouTube Channel

Starting a YouTube channel can be an amazing way to share your passion, build a brand, or even earn money. However, it's important to approach it strategically and with a plan.

Choose your YouTube channel’s niche.
- Choosing your niche is the first and most important step in starting a successful YouTube channel.
- Your niche is the topic or category that your channel will focus on.
- You can build a YouTube channel that supports your existing business, or if you’re starting from scratch, choose a niche based on an interest, passion, or area of expertise.
- It’s important to narrow your YouTube channel’s focus down. Going too broad at the start means more competition and a much harder time getting seen.

Research your YouTube niche’s competitors

Once you’ve chosen your niche, it's important to research your competitors. This means looking at other channels that create similar content.

A Simple Trick: Not all videos on YouTube have this, but many have a graph located above the timeline. This is a retention graph and shows you what parts of a video were the most replayed. Paying attention to this retention graph is a great way to learn what a particular audience already likes and enjoys on other channels.

Develop your brand on your YouTube channel.

Your brand is what sets you apart from your competitors. It includes your channel name, logo, and overall style. Take some time to develop a brand that reflects your niche and personality. This will help you build a consistent
image across all of your videos and make it easier for viewers to recognize your channel.

Your brand can be based on your theme, and your channel artwork can be based on the advice that you know you’ll be offering.

Create your YouTube account

To create a YouTube channel, you’ll need a Google account. Using your Google account, go to YouTube and sign in.

Set up your YouTube channel.

Click on your profile icon and select “Create a channel.” Follow the prompts to set up your channel name, description, and profile picture. Be sure to fill out all of this information accurately and completely. This will help your channel appear more professional and attract more viewers.
Create your first YouTube video.

Now it's time to create your first video. Choose a topic that you're passionate about and start recording. It’s going to take time to see the results.

Create a great title and thumbnail for your YouTube video.

Titles and thumbnails are incredibly important: they’re the first things people see before they watch any part of your video! Choose a title that captures attention, but don’t get over-the-top and clickbaity. Some “bait” is important, but whatever you choose for both your title and thumbnail, make sure you deliver on the promise.

Tip: a great tool for creating thumbnails is Canva! Canva has a lot of templates specific to YouTube thumbnails that you can choose from.

Publish your first YouTube video

Hitting publish can be scary, but it’s the only way to learn what works and what doesn’t. Hit publish and be proud of the fact that you created something and shared it with the world! It’s like planting a seed: it’s now where it needs to be to have a chance to grow and thrive.

In most cases, you’re not going to get a flood of views right away, and sometimes YouTube needs time to find the right audience for your videos. That’s where the next step comes into play.

Pay attention to your YouTube channel’s analytics

Paying attention to your analytics helps you improve over time and understand exactly what’s happening with your videos, good and bad.

Click-through rate: This is an indicator of how many people click to watch your video compared to the number of impressions (people who saw your video title and thumbnail) your video had. In other words, are people liking the title and thumbnail enough to click through? Shoot for a 5 percent or more click-through rate.
Average view duration: This is how long a person watches an individual video. The longer you can keep people watching, the more likely YouTube will serve your videos to more people. Pay attention to your retention graph, which can show you how sticky your video is. This can be found in the engagement tab in your analytics.

Holding the attention of your audience is a huge factor in the success of your videos and your channel.

Create a content calendar for your YouTube channel

Consistency is important on YouTube. As best as possible, you’ll want to publish videos on a regular schedule.

Create a content calendar to plan out your videos in advance. This can help you stay organized and ensure that you’re uploading new content on a regular basis. Your content calendar can include the topics of upcoming videos, the date you plan to upload and publish them, and any other relevant information.

Promote your YouTube videos

Promoting your videos is an important part of growing your YouTube channel. Share your videos on social media, embed them on your website or blog, and
collaborate with other creators to reach a wider audience. You can also use YouTube's built-in promotion tools, like paid ads and featured videos.

**Engage with your YouTube channel’s audience**

Engaging with your audience is crucial for building a community around your channel. Respond to comments, ask for feedback, and create videos based on your audience's interests and requests. This can help you build a loyal fan base and keep them coming back for more.

**Monetize your YouTube channel**

Once your channel has grown, you may be eligible to monetize your videos. This can include earning money from ads, sponsorships, and merchandise sales. To monetize your channel, you'll need to meet YouTube's Partner Program requirements. This includes having at least 1,000 subscribers and 4,000 watch hours in the past 12 months. Once you meet these requirements, you can apply to join the Partner Program and start earning money from your videos!

**Collaborate with other YouTube creators**

Collaborating with other creators can be a great way to reach new audiences and create high-quality content. Reach out to other creators in your niche and propose collaboration ideas. This can help you build relationships and grow your channel. You can also participate in YouTube collaborations like tags and challenges to reach a wider audience.

**Stay up to date with YouTube trends and algorithm changes**

YouTube's algorithm is constantly changing, so it's important to stay up to date with the latest trends and updates. Follow industry blogs, attend conferences, and engage with other creators to stay informed. This can help you stay ahead of the curve and create content that performs well on the platform.
f) WhatsApp

- Profile Image: Use a clear and professional image for your WhatsApp Business account. This is often your business logo.
- Status: You can use the status feature to post updates or promotions. Keep it engaging and informative to keep your customers informed.

g) Tiktok

- Profile Picture: Use your business logo or a clear, professional image as your profile picture. This image will be displayed as a small circle next to your username.
- Username: Choose a username that reflects your business name or branding. Keep it short and memorable.
- Bio Description: Write a brief, engaging bio that describes your business and what viewers can expect from your TikTok content. Include relevant keywords and hashtags to increase discoverability.
- Website Link: You can include a clickable link in your TikTok profile. Use this to direct viewers to your website, landing page, or other important online resources.
6. Introduction to SEO for Sri Lankan Websites

6.1. SEO fundamentals

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of enhancing a website's organic search visibility, aiming to secure higher rankings in search engine results. In essence, it's about optimizing your online presence so that when people search for topics related to your website, you're more likely to be found. Given the competitive nature of the online landscape, SEO is crucial as it demonstrates to search engines, like Google, that your website deserves to be at the top.

High search rankings are valuable because many users tend to click on the first few search results. Therefore, improving your position on the search results page can significantly boost your website's traffic. Unlike other marketing channels, search traffic is relatively consistent and passive, as the volume of searches remains stable month to month. This organic traffic is also cost-effective, as it doesn't require the hefty advertising expenses associated with paid search ads.

SEO can be broken down into five key steps.

1) Keyword Research
2) Content Creation
3) On-Page SEO
4) Link Building
5) Technical SEO

6.2. On Page SEO

On page optimization refers to all measures taken by SEOs within the website to improve the ranking of a site in search engine result pages. These measures are related to content and HTML source code of a page, e.g., meta tags, keyword placement, and keyword density including the technical setup, the content, and user-friendliness of your site. So, on page SEO optimization factors are linked with the elements of your website.

So, in on page SEO, you deal with all the elements of SEO that you can control. For example, a website owner can control the technical issues, meta tags, and quality of the content of the site. On page SEO issues are in your
control so that they should be resolved without any delay to improve rankings in search engine result pages.

- **Page Architecture**
  Effective page architecture, often likened to a well-structured website pyramid, plays a vital role in driving traffic to your site. The term 'pyramid' here symbolizes the organization of your website's elements, including both the navigational aspects and the structure of your URLs.

- **Optimize URLs**
  Optimizing your URLs is a critical step in SEO strategy. It's essential to create URLs with SEO in mind to achieve the best results. When your URLs adhere to all the rules for SEO-friendly formatting, it signifies your commitment to success in this aspect of website optimization.

*Figure: On Page Optimization (Source: javatpoint.com)*
To enhance the effectiveness of your URLs, it's highly recommended to implement canonical URLs. This involves indicating to search engines your preferred page for a specific URL, whether it's an updated version or any other relevant content. This practice helps prevent duplicate pages from being indexed, ensuring better SEO results.

**Unique Titles for Each Page**
Providing each page with a unique title serves a dual purpose: it not only adds a creative touch to your content but is also essential for your on-page optimization requirements.

**Unique Meta Descriptions for Every Single Page**
Creating unique meta descriptions for every single page on your website is crucial. These snippets of information appear below search results and serve to describe the page's content while also enticing searchers to click on your website.
Proper Heading Types
Choosing the appropriate header tags is often overlooked by many website owners, leading to the proliferation of content writing services. However, you can also adjust your header tags manually. When dealing with numerous headers and titles, it's advisable to use H2 through H6 tags, as the H1 tag should be exclusively reserved for the primary title. The most effective combination for header tags typically spans from H1 to H3 unless you have additional titles to accommodate.

Alt-Tags for Images
Using alt-tags is essentially a way to get more SEO out of the pictures you're using on your website. Although it may not be too obvious, it's going to be a critical component to how successful you can be online.
• **No follow / Broken Links**
Dealing with broken links is essential for maintaining a strong SEO presence. These links can significantly hinder your website's performance, so it's crucial to address and rectify them promptly.

• **Website Speeds**
The loading speed of your website plays a pivotal role in user experience. It dictates the time users must wait before accessing your content, and in today's fast-paced digital world, user patience is at a premium. Therefore, the faster your website loads, the greater your chances of attracting and retaining traffic. Slow-loading websites are less likely to maximize their traffic potential, as users increasingly lack the patience to wait.

![Google Page Speed Score](image)

*Figure: Google Page Speed Score (Source: scaleflex.com)*

• **Outbound Links**
Outbound links can positively impact your SEO, but it's essential to exercise restraint. While they can be beneficial, excessive use of outbound links should be avoided. It's generally recommended to limit the number of outbound links to a maximum of 100 per page. Failing to adhere to this guideline could potentially raise concerns and affect the overall SEO performance of your website.

• **Mark-up Validity**
Valid markup is crucial for ensuring that your website functions correctly and displays consistently across different browsers. By adhering to a defined list and syntax of HTML codes, you can identify and rectify potential issues that may arise. It not only helps in ensuring cross-
browser compatibility but also has a positive impact on your page loading speed, contributing to a smoother and more reliable user experience.

Figure: Markup Validation Service (Source: W3C)

6.3. Off Site SEO

- **Quality of the Backlinks**
  Neglecting the quality of your backlinks and allowing them to manage themselves can lead to future issues and challenges.

- **Gain High-Quality Backlinks**
  High-quality backlinks are often regarded as valuable "link juice," and many individuals are eager to understand how to acquire the most beneficial backlinks for their websites.

- **Like-Minded Websites**
  Collaborating with websites that share a similar topic or niche with yours enables you to expand your reach and engage a more extensive and relevant audience than you might have reached independently.
• **Discussion / Answering Questions**
Participating in discussions and answering questions related to your industry can be a valuable strategy. However, it's advisable to exercise caution with websites that require you to sign up, as your efforts might go to waste due to potential bans or unreliable operations. Instead, consider engaging in blogs and forums where you can leave comments that link back to your website or subtly reference a product or service you offer. This can be a more secure and effective way to build your online presence.

• **Local SEO**
Local SEO is the strategy of optimizing a website to enhance its visibility in local search results. The goal is to attract more local traffic, generate leads, and raise brand awareness within a specific geographic area.

*Figure: On page and Off page SEO (njlocalmarketing)*
7. **Inventory Management**

7.1. **Understanding Inventory Management**

Here, we delve into the fundamental principles that underpin effective inventory control for MSMEs operating in Sri Lanka's e-commerce and digital marketing landscape.

We explored why inventory management is pivotal for MSMEs, discussing its impact on profitability, customer satisfaction, and overall business performance. You'll gain a clear understanding of why mastering this facet of your business is crucial in the competitive e-commerce environment.

Not all inventory is the same, and this section explains the various types, such as raw materials, work-in-progress, and finished goods. You'll learn how to distinguish between them and the role each plays in your supply chain.

Effective inventory management is guided by principles that ensure efficiency and cost-effectiveness. We will introduce you to these principles, such as the FIFO (First In, First Out) and LIFO (Last In, First Out) methods, to help you make informed decisions about inventory allocation and rotation.

With the rapid growth of e-commerce and digital marketing in Sri Lanka, understanding the direct correlation between efficient inventory management and e-commerce success is essential. This section highlights the specific challenges and opportunities MSMEs face in this evolving landscape and how mastering inventory control can give you a competitive edge.

There are several free inventory management software options available online that MSMEs can use. These tools can help you efficiently manage your inventory without incurring additional costs.

- inFlow Inventory
- Zoho Inventory
- Odoo
- ABC Inventory
- Delivrd
- PartKeepr
- Inventoria
- Sortly

Cost analysis and pricing models for the Sri Lankan market are essential components of any business strategy in this dynamic and diverse economy. Understanding the intricacies of cost analysis allows businesses to assess their expenditures accurately, from production and distribution to overhead and taxes.

By conducting a comprehensive cost analysis, companies gain insights into the true cost of their products or services, which is a foundational step in setting competitive and sustainable prices. In the context of the Sri Lankan market, where consumer preferences, economic conditions, and competition vary, adopting the right pricing model is crucial. Businesses must consider factors like price elasticity, market positioning, and cultural nuances to develop pricing strategies that are not only profitable but also resonate with the local consumer base.

While there are several online tools and resources that can assist businesses with cost analysis and pricing strategies, it's important to note that specific tools for the Sri Lankan market might be limited. However, you can still leverage general tools and adapt them to your specific market and business needs.

- **Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets**: These spreadsheet software solutions can be highly effective for conducting cost analysis and creating pricing models. You can use formulas and templates to calculate costs, profit margins, and pricing strategies.

- **Pricing Software**: Tools like Price2Spy, Wiser, or Competera offer price tracking and competitive analysis features. These can help you monitor your competitors' prices and adjust your pricing strategies accordingly.

- **Online Calculators**: There are various online calculators that can help you calculate costs and pricing. These can include financial calculators, markup calculators, and price elasticity calculators.

- **E-commerce Platforms**: If you are operating an e-commerce business, platforms like Shopify, WooCommerce, and BigCommerce offer built-in pricing and inventory management features that can help you set prices and manage stock.
- **Accounting Software**: Accounting software such as QuickBooks or Xero can be used to track expenses and profits, making it easier to conduct cost analysis.

- **Market Research Tools**: Tools like Statista, Nielsen, or Euromonitor International can provide market data and insights specific to the Sri Lankan market, helping you understand consumer preferences and competitive landscapes.

- **Online Business Forums and Communities**: Platforms like LinkedIn groups or industry-specific forums can be valuable for networking and learning from the experiences of other businesses in the Sri Lankan market.

- **Industry Associations**: Look for industry associations or trade groups in Sri Lanka that may offer resources, reports, and guidance on cost analysis and pricing strategies specific to your sector.
8. **Affiliate Marketing in the Sri Lankan Context**

Affiliate marketing has gained significant prominence in the global digital landscape, and its principles are equally applicable in the unique context of Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, affiliate marketing has emerged as a powerful online marketing strategy where businesses collaborate with individuals or websites (affiliates) to promote their products or services. Affiliates earn a commission on every sale or lead generated through their marketing efforts.

Sri Lanka's e-commerce sector has witnessed substantial growth, particularly in recent years. With an increasing number of consumers turning to online shopping, affiliate marketing provides a cost-effective way for businesses to expand their reach and drive sales.

Affiliates in Sri Lanka can range from bloggers and social media influencers to websites dedicated to niche markets. As digital penetration continues to grow, local affiliates have found opportunities to partner with both local and international businesses.

In Sri Lanka, affiliate marketers can capitalize on local niches. For instance, promoting traditional Sri Lankan products, handicrafts, or eco-friendly goods can be a successful affiliate venture, catering to both domestic and international audiences.

Building trust is essential in Sri Lankan affiliate marketing. Successful affiliates often partner with local brands and businesses that resonate with Sri Lankan consumers. Trustworthiness and cultural alignment are key factors in these partnerships.

Given the prevalence of mobile internet usage in Sri Lanka, affiliate marketers need to adopt a mobile-first approach in their strategies. This includes ensuring that affiliate links and content are mobile-friendly.

Sri Lanka has specific regulations governing online marketing. Affiliate marketers must be aware of and adhere to these regulations, which include data protection and consumer privacy.
Payment gateways and methods should be tailored to the Sri Lankan context, accommodating local preferences and payment systems. Local currency transactions are crucial for smooth affiliate operations.

Effective affiliate marketing in Sri Lanka requires the use of the Sinhala and Tamil languages in content and promotions to cater to a broader audience. Localization efforts are essential to connect with the local consumer base.

Just like in global affiliate marketing, tracking the performance of campaigns is vital. Businesses and affiliates in Sri Lanka should employ analytics tools to monitor the success of their marketing efforts and make data-driven improvements.

*Figure: Affiliate Marketing (quoracdn)*