

Media Planning and Buying: A Definitive Guide [2023 Update]



Table of contents.

Introduction	03
What is Media Planning?	04
Media Planning vs. Media Buying: What's the Difference?	05
How to Create a Media Plan	07
Media Planning Trends for 2023 and Beyond	14
What's Next?	21

Introduction

In this guide, we dive into media planning and buying. We'll cover the basics, include a step-by-step guide to modern media planning, and touch on media planning trends for 2023 and beyond.

Whether you're an in-house marketer or an agency media planner, adopting a data-driven digital marketing approach is crucial. Intuition will only get you so far.

But you can't do away with the human touch entirely.

In an era of personalization at scale, non-linear customer journeys, and heightened online activity, your digital marketing must adapt to mirror consumers' ever-evolving needs.

That means understanding your audience and meeting them on their home turf.

If you're looking for better ways to drive traffic, generate leads, and deliver more ROI, start by leaving the old tactics behind.

Let's get started.

What is Media Planning?

Media planning is the process of identifying, assessing, and selecting media channels and platforms to reach a target audience. The primary purpose of media planning is to get a brand in front of the right audience at the right time and deliver the right message.

Media Channels Explained

A media channel is a broad media class or medium used to deliver advertising messages to prospective customers.

These days, media planners need to cover an array of traditional and digital channels to reach their audience.

Traditional Media Channels

- TV
- Radio
- OOH (out of home, e.g., billboards)
- Events
- Direct Mail
- Newspapers
- Magazines

Digital Media Channels

- Social Media
- Email
- Website
- Display Advertising
- Search Advertising
- Streaming Service
- Affiliate Marketing



What is a Media Vehicle?

A media vehicle refers to a specific channel advertisers employ to get their message out. It could be a page in a local newspaper, a website with a similar audience, or a LinkedIn remarketing ad.

Media planners will pick a mix of media vehicles to reach a target consumer group on multiple occasions. The right mix will hopefully influence their perception of – and interest in – a product or service.

Getting the Mix Right

Media planners need to establish a clear target audience to get the most bang from limited marketing bucks. Then they can strategize which channels would be most effective. The next step is determining the media vehicles, content types, and engagement frequency to garner the best results.

When planners talk about ‘selecting the right media mix’, they refer to picking the most effective combination of media based on their audience’s behavior and preferences, and the likelihood they’ll convert.

As you might expect, these decisions involve a lot of data. There’s also some trial and error – and we can’t ignore the value of a media planner’s experience.

Media Planning vs. Media Buying: What’s the Difference?

How is media planning different from media buying? Although the two processes often get lumped together, media planners and media buyers play distinctly different roles in launching campaigns.

Let’s look at the main differences between media planning and buying, and how both sides work together to deliver the best results.



What do Media Planners do?

Media planners determine how, where, when, and why a business will distribute content to drive ROI through paid advertising.

A media planner is responsible for developing a coordinated media plan based on the goals outlined in an organization's marketing strategy.

Media Planners:

- Carry out research
- Contribute to campaign strategy
- Outline media goals and objectives
- Allocate budgets
- Set the media cadence
- Create the channel plan
- Track and tweak campaigns

In short, media planners take care of all the behind-the-scenes intel required for a successful integrated marketing campaign.



What do Media Buyers do?

Media buying is the other side of the advertising coin. Media buying refers to the process of securing media space, be it a timeslot, ad space or endorsement.

Media buyers have an intimate understanding of the marketplace and a long list of contacts/relationships with media vendors built over their careers.

Media Buyers:

- Develop relationships with vendors
- Negotiate placement rates
- Track and tweak campaigns

Media buyers are media planners' operational counterparts. There is some overlap when it comes to optimizing campaigns; planners and buyers work together to adjust the tactics so they make the best use of the budget.

How to Create a Media Plan



Your Step-by-Step Guide to Modern Media Planning

Digital marketers are under increasing pressure to deliver results. But when everything changes so fast, how can you hope to keep up with the competition, let alone get ahead?

Remember that old maxim, “the more things change, the more they stay the same”?

Marketing is always changing. Media planners who balance tried-and-true expertise with data-driven insight will be ideally positioned to navigate whatever challenges come along. Follow these 6 steps to create a strong, agile, and effective campaign strategy.

Define Your Target Audience

A target audience is a group of people you identify as potential customers based on age, occupation, location, interests, gender, or other factors.

Use what you know about your audience to build an ideal customer profile (ICP) or audience personas.

Let’s say you have a business that sells eco-friendly baby products. Right away, you can define three broad audiences: new parents, grandparents, and friends of new parents.

(There’s not much point targeting high school students or their middle-aged parents with ads for expensive prams).

Now use demographic, economic, psychographic, and geographic data to get closer to your audience.

The tighter you can make your audience segments, the more targeted your marketing will be. But don't focus too tightly, or you might end up with segments that are too small to reach your goals.

The audience segments for our eco-friendly baby products might look like this:

Audiences 1 and 3: New Parents and Their Friends

- Professionals
- Aged 25-40
- Living in mid-size and large cities
- Commute by public transport
- Above average income
- Interested in sustainability
- Active on social media
- In the market for baby products or gifts

Audience 2: New Grandparents

- Late-career professionals or retired
- Aged 55-75
- Above average income
- Interested in high-end products
- Frequent travelers
- In the market for baby gifts

Determine Campaign Goals

You can't measure campaign performance if you don't know what success looks like.

Are you aiming for brand awareness or trying to generate sales? What are your daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly revenue targets? How is this media plan linked to company growth?

Starting with clear goals and ambitious KPIs helps media planners select the right mix of media channels and messages.

Let's stay with our eco-friendly baby product company and assume we are launching a new clothing line for Christmas. Brand awareness is good, but the main aim is to sell products. Right away, we define success in terms of revenue – but let's go further.

Last Christmas, we sold \$30,000 worth of products from a \$6,000 campaign. This year we're aiming for a 25% increase. But times are tight, and our marketing budget has been cut by 10%. We'll need to improve ROAS to reach our goals.

As an eco-friendly company, loyalty is important. So we want at least 20% of sales to come from returning customers.

Using these goals, we can put some KPIs in place:

- \$37,500 sales from a \$5,400 marketing budget
- 20% of sales from returning customers
- 10-week campaign (October to mid-December)

Now we have campaign goals that connect with our target audiences and link to the company's growth aspirations. It's clear we will need an aggressive marketing strategy with some clever tactics to re-engage past customers.

How are we going to pull it off?

A quick note before we continue: Media planners don't act alone. Steps 1 and 2, as well as the broader marketing strategy that came before, are collaborative exercises involving many stakeholders.

Research the Market

Market research will always turn up insights that will inform our advertising strategy and guide tactical decisions.

Media planners undertake two types of market research; internal and external.

Internal

Working closely with a brand's key stakeholders to understand the growth objectives and marketing goals. Most internal research will, realistically, occur in steps 1 and 2.

External

In this stage, a media planner will gather and analyze insights about the competitive landscape and marketplace:

- Research industry trends
- Assess the competition
- Build audience segments and ICPs
- Understand where audiences are most engaged with ad content
- Unearth insight about past buyer behavior

For example, we might learn that TikTok advertising is our biggest opportunity to find new customers, email marketing is effective for past customers, and our biggest competitors are selling eco-friendly baby toys instead of clothing.

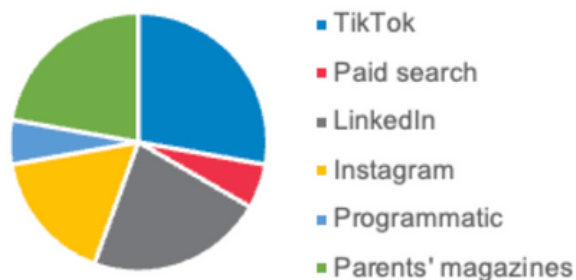
Select the Right Media Mix

The plethora of channels available to media planners is dizzying, so it's essential to choose the most effective mix for your audience.

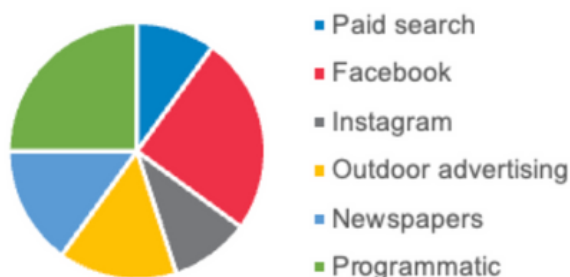
Armed with market research and goal-setting insights, marketers must determine which channels can bring them the most success. Media planners typically use a targeted mix of offline and online channels.

The media mix for our eco-friendly baby clothing company will look a little different for each audience segment.

Audiences 1 and 3 (new parents and their friends)



Audience 2 (new grandparents)



(Note that this mix excludes below-the-line channels like email, PR, SEO, and word-of-mouth marketing. The media planning is a significant part of the comprehensive channel plan, but not the entire thing).

Mediatool's collaborative planning features make it easy for large teams and agencies to create, share, approve and amend media plans. You never need to worry about working on the wrong version, losing documents, or missing a memo with Mediatool's media planning templates and tools.

Consider Frequency and Reach

Reach refers to how many people will see your ads, while frequency determines how often.

The goal here is to find the balance between maximizing ad visibility and optimizing spend. We want our ads to be noticed but not to the point where they become annoying. We also don't want to overspend on ineffective channels.

There are three main approaches to consider when deciding on ad frequency:

- **Continuity:** A consistent schedule of ads throughout the campaign in the chosen medium. It's often used for goods that aren't seasonal and require reinforcement to stay top of mind.
- **Flighting:** Alternating periods of advertisements, when marketers run the campaign for a defined time, pause for a while, and then resume later. This strategy is suited to seasonal products or campaigns with limited budgets.
- **Pulsing:** This approach combines Continuity and Flighting. Pulsed campaigns have periods of continuous low-intensity advertising, augmented by flights of higher-intensity campaigns when additional spend can generate the greatest ROI.



Which approach would we use to boost sales of our new baby clothes for Christmas?

A handy rule of thumb is that ad creative needs to be seen three times to be memorable. However, each media channel has its own considerations.

In our case, we can use what we know about our audience segments, combined with the channel plan, to decide on a “Flighting” approach for the Christmas campaign. We want to make a big impression quickly, so we can sell a lot of clothes in 10 weeks.

By now, you should see how all these considerations are cumulative. Each step influences the next, and success depends on a cohesive and collaborative media planning process.

Media Buying

Media buying is all about negotiations and getting bang for buck.

Media buying is primarily the realm of the media buyer (no surprises there). But, as with anything in the world of media planning and digital marketing, there’s room for collaboration.

Effective media buying means using the least budget to achieve the most impact and support the marketing strategy in the best way.

Building Relationships

Automation tools haven’t completely done away with the need to directly manage media vendor relationships. Media buyers should still invest in building relationships with ad vendors.

Negotiating Media Rates

If the media buyer has done their homework and built solid relationships, they should be able to negotiate preferential rates for large platforms.

Budgeting for Paid Media

A large chunk of any digital marketing budget will go to online platforms like social media and search. Media planners and buyers should collaborate to optimize spend according to the media mix and frequency.

Tips for Building a Media Budget:

- Always leave a margin for contingencies
- You won't get it 100% right the first time
- Pay attention to minimum spends
- Consider timing ad delivery (e.g. turning the ad off overnight)
- Watch for double-spending on platforms where audiences overlap

Monitor, Measure and Continuously Improve Your Campaigns

Create an attribution framework and continuously monitor campaign performance in each channel.

As soon as your media plan is live, you can start to look for optimization opportunities. Despite exhaustive research, extensive planning, and years of experience, you can't predict your audience's behavior with 100% accuracy.

The key to tracking and optimizing media plans in real time is a centralized dashboard that provides a comprehensive overview of all marketing activity.

Target indicators, visual reports and user-friendly dashboards make tracking campaign performance easier for marketers and media planners. A single dashboard with multi-source data ensures media buyers have all the information they need to optimize campaigns, rearrange budgets, and make more informed decisions for future plans.

With Mediatool's customizable dashboards and reporting capabilities, advertisers and agencies get a holistic view of all their campaigns in one central location. Real-time data integrations ensure you get an up-to-date feed of campaign performance and can quickly make well-informed decisions to adjust, pause and optimize campaigns from a single account.

Media Planning Trends • for 2023 and Beyond

The complexity of the media planning and buying process was already staggering. Throw a global pandemic, data privacy changes, and political unrest into the mix, and you have a concoction that will make any media planner's head spin.

Besides the standard headaches marketers have – attribution, proving ROI and keeping up with trends – the 'new normal' in media planning promises to kick things up a notch.

Consumer Trends are Driving Media Plans More than Ever Before

Both because of the COVID-19 pandemic and after it, when the global economy got a bit funky, consumer trends have changed. Marketing teams have been scrambling to catch up.

Marketers need a new framework to reach their audience in “these unprecedented times”. So they turn to trends and data.

Data-driven audience insight is nothing new in media planning. Yet the focus on mining real-time data for actionable insights is a newly rediscovered superpower.

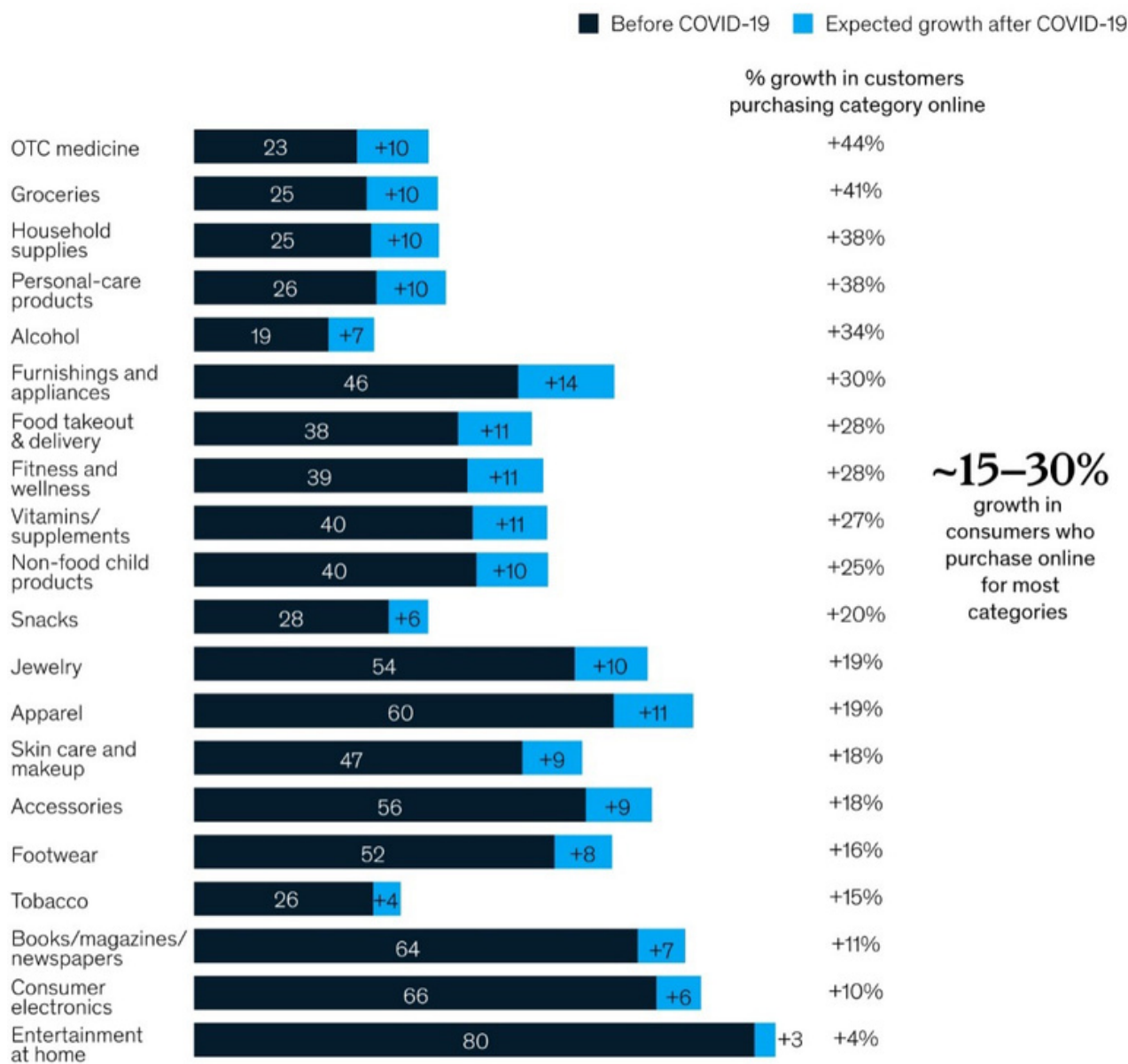
For example, McKinsey's research shows that consumers are expected to shop online for things they usually buy in-store. Comparing pre-covid trends with post-covid expectations shows the scale and pace of these changes.



The biggest change is in furnishings and appliances. In percentage terms, the biggest mover is OTC medicine.

More people expect to make a portion of their purchases online post-COVID-19 than before.

Consumers' use of online channels before and expected use after COVID-19^{1,2}
 % of respondents purchasing online³



¹Q: Before the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation started, what proportion of your purchases in this category were online vs from a physical store/in person?

²Q: Once the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation has subsided, tell us what proportion of your purchases in this category you think will be online vs from a physical store/in person?

³Respondents who indicated that they have not bought the category online and do not intend to do so in the next 2 weeks are classified as not purchasing online.

Source: McKinsey & Company COVID-19 US Consumer Pulse Survey 6/15–6/21/2020, n = 2,006, sampled and weighted to match the US general population

That's the B2C side. What about B2B marketers?

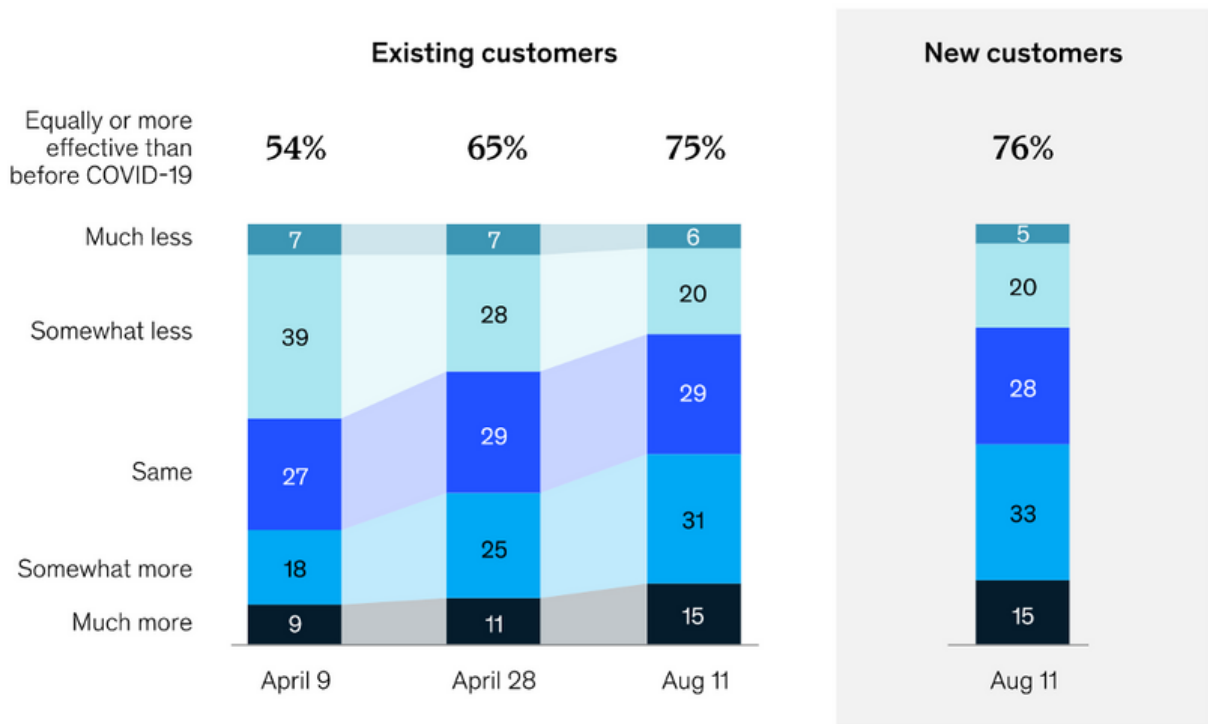


Once again, McKinsey research reveals the shift to online interactions is happening. And it's here to stay.

Remote engagement successfully supports both selling and prospecting.

Effectiveness of new sales model in reaching and serving customers^{1,2,3}

% of respondents



¹Q: "How effective is your company's new sales model at reaching and serving customers?"

²Q: "How effective is the new sales model in acquiring new customers (eg, those that have never purchased from your organization before)?"

³Figures may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

Source: McKinsey COVID-19 B2B Decision-Maker Pulse #1 3/30-4/9/2020 (n = 3,619), McKinsey COVID-19 B2B Decision-Maker Pulse #2 4/20-4/28/2020 (n = 3,755), McKinsey COVID-19 B2B Decision-Maker Pulse #3 7/27-8/11/2020 (n = 3626)

McKinsey
& Company



Data Privacy: The Great Disruptor, or a Great Opportunity?

If you work in marketing or media, you have undoubtedly heard about the data privacy changes affecting advertising. With Google phasing out support for third-party cookies, GDPR/CCPA legislation putting a halt to shady practices, and Apple limiting third-party tracking on their devices, the power of data is in consumers' hands.

A lot of marketers worry that the changes will erode their ability to target prospective customers. But that's not the case at all.

Data tracking isn't disappearing. It's evolving.

By adopting a first-party data strategy, media planners can get closer to their ideal audiences and garner deeper insights for a 360° customer profile.

Most media planners have more than enough first-party data in their warehouse. The challenge isn't collecting more data but being strategic about where, how, and why the data is collected.

Teams are Acting on Campaign Performance Data Faster than Ever

While digital marketing has always been touted to enable more speed, agility and transparency, its potential has hardly been tapped to date. Gartner reports that martech makes up 26% of the marketing budget, yet marketers only use 58% of the stack's potential.

The last few years have left no room for gut-driven strategies and over-complicated decision-making processes. In fact, decisions that used to take days or even weeks are now being made in hours.

Teams are tightening the feedback loop with:

- More collaborative analysis
- Closer focus on KPIs
- Real-time target tracking
- Mid-campaign reporting
- Democratized data policies

As a result, media planning is more grounded and less concerned with gloss and polish.

Advertisers are Prioritizing Attributable Media

In the past, there was a perception that stretching the marketing budget as wide as possible would generate ROI.

In times of unprecedented uncertainty, business leaders look to decrease risk. Every dollar spent has to drive immediate results, which presents significant challenges for marketing teams.

Ad spending is rising after a dip in 2020, but the landscape isn't like it was. Advertisers are pulling back from brand awareness campaigns and redeploying their resources into channels and tactics that are easier to track, measure and report on in real-time.

Does that mean brand campaigns will become a thing of the past? Not necessarily. The close scrutiny of marketing budgets is driving media teams to reconsider their revenue-generating approach. It's part of a broader perception shift, with marketing going from a cost centre to a revenue generator.

Media planners are being more thoughtful about where, when and why they deploy brand campaigns will help marketers to maximize their impact moving forward.

When it comes to optimizing a multi-channel customer experience, it's essential to have the most accurate and up-to-date information about your target audience, preferably in one neat dashboard. Then, you can use data to drive your tactics instead of relying on personal hunches.

What the Changes Mean for Marketers (With Innovative Media Planning Examples)

While some trends have arrived sooner than expected, don't throw out your media planning playbook just yet. Instead, update your approach to be more data-driven, collaborative & agile.

Uncovering emerging trends early allows marketing teams to act in time and be part of the conversation. More importantly, it provides much-needed context for tailored ad creative and more engaging copy.

With the right tools, good marketing data, and a clear strategy, any experienced media planner can tap into real-time consumer intent. The fundamentals of media planning haven't changed. They've simply evolved.

Media planners who can identify trends within their audience segments, create tailored content, and deliver relevant customer experiences will gain a competitive edge.

Struggling with Workflow and Collaboration Madness

Digital advertising campaigns require a great deal of communication, fine-tuning and cross-functional collaboration. According to a McKinsey study, knowledge workers spend around 28% of the work week managing their email. Another 20% is spent searching for internal information or tracking down colleagues who can help with specific tasks.

The study suggests that businesses can raise productivity by 20 to 25% by adopting the right social technologies.

Effective collaboration is trickier as remote working becomes normalized and teams are increasingly geographically diverse. Teams that had the right tech stack (or pivoted at the right time) do well during uncertainty, while others struggle to adapt and deploy campaigns in time. A survey by NewsCred found that organizations using planning and project management tools faced fewer challenges as a result of COVID-19 compared to those that didn't use any tools.

The first step towards streamlining your marketing team's collaboration is understanding the productivity and communication tools needed to keep projects moving forward.

The secret is finding one or two platforms that can do it all. Bringing in too many new tools might end up being more disruptive than having no communications infrastructure at all, so invest wisely.



Dealing with Budget Restrictions

Marketers may face budget cuts with the economic uncertainty of 2023, as finance teams put the brakes on spending in a bid to protect cash flow. Rather than going for blanket cuts, teams should focus on making selective strategic cuts based on the channels, content, and frequencies that resonate most with target audiences.

If you think you'll be dealing with budget restrictions, follow these guiding principles when drawing up your marketing plan and budget:

- Review all marketing spending in detail: Before pausing or shifting marketing activities, spend time analyzing all locked-in commitments, contract terms and paid campaigns with the aim to repurpose, renegotiate or shift to a higher-return action.
- Consider churn and acquisition costs: Be careful when cutting spend on activities that can cause damage in the long run, such as brand campaigns or paid search altogether. What may seem like a quick win today could negatively impact the overall performance of marketing costs and results. Even if you have to make cuts, consider these metrics to anticipate the impact.
- Evaluate performance quickly: Use KPIs and benchmarks that reflect the current climate, consumer needs and business objectives to evaluate marketing performance and identify inefficiencies. Cut without regret and shift your focus to A/B testing other channels or tactics.
- Run experiments to find new winning combinations: Even when your focus is on cost reduction, you still have the opportunity to experiment with formats and data. Explore creative formats, new media channels, possible partnerships and novel ways of using consumer insights to discover a new mix of the most effective tactics.

What's Next?

One thing is clear – media planners need to get comfortable with discomfort. If media planners want to stay ahead of the curve, they need to:

- Reacquaint themselves with their audience
- Reorganize how they operate
- Reinvent their processes
- Embrace software that makes media planning easier
- Use data to guide decision-making

But don't throw out the old playbook just yet. Things have certainly changed, but the fundamentals of media planning remain intact.

With strategy, people, processes and systems working together, brands and agencies are bound to emerge on the other side unscathed, if not re-energized.

About Mediatool

So, who are we, the company behind the guide?

Mediatool is a Cloud-based marketing campaign planning and management platform that helps brands and agencies to plan, track, improve, and report on media and marketing campaigns.

Increase efficiency with total budget control, seamless data integration, and campaign optimization intelligence for high-performance marketing. Visualize your results to make the data-driven decisions you're not making today.

Get a comprehensive overview of all your marketing activities—everything your team needs to deliver better campaigns and better results.



Take a platform tour to learn more about how **Mediatool can improve your marketing operations.**

