

Why digital marketing internships are vital for career success

Digital marketing has been listed as one of the hottest jobs in 2021, but for those wanting to enter the field, getting a start with a good internship programme will be vital for long-term success.



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This according to Ariel Sumeruk, owner of digital marketing and analytics agency, Conversion Science. “Digital marketing experts are highly sought-after. It’s an exciting field, but there is a ton of technical know-how required to make a success of it, and unfortunately, there is a large digital skills gap that holds a lot of young people back,” says Sumeruk.

According to the [2021 IAB SA Digital Skills Gap report](#), the biggest skills gap lies in data analytics, a role that will continue to grow in demand in the workplace.

Given that Covid-19 has accelerated digital transformation in the working environment, intervention may be needed to help close digital skills gaps. “Today’s digital marketers have to master several technical tools in an industry that is constantly evolving. There’s more of a practical element to it than people think, especially where data analytics is concerned. This is where on-the-job training is a game-changer for anyone wanting to pursue it as a career,” says Sumeruk.

Conversion Science has been running their 12-month paid internship programme for seven years, and of the 40 interns to have gone through the programme, 90% are still in digital marketing positions today, with more than half in senior positions. Sumeruk attributes this to prolonged in-depth training and sufficient digital skills transfer.

Fetching coffee or doing menial labour is synonymous with the concept of an internship, but Sumeruk wants to encourage young graduates to shop around for a programme that offers intensive and high-quality training. He warns that a quick two-week or even three-month internship is not ideal to equip young professionals with the digital skills they need for this field and emphasises that exposure across a variety of technologies is beneficial. “The job of a digital marketer can involve a lot of moving parts. They have to achieve a company’s marketing objectives using the right mix of digital tools, e.g., paid social media advertising, Google Ads & PPC, mobile apps, SEO, email, and automation, etc. The more an intern can be exposed to, the better,” says Sumeruk.

Further to this, he highlights how the ongoing evolution of digital marketing tools has given rise to data-driven roles, making data science a key component of the digital marketing mix. “This calls for a precise set of analytical skills, and to hone these skills in a dynamic environment early on in your digital marketing career can put you on the front foot in an industry that values speciality skills,” says Sumeruk.

Desigan Moodley, who completed an internship with Conversion science in 2018 and now heads up paid media at Takealot, says that the on-the-job training he received is still the key pillar to his career growth. “I had never done any digital marketing before, but the guidance and training I received during my internship enabled me to become a strong data-driven digital marketing specialist, and I continue to use the skills I learnt during my training in my current role,” says Moodley.

Virtual and hybrid internships post-pandemic

The pandemic’s acceleration of technology and wide acceptance of a remote working model provides further access to good internship opportunities. As more industries consider virtual internships, this can assist with closing the digital skills gap at a quicker rate. Virtual training means that young people are not restricted by their location, and companies have access to a wider talent pool. A blended approach of both virtual and in-person can also prepare interns for the real world of work where this way of working is becoming the norm. “Virtual or hybrid internships are a win-win for both intern and employer. It’s also a great lesson in communication, which is key in the professional environment,” says Sumeruk.

Here are the top three benefits of a digital marketing internship:

1. **Essential skills in a highly competitive industry** – most companies today require some sort of digital expert. Job candidates that have real-world experience will have a competitive advantage and be better qualified to fill a digital marketing position.
2. **Intricate knowledge of digital marketing tools** – while tertiary learning and marketing courses provide a good foundation for a career in digital marketing, nothing quite compares to getting practical training with real client projects, while using the latest digital technologies.
3. **Specialisation** – the digital marketing field includes a vast number of roles, and specialists in certain areas can be hard to come by, therefore honing a specific skill set can be especially advantageous for a successful career in the industry.

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