

the tao of
DIGITAL

[digital is the way, and the way is digital]

written by keane angle

FORWARD

This book is the summation of the fundamentals of Digital Marketing. Many metaphors are used in order to make points as relatable as possible to those without interactive marketing experience. This book covers droves of topics and covers these disciplines very broadly. Yet, each point that is made (as simple as it may seem) is absolutely critical to proper planning and execution.

During the writing of this document (March '10 - July '10) I note many commonly accepted principles of Digital. At the core of these fundamentals are underlying threads that will persist throughout time regardless of new technologies or newly accepted best practices. This thread is comprised of five pillars.

These five pillars will never change. They are eternal.

THE FIVE ETERNAL PILLARS OF DIGITAL MARKETING

1. Clearly define objectives
2. Plan logically & always think of the user
2. Take calculated risks
4. Emphasize aesthetics
5. Leverage data when possible

1

The Way is Digital, and Digital is The Way.

2

The Way that can be spoken of is not the eternal Way.

What is will pass and what is to be will come.

The Way is simple and yet, The Way is complex.

The Way is a means to an end and can accomplish great things.

When you do not follow The Way there exists a great void.

Only when you embrace The Way can you see it's true value.

Embrace The Way.

3

Users are The People.

The People rule all and you do not.

What is not done for The People is not done right.

What does not compliment The People is a waste.

If The People cannot accomplish their goals, you cannot accomplish yours.

Respect The People and they will respect you.

4

No strong house was built without a blueprint.

No great sculpture was carved without a sketch.

No prosperous city was created without a plan.

No inspiring song played without being first written.

The Creator must know what it is they need to create.

The Owner must know what it is they are going to own.

Without a plan, there is no destination.

This is the importance of Wireframing.

5

The Cave is the unknown.

When in The Cave, Analytics is your lantern.

Data is used to shed light where there is none.

With Analytics can you see what is invisible.

Paint a picture with no subject.

But the lantern alone cannot move your feet to the exit of The Cave, it can only light the way.

To navigate the unknown safely, you must use a lantern.

6

The Brand is The River and The People are The Water.

The Water makes up The River.

The Water controls the direction and the strength of the currents.

You can swim upstream, but you will tire.

You can let The River take you where it pleases, but you will get lost.

To tame the river, you must navigate it with skill and respect.

To gain skill and respect, you must first respect The Water.

7

Respect The Elders: TV, Print, Radio...

They created the beginnings of The Way.

The Ancients are wise and can be of great use.

Do not turn a blind eye to them.

But, those who trust only them will soon fade like The Elders.

And those who deny their existence lack wisdom.

Respect The Elders, for they too have reach.

8

The Way is filled with new technology.

This Newness is eternal and there will always be Newness.

What is New will be Old, and then there will be more Newness.

Newness is always uncomfortable and unproven.

Newness can be great, and it can destroy.

Like a frozen lake with fish underneath, the Newness can bear great rewards.

But also like the frozen lake, the Newness can be thin and breakable.

Tread lightly when walking on The Newness when searching for its rewards.

9

The Media of The Way is tripartite.

Purchased, Owned and Earned.

Purchased Media is when a lord decides to rent a part of a marketplace that is already built - simple, yet short term.

Owned Media is when a lord decides to build his own marketplace - costly, yet long term.

Earned Media is when The People decide to write songs about the lord - this cannot be bought and must be earned.

Without the approval of The People, the lord will never be great.

Pay attention to all three, for the successful lord cannot live on just one type of Media alone.

10

You wouldn't set sail across the oceans in a freshly made boat without checking for leaks.

There may be a few small ones, but those alone will not sink the ship.

It hastily made mast that breaks at first glance of wind that ruins the voyage.

So goes the story of Quality Assurance.

This cannot be overlooked.

But remember, the strive for perfection is endless.

Instead, settle for just good enough.

Fix the rest after you've weighed anchor.

This way, you can set sail sooner..

11

A city without roads is one that is empty.

A house hidden behind trees is one that is solitary.

A Website not optimized for search engines is one without traffic.

12

If you build it, they will not come.

If you talk about it, some might come.

If you leverage Paid Media, a few more will come.

Those that come naturally are of the most value.

These are the laws of Website Traffic.

13

Everything under the sun has a purpose.

The cat to eat the bird.

The bird to eat the frog.

The frog to eat the mosquito.

To follow the Way means to always act with purpose.

Everything Digital must have a purpose.

Everything Digital must have a reason to be.

This reason should be called an Objective.

14

A good Objective is measurable and quantifiable.

A bad Objective is unmeasurable and unquantifiable.

A good Objective lets you know when something has worked and to what extent.

A bad Objective does not let you know when something has worked.

Always have a good Objective.

Without a good Objective, The Way is unclear.

15

Keep everything to its minimum.

It is during complexity that confusion takes place.

Simple is the path of the Way.

The People will only follow The Way unless it is simple.

Make The Way simple and The People will follow.

16

Without the bee, the flower cannot survive.

There is no such thing as a dull flower, as dull flowers do not attract the bee.

A pretty flower is one that has a good design.

A good design is needed to appear dependable and trustworthy.

It instills trust, and conveys a message of reliability.

Good design is a vital requirement.

Your Website must be a pretty flower and you will live on by attracting the bee.

17

The great painters are the ones who paint.

The great sculptors are the ones who sculpt.

One who cannot paint does not paint well.

One who cannot sculpt does not sculpt well.

Designers are the ones who design.

Let them design.

18

The biggest, fastest boat is not that way by accident.

It was not free or inexpensive.

It was not built in a day.

It was not made by only one person.

Big, fast boats take money, time and people to build.

This is an undeniable fact.

So goes The Way of Digital.

But not all boats are big and fast.

Regardless of size or speed, a boat can sometimes still reach it's destination.

Don't build a big, fast boat when a small one will do just fine.

19

A new blank page is turned daily.

And every day this page is filled with words.

Each new page is a new medium.

Websites, Email, Facebook, SMS.

As soon as one channel is flooded, another one opens.

The cycle is endless.

Media is a natural resource that should be respected.

Those who follow The Way should respect these resources just as they should respect the air we breath or the wather we drink.

20

Take caution when journeying into the Internet.

Deep within the darkness, carnivorous eyes shine bright.

Lions, tigers and bears.

They wait for you to slip.

They wait for you to fail.

They pounce on unsuspecting prey.

Do not underestimate the power of Digg, Reddit and 4chan.

21

The Explorer did not find new lands without setting foot into uncharted territory.

If you do not venture, you will not gain.

When following The Way, you must venture into the unknown.

Those that do will be rewarded.

Those that don't will dine only on leftovers.

If you do not want to venture, study those who do.

But keep in mind, studying is not acting.

And only acting is rewarded.

22

In the days of The Elders, there were only a few paths.

These paths played well with each other and were easy to walk.

Now, there are many paths that make up The Way.

These paths intersect, cross, and intertwine with each other.

Regardless of the number or nature of these paths, they all still lead to a destination.

Some paths are shorter than others.

Some paths are easier to traverse than others.

Some paths are too long and people turn back.

But the paths you pave must all lead to a planned destination.

You do not build a path for the sake of building a path.

23

People have always talked about Media.

This is nothing new.

People have always talked about Brands.

This is nothing new.

Brands have always talked to People.

This is nothing new.

Technology has enabled what has always been happening to be seen and heard by everyone.

It's just happening faster now.

Social Marketing is not a new or revolutionary concept.

Stop freaking out and listen, then talk back.

24

Technologies come and technologies go.

Just as tides rise and tides fall.

MySpace came and MySpace went.

Facebook came and so did Twitter.

In time, they too will go and another will rise.

Enjoy the waves that the tides bring.

Eventually these waves will die down as the tide recedes.

When this happens, just wait for the next tide to come in.

But rest assured, it will come.

25

To the insane hermit who speaks a language no one can understand, the hermit is a genius - but only to himself.

Speak of The Way so that all can understand.

Or else you too, shall be like the hermit.

26

Humans created huts to shelter themselves from the elements.

Humans sharpened spears to hunt their food.

Humans forged metal in fire to create tools.

Humans imagined the engine to allow them to power massive machines.

Humans create technology to solve problems.

The Internet solves problems - it is no different than any other technology.

Use the Internet to solve problems.

27

Before, people had fewer connections with each other.

Fewer connections means fewer conversations.

Fewer conversations means fewer ideas are exchanged.

Today, people have more connections than ever before.

More connections than ever before means more conversations than ever before.

More conversations means more ideas are exchanged.

Now, everyone is an influencer and every is influenced.

28

When the Caveman is hungry, they hunt for food.

Your Website could be food.

To be found during that hunt means that your Website is what the Caveman needed.

Be found during the hunt.

This can be easily accomplished with Search Engine Marketing.

29

Two brains are better than one.

So three brains must be better than two.

And ten brains must be better than three.

And a hundred brains must be better than ten.

And a thousand brains must be better than a hundred.

By creating a common goal and vision for these brains to work towards, you can accomplish great things.

This is known as crowdsourcing.

30

Before, the golden rule was what was lived by: he who has the gold makes the rules.

Today, the rules are made by the People.

Once the rules are made by the People, it is very hard to turn back.

Accept that the rules are made by the People, and the People will sing songs of praise.

31

The core of any strategy in war is to exploit your enemy's weakness.

What your most vicious competitor does poorly, do unimaginably well.

The Way is no different.

32

A million impressions is about as useful as simply walking by one million people.

The People will not see you.

Even if they do, your memory will soon fade.

To be remembered means that the People must spend time with you.

Focus on engagement not impressions.

33

If you'd like a fish to swim to one single destination, build a funnel to lead them there.

If you'd like a Person to reach one single destination, build a Conversion Funnel to lead them there.

Like the funnel for the fish, this Conversion Funnel should have a wide opening and only one way out.

A Funnel with holes is a useless Funnel.

Do not distract from the Funnel by offering other ways out.

34

You do not know how to make the best User Experience.

You can guess, but you do not know.

The User doesn't know either.

Listen to and watch their clicks, not their words.

Use tools to shed light on how People navigate.

Always be improving.

35

Participate in The Conversation just like you would participate at a party.

You wouldn't ignore someone talking to you.

You wouldn't take 24 hours to respond to someone.

You wouldn't shout out one-liners about how great you are.

You wouldn't go around trying to sell things to people you didn't know.

Social Marketing should literally be a conversation.

36

An integrated idea does not mean using the same tagline on your website as you do at your events.

It does not mean that your Interactive team goes off to think on their own about the idea.

It means take the People through a journey that spans both the online and offline worlds.

There, and back again.

This is the only Way.

37

Don't ever have a flash intro.

If the salvation of the world depends on it, don't have a loading screen for it.

If the salvation of the universe depends on that, then have a skip button.

Or a little game to play.

Or just don't do it in the first place...

38

You do not know everything.

Use an expert when needed.

Experts do not know everything.

Use an A/B test whenever possible.

39

There are three truths in this world:

Death.

Taxes.

Banner Blindness.

No one looks at banners.

No one looks at anything that even remotely resembles a banner.

Use other mediums before banners.

40

In order to build a house, you must lay the foundation.

Before the painting can be hung, the wall must be built.

Before the yard decorated, the paths must be laid.

In order to embellish an environment, you need to have the foundation laid.

Master the basics of The Way before relying on completely uncharted territories to save your business.

41

Marketers talk to themselves a lot.

They think they know, but they have no idea.

They concept things that make all the sense in the world.

They pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to have those things made.

They pay millions to have The People know about them.

But sometimes they overlook the most basic of errors.

Sometimes those errors cost a brand severely.

42

Every Brand should have their own Way.

This Way allows them to converse with The People online in a way that's consistent.

This Way of Conversing is called a Social Mission.

A Social Mission is simple, one sentence long, and can be comprehended by the average person off the street.

Give your Brand a Mission.

43

A bad review is infinitely more valuable than a good review.
Learn from bad reviews.

44

Spam doesn't work - stop doing it.

45

The Conversion is the most important part of The Way.

“Liking” a brand is a conversion.

Downloading a coupon is a conversion.

Entering an email address is a conversion.

Attending an offline event coming from the online world is a conversion.

“Drive to online” does nothing.

Drive to conversion does everything.

46

The importance of The Conversion does not lie in the click of a “Submit” button.

The importance lies in what happens next.

The next email.

The next update.

The next event.

This series of Person to Brand interactions is called a Consumer Journey or User Experience or Conversational Marketing.

Whatever the name is, focus on it you must.

47

Sometimes, a Person or a group of People will really like what your brand is doing.

These People will tell many people about what you are doing.

They will buy your product all the time.

They will tell other People to buy your product all the time.

Treat them better than your spouse.

Buy them “two tickets to that thing you love” in the words of the Old Spice guy.

Reward them, for your biggest fans do more for your brand than even the best media performance.

48

If you haven't done something before, odds are, someone might have already done it.

Study those who have already taken chances.

Learn from their mistakes.

Learn from their successes.

Innovate where possible.

The unseasoned Warrior that plunges first into battle rarely emerges victorious.

49

Design around objectives, not design elements.

A poster that has a primary objective to drive email opt-in should place emphasis first and foremost on driving email opt-ins.

Placing a small URL at the bottom of a call-to-action poster will not do anything.

Even if your call-to-action is gigantic, People still might not do anything.

50

Context and Content are king.

A joke is not funny if no one can hear it.

A joke is not funny if the mood is not right.

Make sure the mood is right and that People can hear you before you tell your joke.

This is the best way to ensure People laugh.

The exact same rules apply to The Way.

KEANE ANGLE

is a digital integration strategist at a full service ad agency in CT.

keaneangle.com

keane.angle@gmail.com

twitter: [@keaneangle](https://twitter.com/keaneangle)