Building Small Business Resilience:
Digital Marketing Prototype

FINAL REPORT 2023

Table of Contents

Future Skills Centre Centre des **Compétences futures**

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Stage 1: Program Design

'Building Small Business Resilience' Digital Marketing Training Program
Stage 1: Program Design

This is the first report from our research project: 'Building Small Business Resilience' (BSBR) Digital Marketing Training Program. It summarizes the findings from the first stage of the research: Program Design, which aims to investigate the needs and challenges of underrepresented small business owners to grow their businesses online. The findings from this stage will inform the development of the BSBR Digital Marketing Training Prototype in the Stage 2 of the research project.

Background
As the COVID-19 pandemic plunged the global economy into worst recession since World War II [1], under-represented businesses were amongst the hardest hit due to their existing financial fragility and poor economic health [2]. As businesses have been forced to pivot online, owners have faced the need to quickly upskill their digital marketing capabilities. The BSBR Digital Marketing Training Prototype will be specifically designed to address vital skill gaps and build resilience amongst underrepresented small business owners to prepare them to face any future economic shock or disruption.

Objectives
The project aims to:
- Increase equitable, diverse and inclusive participation in small business sectors
- Develop optimal training courses and tools to bridge digital marketing skill gaps for small business owners
- Develop and enhance other training programs in adult education, experiential learning, and digital marketing as we learn from the research data

Expected Outcome
For the short-term outcome at the end of the training program, participants are expected to be able to develop and execute a digital marketing campaign plan that is applicable to their own businesses and customer bases; identify elements of success and failures; and make necessary changes to optimize results.

For the long-term outcomes, participants are expected to successfully apply the knowledge and skills from the BSBR program, pivot their businesses online and increase their revenues and resilience against any future economic disruption. More successful underrepresented owners will experience more equitable, diverse and inclusive participation in small business sectors.

The training prototype is expected to be developed into programs offered by Sheridan College of Learning and Advanced Technology. Learning gained from the project will be applied to the development of other digital marketing programs in the Pilon School of Business, Faculty of Continuing and Professional Studies and EDGE Entrepreneur hub at Sheridan College.

Research Process
There are 5 stages of the research:
Stage 1: Program Design
Stage 2: Program Development
Stage 3: Alpha Testing
Stage 4: Beta Testing
Stage 5: Program Evaluation

This report covers Stage 1: Program Design.

1.2 Online Discussion Board

After analysing the questionnaire data, we invited 51 business owners to participate in an online discussion board and a focus group discussion.

Prior to the group discussion, we asked participants to answer three questions on the online discussion boards using the online discussion board, Padlet[1]. These questions were designed to guide later group discussion.

- What are the main problems or failures with your online marketing activities?
- What are the skills that are needed most in your business?
- What types of training program will give you the best chance to succeed?

Group 1

Group 2

Group 3

Group 4

Group 5

1.3 Focus Group Discussion

Twenty-six business owners participated in one of the five Focus Group Discussions. A 90-minute online discussion was designed to further explore their skill gaps, barriers, needs, and expectations of the training program.

There were two main areas we focussed on:

- **What to include in the training:** in this section, we asked participants to discuss their business needs and skill gaps in more detail with the following guiding questions:

_____

[1] https://padlet.com/dashboard

- o From your experience, what are the main problems and failures you have had with your online marketing activities?
- o From the digital marketing skills listed in the survey questions you completed earlier, please discuss the skills are important and needed most in your business.
- o What are your expectations after completing the 12-week program?

- **How to offer the training:** in this section, we asked participants to brainstorm ideas for training delivery with the following guiding questions:
  - o With the intensive nature of the program which you will undertake while running your business full time, what types of delivery will give you the best chance to succeed?
  - o How can the program help you apply your learning specifically to your business?

2. Data Analysis

2.1 Owner profile

From the online survey with 153 participants, the majority identified themselves as women, immigrant, and racialized peoples, whose employees are also women, immigrant, and racialized peoples. Their median age is 43 years old. English is their first language. They are highly educated with 58% having a bachelor's degree or higher, and 19% having a diploma. They also have high computer literacy with 81% rating themselves as intermediate or advanced level in Microsoft Office.
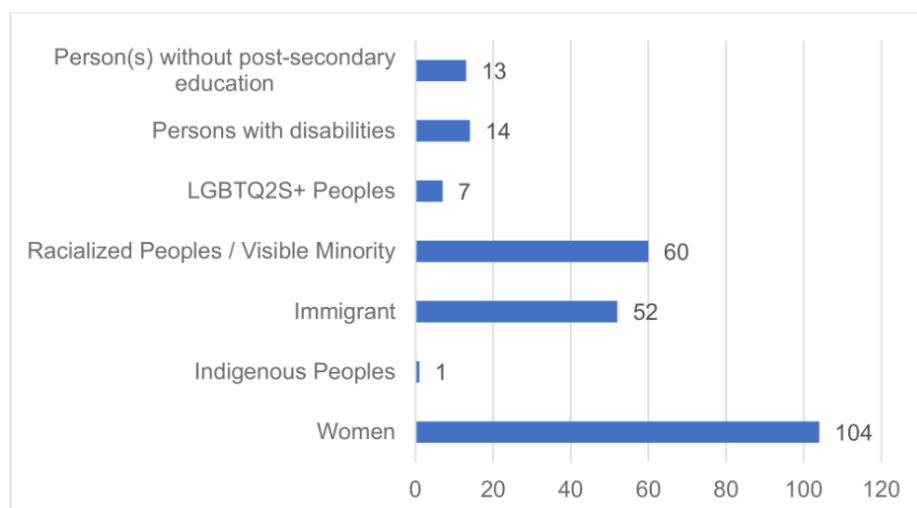
Figure 1: Participants' profile

2.2 Business profile

Almost all of the businesses (97%) are based in Ontario and the majority are from Arts; Educational Services; Health Care and Social Assistance; Professional, Scientific and Technical Services; and Retail industry sectors. Their current customers are based locally or in the same province, but they are looking to expand their customer base nationally and internationally.

Their revenue has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. 77% of the businesses experienced a negative growth in their annual revenue with an average of 58% reduction. The rest had a positive revenue growth of around 162%.

Figure 2: Participants' businesses by industry sector

2.3 Digital profile

The online survey participants are relatively new to digital marketing. On average, they have been operating a business website for 3.5 years, a blog for 0.8 year and an e-commerce site for 1 year. Regarding social media, they have been active on Facebook for 2.6 years, Instagram for 2.4 years, Twitter for 1.4 years, LinkedIn for 1.7 years, YouTube for 0.8 year and email marketing for 2.3 years.

They have a low level of online activities with an average of 2 updates per month. Most frequent updates are on Instagram 6.9 times and Facebook 4.6 times a month. Consequently, their online reach is low with an average 1,126 pageviews, 1,257 Instagram followers, and 427 email subscribers.
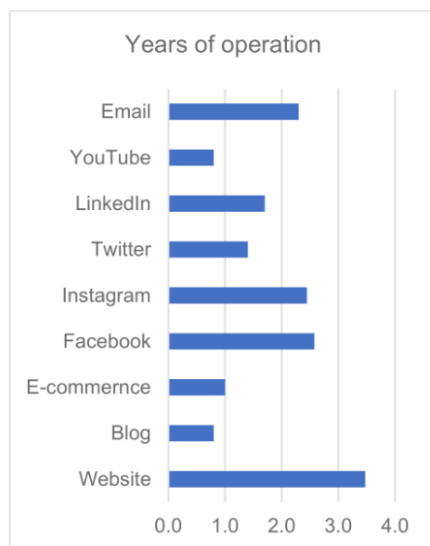
Figure 3: Number of years a business has operated their digital media

Figure 4: Number of media updates a business perform each month
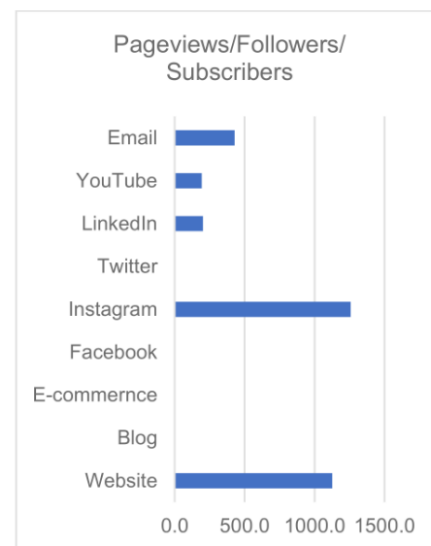
Figure 5: Number of audiences a business has reached through their channels

38% did not engage in any forms of online advertising. For those who did, Facebook and Instagram advertising were preferred (25%) followed by Google advertising (12%). For non-digital promotion activities, word of mouth was the most popular (65%), followed by store signage (16%), flyers (14%), and direct mail (11%).

2.4 Digital knowledge and skills

From the online survey, participants ranked social media marketing as knowledge and skills most important for their business, followed by content marketing, and digital strategy. They ranked influencer marketing and graphic design as least important.

Figure 6: Participants' ranking of digital marketing knowledge and skills that are important for their business
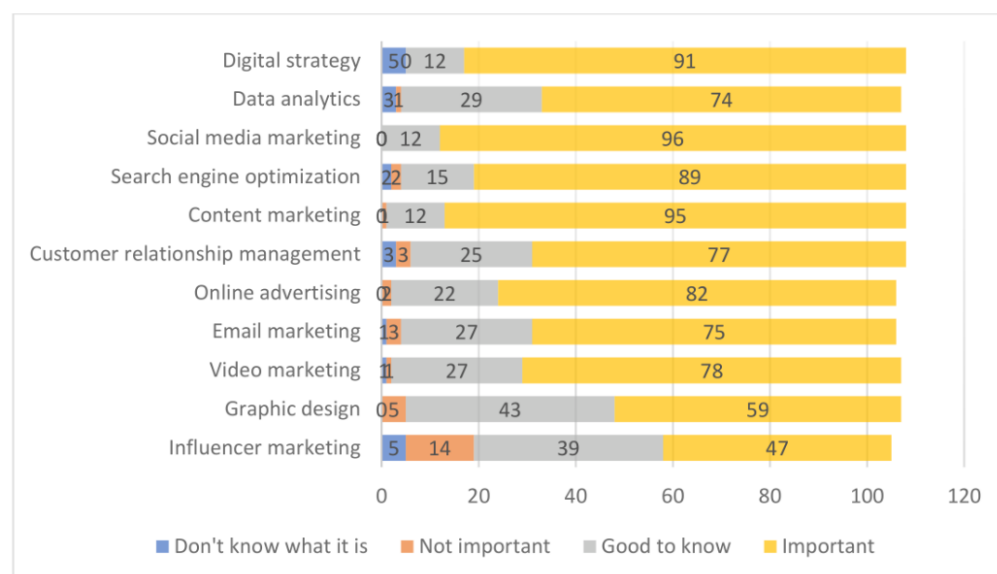
Participants rated themselves mostly as beginners in all aspects of digital marketing with more intermediate skills and knowledge in social media marketing and content marketing.
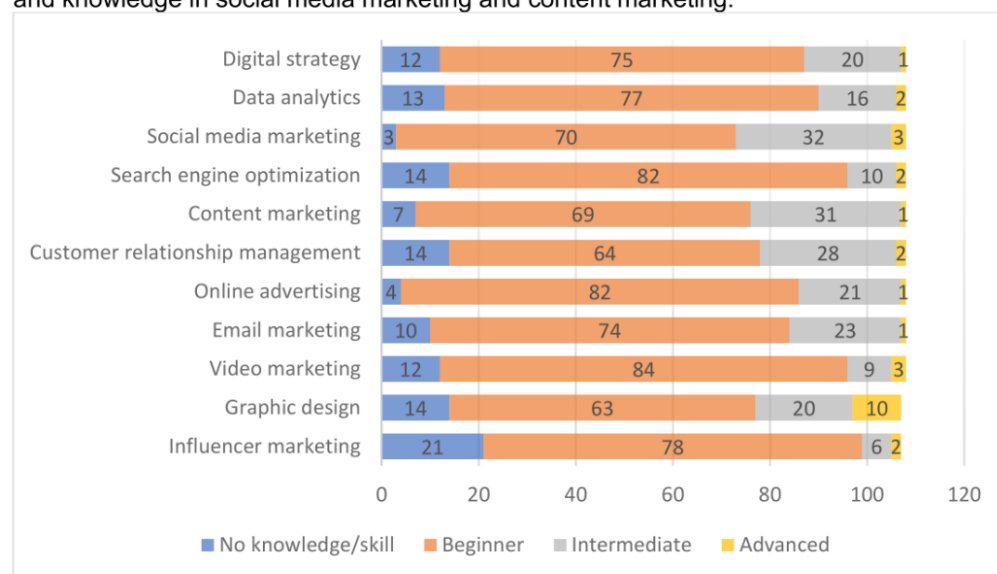

Figure 7: Participants' self-ranking knowledge and skills in digital marketing

After the online survey, 26 underrepresented small business owners participated in online discussion board and focus group discussion. We asked participants to further identify the knowledge and skills needed in their business and perceived gaps in their current skill set. We understood that some participants may not know what they did not know and therefore not be able to identify or articulate their needs. We overcame this by asking them to identify the issues their businesses were facing, we then diagnosed potential causes of these issues and skills needed to fix them.

Participants' feedback was tagged and grouped into learning paths, topics and elements (See Appendix 1), which will form the learning outcomes of the training program.

The learning paths and topics that emerged as priorities with the most comments are:
- Implementation and tactics: Technical how-to information (24% of the comments)
  Participants would like DIY information on how to implement the tactics themselves.

- Strategy and Planning: Overall planning (16% of the comments)
  Participants need help formulate overall marketing strategy and plans that are purposeful, focused and result driven.

- Strategy and Planning: Sales funnel and customer relationship management (12% of the comments)
  Participants have problems finding new customers, converting leads (social followers or email subscribers) to customers, and retaining existing customers.

- Strategy and Planning: Target market, target audience and persona (11% of the comments)
  Participants would like to know who their customers are, where to find them and how to engage with them.

- Strategy and Planning: Unique selling proposition (USP) and value proposition (10% of the comments)
  Participants have difficulties creating promotional messages, and developing content and stories around the messages.

2.5 Program delivery

From the online survey, participants preferred the training program to be delivered online (65%) over hybrid (20%) and face-to-face (15%) with the recommended class length to be 2.1 hours and the proposed frequency of 2.6 classes per week.

From the online discussion board and focus group discussion, participants voted for 1.5 to 2 hours, twice a week as their preferred class length and frequency. Weekday morning sessions (39%) are preferred over lunch (19%), evenings (17%) and Saturdays (12%) or Sundays (13%).

To give them the best chance to succeed, participants suggested the program should:
- Be flexible: offering alternative class times, video tutorials or recorded sessions for those who miss the class
- Be hands-on: explaining the concepts, showing real and relevant case studies and examples, and working on assignments that are related to their own businesses
- Be result-oriented: if participants can see results or progress, they will be more motivated to continue
- Be accountable: sharing and commenting on each other's work, learning from each other's mistakes
- Include coaching time: one-on-one or group sessions after class to help with homework and catch up with lessons
- Offer technical support: especially when using software
- Have learning resource available prior to class so participants can study in advance and use the class to discuss issues
- Include resources like planners, workbooks, tools, and systems to help complete assignments
- Have a peer-support system: class buddy, groups of similar businesses to help and encourage each other and networking opportunity
- Encourage to experiment and not be afraid or worried about failing
- Provide participants with constructive feedback from mentors and peers

3. Next Step
The first stage of the research project, Program Design, is completed. We are ready to progress to the next stage, Program Development. The research findings and insights from our participants and their learning needs will provide guidance and directions to develop our first training prototype, which will be launched in September 2021.

Appendix 1: Learning paths, topics and elements

Below is some of participants' feedback, which was tagged and grouped into learning paths and topics, and learning elements.

Participants' feedback	Learning paths and topics	Learning elements
Strategy and Planning		
• Unsure of where to start with some things, or where to best focus my energy as there are so many options and so many of the are constantly changing and evolving • How to tie together in a focused approach • Better understanding of the marketing strategy • What we have to offer is sometimes overwhelming. Not sure where to focus and when • Overwhelmed by everything and find it hard to prioritize/implement any kind of growth strategy • Increase my revenue	Overall planning	• Business strategy • Marketing strategy • Business plan • Marketing plan • Marketing campaign plan • Strategy formation process
• Promoting & competitors • Keeping up with technology • Having clients see the difference between us and our competitors	Environmental scan	• Monitor external environment • Conduct environmental and competitive analysis for strategy formulation
• Can't analyze my target market properly • How to form connection - targeting my potential customer • Finding and reaching the right target market • Not reachable to targeted audience • Targeting more niche audiences	Target market, target audience and persona	• Market segmentation • Identify target markets • Choose target audience for each campaign • Research and empathize with the persona
• Getting more people to like the page organically • Creating compelling storytelling and content • Content creation difficulties • Targeted messaging, making the value clear • Identifying the right messaging • Not being able to generate relevant content according to the target market	Unique selling proposition (USP) and value proposition	• Develop USP and value proposition for each target audience • Content marketing • Content ideas • Pillar and micro content • Cluster content
• Keep speaking to our current clients. Need new ones • How to get more customers into my email list • Not generate enough engagement/leads • Difficult to move to a call-to-action	Sales funnel, customer journey, customer relationship management	• Lead generation • Lead nurturing • Customer conversion • Customer loyalty • Advocates: online recruitment of new clients from existing Word of Mouth approach

• Onboarding and Customer Retention • Got leads but the conversion to sales was difficult • Primary Word of Mouth, need to move away • Awareness is not sales • Have emails but don't know what to do with them		
• Align the marketing strategy tighter with business goals • Tangible ROI • KPIs - understanding metrics • Want to have more strategic goals that are well informed given my type of business	Goals, objectives and KPIs	• Business goals • Marketing objectives • Key performance indicators (KPIs) • Return on investment (ROI) • Align and use them for planning and evaluation
Implementation and Tactics		
• Lack of education on how to use the tools • Become self sufficient at building and maintaining my digital channels • Tried FB ads, very overwhelming and expensive • Lack of knowledge of the technology and how to use it to my advantage • Have one Landing page – no CTA • How to optimize SEO • SEO - keep up with the Google Algorithm • Lack of technical knowledge • Want to do some of the work myself in-house	Technical how-to	**Software mentioned:** • Website: WordPress, WIX • Social: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube • E-commerce: WooCommerce, Square, Shopify, Google ads, Google My Business, Etsy • SEO: SEMrush • CRM: Salesforce, HubSpot, Party Center • Advertising: Facebook, Google, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest • Email: MailChimp **Tactics mentioned:** • SEO • Web Landing Page • Mobile marketing
• Which social channels to choose to find my customers • Understanding the different platforms for advertisements • Where is the best place for results? • Done ads on LinkedIn. The clicks were not very high • Google ads – did not see ROI	Best practices, ideas, tips, and tricks	• Choose the right channels for the target audience • Develop the right content for the target audience • Link strategy to tactics: awareness, engagement and conversion • Link tactics to KPIs
• Time management for regular tasks like posting • Limited time, not consistent effort • Marketing activities are time consuming • The hardest part is the lack of time • Trying to get the valuable time for marketing, need results • How often to post on social media?	Time management	• Set up and manage campaign calendar and yearly marketing calendar • Link time management to KPIs and ROI

• A daily routine that will help build business		
• Where best to spend my marketing dollars • What an appropriate budget should be for advertising	Budget management	• Set up and mange marketing budget • Allocation for ad spend • Link budget to KPIs and ROI
• Had others do social media, and they do not follow the brand guide • Able to better direct others and knowing what they are doing. • Do yourself vs handing off to others • Had an agency – but low ROI and quality • Total control. Be able to know what the agencies are doing • Delegating can be challenging	Outsourcing	• Hiring staff, freelancers, agencies • Delegating tasks • Project briefing • Performance monitoring and evaluation • Link performance to KPIs and ROI
Evaluation and Analytics		
• Hard to measure the results • Concrete steps how to create reports and analytics to see trends • Learn about Google Analytics	Technical how-to	• Data collection
• Have Google Analytics but what to do with it • How to analyze the data/campaign evaluation • Experimenting without understanding • Not sure how the advertising did not work • How to use the analytics relative to adjustments • How to read the results and do better	Evaluate data	• Data analysis • Data interpretation • Translate analytics to actions: lesson learned, what's next

Reference

[1] The World Bank (June, 2020). *COVID-19 to Plunge Global Economy into Worst Recession since World War II.* Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/08/covid-19-to-plunge-global-economy-into-worst-recession-since-world-war-ii

[2] Canadian Women's Chamber of Commerce (CWCC). (May 2020). *Falling Through the Cracks: Immediate Needs of Canada's Underrepresented Founders.* Retrieved from https://canwcc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Falling-through-the-Cracks_CanWCC_May2020v19.pdf

Stage 2: Program Development

'Building Small Business Resilience' Digital Marketing Training Program
Stage 2: Program Development

This is the second report from our research project: 'Building Small Business Resilience' (BSBR) Digital Marketing Training Program. It summarizes the development of the Alpha Training Prototype, the first iteration of the training program. The Alpha Training Prototype is designed to be a 12-week training program to bridge digital marketing skill gaps for underrepresented small business owners, and support them to pivot and grow their businesses online.

This Alpha Training Prototype will be tested with the first cohort of training participants in Stage 3 of the research project.

Background
As the COVID-19 pandemic plunged the global economy into the worst recession since World War II [1], under-represented businesses were amongst the hardest hit due to their existing financial fragility and poor economic health [2]. As businesses have been forced to pivot online, owners have been faced the need to quickly upskill their digital marketing capabilities. The BSBR Digital Marketing Training Prototype will be specifically designed to address vital skill gaps and build resilience amongst underrepresented small business owners to prepare them to face any future economic shock or disruption.

Objectives
The project aims to:
- Increase equitable, diverse and inclusive participation in small business sectors
- Develop optimal training courses and tools to bridge digital marketing skill gaps for small business owners
- Develop and enhance other training programs in adult education, experiential learning, and digital marketing as we learn from the research data

Expected Outcomes
For the short-term outcome at the end of the training program, participants are expected to be able to develop and execute a digital marketing campaign plan applicable to their own businesses and customer base; identify elements of successes and failures; and make necessary changes to optimize the results.

For the long-term outcomes, participants are expected to successfully apply their knowledge and skills gained from the BSBR program, pivot their businesses online and increase their revenues and resilience against any future economic disruption. More successful underrepresented owners will experience more equitable, diverse and inclusive participation in small business sectors.

The training prototype is expected to be developed into programs offered by Sheridan College. Learning gained from the project will be applied to the development of other digital marketing programs in the Pilon School of Business, Faculty of Continuing and Professional Studies and EDGE Entrepreneur Hub at Sheridan College.

Research Process
There are 5 stages of research:
Stage 1: Program Design
Stage 2: Program Development
Stage 3: Alpha Testing
Stage 4: Beta Testing
Stage 5: Program Evaluation

This report covers Stage 2: Program Development.

Stage 2: Program Development

The goal of the second stage of the research, Program Development, aims to design and develop a 12-week training program specifically for underrepresented small business owners to help them pivot and grow their businesses online.

We used the findings from the first stage which included online surveys, online discussion boards, and focus group discussions to understand our participants and their needs to develop a customised training program that is relevant and responsive to their businesses.

1. Who are the participants?

Photo by Keira Burton from Pexels   Photos by Etsy

Participant Persona

Zara
- Zara is a 43-year-old woman, Canadian born with a Malaysian heritage. She speaks English as a first language
- She has a Bachelor's Degree in Commerce and a high level of computer literacy
- Zara has been running her business in Hamilton, Ontario for 3 years. Her business, Hamilton Stitches, sells hand embroidery kits and supplies as well as offers embroidery classes. Her current customers are mostly in Hamilton.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, her business experienced negative growth with a 58% reduction in sales revenue as her brick-and-mortar shop was closed during the lockdown. Zara started an e-commerce store about a year ago and would like to expand it to reach customers nationally.
- Zara is still new to digital marketing. Her website was created three years ago but it is more like an online brochure and consists of 3-4 webpages. She started using Facebook two years ago, posting about new classes and new product arrivals about twice a month whenever she could find the time.
- Most of her customers come from word of mouth and passerby. She does not engage in any offline or online advertising.

After 3 years of operation with proven revenue generation, Hamilton Stitches has survived the concept stage and demonstrated that it is a viable business entity. Zara has successfully built a customer base using her brick-and-mortar store presence and traditional word of mouth recommendations. Her customer base is confined within her local community.

The pandemic forced Zara to adopt e-commerce very quickly without having the necessary skills and resources to navigate and capitalize the online market. As a solo entrepreneur, she wears many hats with endless to-do lists, and always runs behind schedule. Zara always searches for new ideas. She improvises and makes up her plans as she goes. She tries out different ideas but is never quite sure which one works. As a result, her online marketing attempts are sporadic and uncoordinated. She would like help planning a cohesive, long-term strategy as well as executing day-to-day tactics with a strong ROI to justify her marketing efforts.

2. What to include in the training

To determine the content of the training program, we use the backward design approach [3], which is a goal-based framework for curriculum development.

2.1 Identify learning outcomes

The first step in the backward design process is to determine the desired goals or learning outcomes, which are the knowledge and skills learners should have acquired when they finish the program.

Our short-term goal at the end of the training program is for Zara to develop (THINK) and execute (DO) a digital marketing campaign plan that is applicable to her own businesses and customer bases; identify elements of success and failures (MEASURE); and make necessary changes (ADAPT) to optimize results. Our long-term goal is for Zara to successfully apply the knowledge and skills to increase her revenues and become resilient against any future economic disruptions.
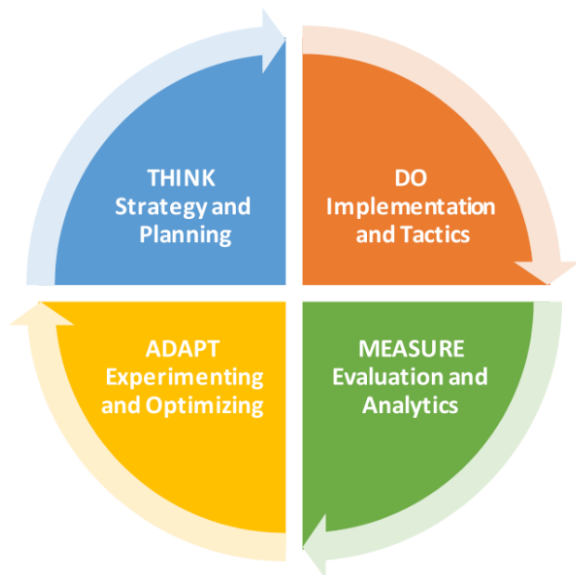
Big Idea: DIY Continuous Improvement Process

The big idea is for Zara to become self-reliant in digital marketing by teaching her DIY (do-it-yourself) skills so she can continue to plan and execute digital marketing activities, and improve the results by herself.

Once she masters these skills, she can keep experimenting and adapting her marketing efforts to grow her business. Ultimately, her adaptability will protect her business against any future disruption.

We break down the goal into 4 learning outcomes (LO) following the sequence of a marketing process:

LO#1 - THINK: Strategy and Planning
Develop marketing strategy and create a cohesive plan

LO#2 - DO: Implementation and Tactics
Execute the plan using suitable digital tactics

LO#3 - MESAURE: Evaluation and Analytics
Assess the performance using data

LO#4 – ADAPT: Experimenting and Optimizing
Learn from past results to keep improving

We chose to adopt a marketing campaign as the learning conduit as it covers critical marketing concepts and offers an opportunity to practice the whole marketing process within a short timeframe.

Training paths, topics and elements
From the research findings, participants' feedback was tagged and grouped into learning paths, topics, and elements, then aligned with learning outcomes.

Learning priority
Learning priority determines how important each element is to the learning outcomes and how extensive it should be covered. It can be categorised into 3 levels:
- Good to know (G): learners should be introduced and familiarized with these concepts.
- Important to know (I): learners should understand these concepts.
- Critical to know (C): learners should understand and be able to apply these concepts. They are essential to successful learning outcome.

Learning Outcome (LO)	Learning paths and topics	Learning elements	Learning Priority
Strategy and Planning **LO#1:** Develop a digital marketing campaign plan	Overall planning (16% of the comments)	Understand business strategy	G
		Understand marketing strategy	I
		Understand business plan	G
		Understand marketing plan	I
		Create marketing campaign plan	C
		Develop marketing campaign strategy	C
	Environmental scan	Understand external environment	I
		Conduct competitive analysis	C
	Target market, target audience and persona (11% of the comments)	Understand market segmentation	I
		Identify target markets	I
		Choose the right target audience for each campaign	C
		Research and empathize with the persona	C
	Unique selling proposition (USP) and value proposition (10% of the comments)	Develop USP/value proposition for each target audience	C
		Understand content marketing	C
		Generate content ideas	C
		Create pillar and micro content	C
		Understand cluster content	I
	Sales funnel, customer journey, customer relationship management (12% of the comments)	Generate online leads: lead generation	C
		Convert word of mouth to online recruitment	C
		Build online relationship: lead nurturing	C
		Convert leads to purchases: customer conversion	C
		Develop long-term relationship: customer loyalty	I

	Goals, objectives and KPIs	Understand business goals	C
		Create marketing objectives	C
		Specify Key performance indicators (KPIs)	C
		Understand Return on investment (ROI)	I
		Align objectives and KPIs for planning and evaluation	C
Implementation and Tactics **LO#2:** Execute digital marketing tactics	Technical how-to • SEO • E-Commerce • Online Advertising • Email Marketing • CRM (24% of the comments)	Search Engine Optimization (SEO) • Create a campaign landing webpage • Optimize webpages Software demonstration • WordPress + Yoast • SEMrush or other analytics software	C
		E-commerce: • Optimize product description Software demonstration • Amazon • WooCommerce	C
		Online Advertising • Create online ads • Testing, measure and evaluate performance • Allocation for ad spend Software demonstration • Facebook/Instagram • Google	C
		Email Marketing • Understand list segmentation • Use A/B Testing Software demonstration • HubSpot	C
		Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Software demonstration • HubSpot	I
		Earned media • Public and media relations • Link building • Influencer marketing • Google My Business	G
	Best practices, ideas, tips, and tricks	Choose the right channels for the target audience	C
		Develop the right content for the target audience	C
		Link strategy to tactics	C

	Time management	Create a campaign calendar	C
		Create a yearly marketing calendar	I
		Link time management to KPIs and ROI	I
	Budget management	Set up and mange marketing budget	I
		Link budget to KPIs and ROI	I
	Outsourcing	Hire staff, freelancers, agencies	G
		Project briefing / delegate tasks	G
		Performance monitoring and evaluation: KPI and ROI	G
Evaluation and Analytics **LO#3:** Evaluate the campaign results	Technical how-to • Data Collection • Data Analysis	Collect data from digital channels	C
		Analyze and interpret the results	C
		Link results to KPIs and ROI	I
Experimenting and Optimizing **LO#4:** Learn and adapt the plan, strategy or tactics	Adapting and continuous improvement	Develop an action plan from the results	C

2.2 Determine evidence of learning

We plan to evaluate if Zara has achieved the Big Idea's learning outcomes by asking her to perform tasks, analyze the results and make recommendations for improvement. She then will be asked to adjust her work, and analyze the results again. This learning experience will guide her through the full cycle of the DIY Continuous Improvement Process.

Learning Outcomes	Performance Tasks and Evidence of Learning
LO#1 - THINK: Strategy and Planning Develop marketing strategy and create a cohesive plan	• Create a 4-week digital marketing campaign plan for her business
LO#2 - DO: Implementation and Tactics Execute the plan using suitable digital tactics	To promote her campaign, Zara will: • Create a campaign landing webpage on her website To drive traffic to her webpage, Zara will: • Create social media posts • Create email blast • Create online advertisements • Identify influencers, media and public relations, and link building opportunities
LO#3 - MESAURE: Evaluation and Analytics Assess the performance using data	• Compile a data analytics report on the performance of her campaign webpage, website, social media, and online advertisements
LO#4 – ADAPT: Experimenting and Optimizing Learn from past results to keep improving	After 2 weeks of campaign launch, Zara will • Analyze the data • Adjust her tactics: social media posts, email blast and online advertisements • Compile a follow-up weekly data analytics report on the performance

The evaluation will be done by instructors and participants (peer-reviewed).

2.3 Plan learning experience

	Learning Outcomes	Key Learning Events and Activities
Week 0		**Pre-training Activities** Zara will be provided with an audit report on her digital performance. This will form part of her SWOT analysis, and subsequently campaign strategy and plan. The Program Workbook will also be available prior to the program start. Zara will be encouraged to start working on the Workbook and answer as many questions as she can.
Week 1-4	**LO#1 - THINK:** Strategy and Planning Develop marketing strategy and create a cohesive plan	**Instructor-led Lectures and Workshops** Lectures includes explanation of underpinning theoretical concepts and samples, and using participants' businesses as case studies. Zara will be guided through a series of questions and activities on the Workbook, which will help her formulate her campaign plan.
Week 5-9	**LO#2 - DO:** Implementation and Tactics Execute the plan using suitable digital tactics	**Participant-led Lectures and Workshops** Zara and other participants are invited to share technical how-to tips with the class.

		Show and Tell Zara and other participants are encouraged to give each other feedback on their tactics: webpage, social posts, e-commerce, online ads, influencers, inbound links and email.
Week 10	**LO#3 - MEASURE:** Evaluation and Analytics Assess the performance using data	**Instructor-led Workshops** Zara will use the Workbook to record her results and answers questions, which are designed to help her reflect on her campaign results.
Week 11-12	**LO#4 – ADAPT:** Experimenting and Optimizing Learn from past results to keep improving	**Show and Tell** Zara and other participants share their lessons learned and ideas to better their results.

3. How to offer the training

The BSBR training program is designed following the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines, underpinned by the adult learning principles and the experiential learning approach.

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines [4] [5] is a framework to optimize learning experience for all learners by identifying design elements that provide the greatest access for the range of learners in any setting. Its premise is that when we design for particular accessibility needs, all learners benefit. The UDL Guidelines advocate that learners should be provided with multiple means of engagement (the why of learning), multiple means of representation (the what of learning), and multiple means of action and expression (the how of learning).

Adult learning principles [6] recommend that adult learners who are self-directed, should be encouraged to take charge of the content and process of their learning. Their prior knowledge and life experience should be capitalized and built upon with the learning of new concepts. Adult learners are intrinsically motivated by practical, problem-solving content that is directly relevant and applicable to their work or life. They are also result-oriented, so they tend to move quickly from theory to application.

According to Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (ELM) [7], to develop new knowledge and skills, learners must learn by immersing themselves in an active, hands-on experience; reflecting on that experience; concluding and conceptualizing the experience; and then engaging in experimentation by trying out the newly gained knowledge and skills.

The BSBR Digital Training Program will be delivered online over 12 weeks. The online mode is chosen not only to comply with the COVID-19 health regulations, but also to accommodate participants' busy schedules. The main advantages of online learning are flexibility and convenience. Participants can join the class in the convenience of their own space with no travel time. However, it is harder to focus and engage with instructors and other learners virtually, which could leave learners to feel isolated and unmotivated. Therefore, the program is designed with frequent touchpoints, offering multiple contact opportunities and channels for participants to engage with instructors, support staff and each other.

Each week, there will be two lecture sessions and one workshop session with ongoing support throughout the program period.

3.1 Lectures
There will be two lecture sessions per week. Some of the sessions will be elective, allowing participants to choose the sessions that are relevant to their businesses. The mandatory sessions provide crucial learning components, which will be scaffolded to create a learning path to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Each session could consist of 1.5 hours, which could be divided to:
- **Introduction** (5-10 minutes)
  This section is allocated to greetings and introducing the class agenda as well as recapping and answering questions on the last class's topic.

- **Lecture** (40-50 minutes)
  The lecture section could be instructor-led, participant-led or a combination of both. This section will be recorded to provide an asynchronous learning mode for participants to learn on their own time.

  An instructor-led lecture aims to provide participants with theoretical and conceptual foundations on a digital marketing topic with real life samples to illustrate the concepts.

  For a participant-led lecture, participants will be invited to share their knowledge and skills with the class. We acknowledge that many participants have years of experience in particular areas of digital marketing. Sharing the knowledge with the class will not only benefits others, but also themselves, since one of the best ways to reinforce learning is to teach.

- **Case study or show and tell** (20-30 minutes)
  This case study section is designed to be an open discussion on the topic using one of the participants' businesses as a case study. The discussion will guide participants to apply the learned concepts by analyzing problems, brainstorming ideas, anticipating potential issues or difficulties, and working out solutions. Case studies will be on the voluntary basis only. If there are no suitable volunteers, external case studies will be used. The case study section will not be recorded to allow for an open and candid discussion.

  In the show and tell section, participants are encouraged to share their assignments, including campaign plans, executions and results with their groups and the class. Peer reviews will be adopted so participants can seek feedback and ideas to improve their outcomes and learning.

- **Question time** (5-10 minutes)
  This section is to wrap up and answer questions about the class's topic.

- **Homework** (1-2 hours)
  Participants will be provided with a Program Workbook, which consists of an assignment for each topic. Generally, the assignment will ask participants to apply the acquired concepts to their own business.

Experimentation is strongly encouraged. Rather than using their own digital platforms which have real customers and audience, participants can use Program's digital channels to experiment and test their ideas. Mistakes and mishaps are considered crucial learning activities.

BSBR Program's digital channels are a dedicated learning platform where participants can practise their digital marketing activities. These channels include:
- Website: https://nine.psbdigital.ca/
- Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/PSB9Digital/
- Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/psb9digital/
- Twitter: https://twitter.com/PSB9Digital
- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/79696003/
- YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCl6r71ARybNVCWj5uw9jKfQ
- Google Ads: These will be undertaken on the participant's channel with practice in HubSpot
- Facebook Ads: These will be undertaken on the participant's channel with practice in HubSpot
- HubSpot email: https://app.hubspot.com/email/6800850/manage/state/all

3.2 Workshops
There will be one Instructor-led workshop per week. This optional session is designed to assist participant with their assignments. Participants can choose to attend to ask questions and assistance on how to apply digital marketing concepts to their businesses. The workshop session will be group-based so participants can learn from one another. Participants can share their problems with the group and instructors will guide the discussion for possible solutions. The workshop sessions will not be recorded.

3.3 Support

- **Technical Support**
  Support is available to assist participants with technical issues, mainly software setup, how-to and trouble shooting. The stated and communicated intention will be to answer all enquiries within 48 hours.

- **Group Support**
  Participants will be organized into groups at the beginning of the Program. The goal is to mix participants from different industries with various digital experience and skill levels so participants can share, provide constructive feedback, and learn from one another. The Program is expected to put pressure on small business owners who already have competing demands on their time. The group role is to help their group members complete the assignments as well as motivate and encourage one another to stay the course and complete the program.

- **Class Support**
  There will be an online social group set up for each program cohort to build a community of learning. The social channel will be a safe and open space for collaborating, commenting and sharing their knowledge; providing emotional support and connection as well as networking.

3. Next Step
The second stage of the research project, Program Development, is complete. We are ready to progress to the next stage, Alpha Testing, which is the launch of the first training prototype in September 2021.

Proposed weekly outline

Week	Class	Mode	Content	Assignment
Strategy and Planning				
Week 0		Mandatory		• Training Benchmarks and Results • Digital Audit Spreadsheet • Workbook Part 1: Campaign Planning and Strategy
Week 1 Sep 27	Lecture 1 and 2	Mandatory	• Digital audit spreadsheet • Competitive analysis • Overall planning • Environmental scan	• Workbook Part 1: Campaign Planning and Strategy
	Workshop	Optional		
Week 2 Oct 4	Lecture 1 and 2	Mandatory	• Target market, target audience and persona	• Workbook Part 1: Campaign Planning and Strategy
	Workshop	Optional		
Week 3 Oct 11	Lecture 1 and 2	Mandatory	• Marketing Mix • Unique selling proposition (USP) and value proposition • Goals, objectives and KPIs	• Workbook Part 1: Campaign Planning and Strategy
	Workshop	Optional		
Week 4 Oct 18	Lecture 1 and 2	Mandatory	• Sales funnel, customer journey, customer relationship management • CRM software	• Workbook Part 1: Campaign Planning and Strategy
	Workshop	Optional		
Implementation and Tactics				
Week 5 Oct 25	Lecture 1 and 2	Mandatory	Owned media • Content marketing • Website and campaign landing webpage • SEO	• Workbook Part 2: Campaign Execution: Landing Webpage
	Workshop	Optional		
Week 6 Nov 1	Lecture 1 and 2	Elective	Owned media • Social media marketing • Email marketing	• Workbook Part 3: Campaign Execution: Social Posts • Workbook Part 4: Campaign Execution: Email Blast
	Workshop	Optional		
Week 7 Nov 8	Lecture 1 and 2	Elective	Owned media • E-commerce Paid media • Google advertising	• Workbook Part 5: Campaign Execution: Google Ads
	Workshop	Optional		•
Week 8 Nov 15	Lecture 1 and 2	Elective	Paid media • Google advertising • Social media advertising	• Workbook Part 6: Campaign Execution: Social Ads
	Workshop	Optional		
Week 9 Nov 22	Lecture 1 and 2	Elective	Earned media • Public and media relations • Link building • Influencer marketing • Google My Business	

	Workshop	Optional		
Evaluation and Analytics				
Week 10 Nov 29	Lecture 1 and 2	Mandatory	• Data collection • Data analysis	• Workbook Part 7: Campaign Evaluation
	Workshop	Optional		
Experimenting and Optimizing				
Week 11 Dec 6	Lecture 1 and 2	Mandatory	• Campaign analysis and reflection • Action plan and re-implementation	• Workbook Part 8: Campaign Iteration
	Workshop	Optional		
Week 12 Dec 13	Lecture 1 and 2	Elective	• Re-evaluation • Time and budget management • Outsourcing	• Workbook Part 8: Campaign Monitoring
	Workshop	Optional		

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Stage 3: Alpha Testing

Stage 4: Beta Testing

Stage 5: Program Evaluation

'Building Small Business Resilience' Digital Marketing Training Program
Stage 5: Program Evaluation

This is the third and final report from our research project: 'Building Small Business Resilience' (BSBR) Digital Marketing Training Program. It summarizes Stages 3, 4, and 5 of the research process, which includes the testing and evaluation of the Alpha and Beta Training Prototypes and recommendations for future development.

Background
As the COVID-19 pandemic plunged the global economy into the worst recession since World War II[1], businesses owned by members of underrepresented communities were amongst the hardest hit due to their existing financial fragility and poor economic health[2]. Underrepresented small business owners were forced to further pivot their businesses online, faced with the need to quickly upskill their digital marketing capabilities. The BSBR Digital Marketing Training Prototype was specifically designed to address current vital skill gaps and build resilience and to prepare them to face any future economic shock or disruption.

Objectives
The project aimed to:
● Increase equitable, diverse and inclusive participation in small business sectors
● Develop optimal training courses and tools to bridge digital marketing skill gaps for small business owners
● Develop and enhance other training programs in adult education, experiential learning, and digital marketing as we learn from the research data

Expected Outcomes
By the end of the training program (i.e. short-term) participants were expected to develop and execute a digital marketing campaign plan applicable to their own businesses and customer base; evaluate impact of implemented tactics; and make necessary changes to optimize the results.

In the long-term, participants were expected to further increase their capacity to successfully migrate their promotional and retail strategies online, with greater potential to earn revenue and build resilience against future economic disruptions. And specifically, business owners who self-identify as members of equity-deserving communities would be better equipped with these strategies, supporting their longer-term viability in the ever-changing market.

The training prototype is expected to be developed into programs offered by Sheridan College. Learning gained from the project will be applied to the development of other digital marketing programs in the Pilon School of Business, Faculty of Continuing and Professional Studies and EDGE Entrepreneurship Hub at Sheridan College.

Research Process
There are 5 stages of research:
Stage 1: Program Design
Stage 2: Program Development
Stage 3: Alpha Testing
Stage 4: Beta Testing
Stage 5: Program Evaluation

This report covers Stages 3 to 5: Alpha and Beta Testing, and Program Evaluation

Stage 3: Alpha Testing

We conducted an online recruitment campaign where applicants were asked to complete an extensive online intake survey to determine their business background and digital marketing skills.

The three main criteria was being a business owner from an underrepresented community, business having secured clientele and revenues i.e. not a startup, and some followers and engagements on their digital marketing channels.

Out of 150 applicants, we recruited 21 individuals to participate in the Alpha cohort and 4 participants who opted for the Beta cohort.

With the Alpha cohort, out of 21 participants, 14 finished the training program. Nine of them came back to join and repeat the program with the Beta cohort; they were a mix of those who finished or did not complete the Alpha program.

Throughout the 12-week program, we conducted online surveys and one-on-one interviews at four and eight week intervals to find out participants' feedback and suggestions to improve both the program content and delivery. Some inputs could be implemented immediately. Others were to be adjusted in the Beta testing.

At the end of 12 weeks, we conducted the final online survey and focus group interviews. Participants were asked to look back at the beginning of the program and reflect on their learning, struggles, and achievements. Since the program was particularly intensive and stressful, the final reflection was beneficial for the participants to take a pause, step back and reflect on their learning experience. Some of their views from the 4- and 8-week discussion changed after they completed the program and gained a new understanding.

One unanticipated issue we encountered was that we overestimated our participants' computer literacy levels. We used self-rating screening questions to gauge their computer skills but these questions were not accurate predictors of tech literacy. As a result, our participants had issues accessing online training applications such as online meetings and Google Classroom.

Stage 4: Beta Testing

We conducted another online campaign and out of 79 applicants, we recruited 24 new participants. With 4 participants from the initial campaign, the Beta cohort consisted of 28 business owners.

With the learning from the Alpha testing, we adjusted some of our program calendar and content. We also restructured the technical support for the participants. The findings are discussed in detail in the Recommendations for Future Development section.

With the Beta cohort, out of 28 participants, 21 finished the training program.

Stage 5: Program Evaluation

At six and 12 months after the program finished, we conducted data collection and focus group interviews with the Alpha and Beta cohorts to find out how they applied their learning in their business and how these applications impacted their business performance.

	Alpha Cohort	Beta Cohort
Started the program	21	28
Finished the program	14	21
Graduation rate	67%	75%
Repeated the program	9	n/a
Participated in the 6-month evaluation	9	12
Participated in the 12-month evaluation	8	8

5.1 Summary of quantitative results

Businesses are growing.
Business Profile: Twelve months after completing the Program, both Alpha and Beta Cohorts increased their yearly revenue by 242% and 121%, respectively. Compared to pre-covid yearly revenue, Alpha increased theirs by 113% and Beta's revenue was back to the same level.

Subsequently, the number of employees increased 138% and 129% to cope with 122% and 127% customer expansion from Ontario to national and international customer bases.

Digital marketing effectiveness evidenced by increasing savings on advertising.

- **Channel Engagement:** After 12 months, customer engagement across all channels increased by 148% for the Alpha cohort and 290% for the Beta cohort.

- **Channel Marketing:** Marketing efforts by Alpha cohorts was up 109% and Beta 197%.
  Comparing the efforts (the frequency participants updating content) to the results (user engagement rate): an increase of 109% effort to 148% results for Alpha and 197% effort to 290% for Beta shows that participants successfully applied the learning to get better performance from their efforts. The Program emphasized the need to create quality content to increase engagement. Particularly a couple high-performance participants shifted marketing efforts from website to YouTube and increased their YouTube engagement to 1096% by increasing their effort 500%.

- **Paid Channel:** paid channels decreased to 72% for Alpha and had very limited use for Beta. The decrease in paid channels is encouraging since most of the participants had room to grow their organic marketing efforts. In addition, many had in the past paid fees to digital marketing consultants or agencies who advised them on ineffective or wasteful digital advertising tactics lacking a measured strategic underpinning.

- Through the Program, participants learned to better manage their advertising spend and outsourcing their marketing resources while evaluating their return on investment.

  The increase in customer engagement relative to the decrease in paid shows better performance and cost effectiveness of their marketing efforts. In the Alpha cohort, customer engagement was up by 148% while paid channels were down to 72%. In Beta, customer engagement was up by 297% while paid channels were not being utilized.

Participants' digital marketing mastery is higher.

- **Channel Importance:** both Alpha and Beta Cohorts did not change their view on the importance of the channels. Most increases were email, followed by video and content writing.

- **Channel Expertise:** After 12 months, participants' confidence in their digital marketing skills was up by 112% for Alpha and 128% for Beta. The common areas of confidence being Digital Strategy and Social Media Marketing.

5.2 Summary of qualitative results

Participants reported the constraints of time and money as their two main obstacles in implementing their learning from the Program. As a small business, an owner is likely to spend most of their time on day-to-day operational issues. Even though they understand the importance of marketing to generate leads and customers, operations demand more immediate attention.

Participants who achieved better than average results reported scheduling marketing tasks/tactics in their weekly calendars as part of the work schedule to ensure ongoing and consistent efforts in marketing.

Some participants turned to outsourcing marketing functions and using knowledge from the Program to help them hire suitable digital marketing service providers, prepare thorough marketing briefs with clear objectives, and evaluate their performance.

The training program consisted of three parts: strategy, implementation, and evaluation. Both the Alpha and Beta cohorts struggled mostly with the strategy section for various reasons including the lack of understanding of the importance of marketing strategy, the assumption that since they had been running their businesses they already knew their strategy, and had an action bias which led to owners preferring to learn to create a Facebook post (devoid of strategic campaign reasons) than develop an overarching digital strategy.

After the 6 and 12-month evaluations, all participants agreed the marketing strategy was the most important and impactful part of the training. They acknowledged the strategy planning was essential to their campaign effectiveness. Some noted they referred back to their strategic plan over time to conduct more research, and update the plan as their business situations changed. Some found it challenging to come up with the right strategies for their businesses. For example, which content approach, what communication channels, what marketing messages, and which marketing technology and tools to use.

Recommendations for Future Development

The BSBR Digital Marketing Training Program was a prototype designed to address vital skill gaps and build resilience amongst small business owners from underrepresented communities, to prepare them to face economic shock or disruption.

Even though the sample size was small, the Program proved to be effective in growing participants' business revenues and employee numbers, increasing digital marketing effectiveness, and developing participants' digital mastery and confidence.

The Program could be further developed (also including AI tools) and offered to small business owners in general. Post COVID-19 pandemic, digitization will be accelerating, and consumers are likely to further embrace online shopping. Small businesses need to ensure they are equipped with digital and data capabilities to build and grow their customer connection and relationship online.

We recommend the following elements in future implementations of the Program:

Hybrid Delivery
The BSBR Training Program was confined to online learning due to the COVID-19 restrictions. While remote learning offers ease and flexibility, participants reported they missed the social interactions, which were difficult to achieve in an online group setting.

With the limitation of online interactions, the Program also could not fully maximize opportunities for business networking and group learning. Participants enjoyed a sense of community when forming groups based on their industry. Many participants formed close bonds that continued after completing the Program. These interactions and bonds would have been easier to develop and stronger should they have had opportunities to connect in person.

Group learning also helps participants think more critically with a deeper understanding of the content. They can learn from one another by pooling their knowledge and skills to solve more complex problems than individuals alone can do. Participants reported they gained a great deal of insight and knowledge from interacting with their peers.

The new training program could combine both in-person and online learning so participants can experience the benefits of both traditional classroom learning and remote learning. There could be a dedicated communication portal to help participants to network and share ideas.

Structured Program Schedule and On-going Checkpoints
One of the most pressing issues participants faced was time management. Each week, the BSBR Program required two 1.5-hour classes, an optional 1.5-hour workshop, and around 2.5-hour homework; or around 7-hour time commitment from participants. This caused a number of drop-outs and many could not complete the homework.

While appreciating the BSBR Program content for being comprehensive and covering broad aspects of digital marketing, some participants found they did not have time to digest and reflect on their learning. After a few weeks, some began to feel overwhelmed and could not keep up with the Program as much as they wanted to. Some of the Alpha participants repeated the Program with the Beta cohort for the opportunity to revisit the content.

The new training program could stretch the delivery timeframe from 12 weeks to 28 weeks. This will allow one class per week and a two-week break between the strategy and implementation parts, and another two-week break between the implementation and evaluation parts. Therefore, participants could have ample time to reflect on their learning by themselves and with their group.

We also found once BSBR participants fell behind in their learning, they continued to fall behind for the rest of the Program. The new program could add checkpoints to ensure participants keep up with the program schedule by making their homework submission compulsory. Their homework will be evaluated before they can progress further in the program. The homework could include a digital marketing campaign plan for the strategy part, and one of the digital tactic executions for the implementation part. This also reflects real business practice. It is unwise to implement any marketing tactics before developing a strategy. Therefore, if participants cannot finish their marketing plan, they will not be allowed to join the implementation classes.

The two-week break between each part will be beneficial to allow participants additional time to catch up with their homework. It also provides opportunities for one-on-one mentorship or feedback to rectify any necessary changes. These additional personalized coaching sessions are very appreciated by all participants.

Content Schedule
As small business owners, they tend to prefer implementing tactics to strategic planning. Only after completing the BSBR Program, participants acknowledged that strategy planning was essential to their campaign effectiveness. The BSBR Program was designed in a conventional theoretical-led approach where participants were taught marketing theory to build the foundational underpinning for their campaign including the environmental scan and competitive analysis, marketing segmentation, and unique selling proposition.

To overcome participants' initial resistance to learning the marketing strategy section, the new program could be redesigned using experiential learning as a practice-led approach. At the start, participants could be asked to create one of their digital marketing tactics such as a campaign's landing webpage. The program can then unveil each of the theoretical components to improve their webpage and at the same time, develop a marketing campaign plan.

The program can take participants through the process and show them the link between the theory/strategy and application/tactics, possibly with an infographic of the entire process. After that, participants could be asked to redo their landing webpage using the knowledge they have learned.

The practice-led approach could enable participants to understand and appreciate how the theoretical knowledge can be applied through their digital channels. This could reduce the knowledge-practice gap and motivate participants to embrace theoretical learning so they can understand not only 'what' to do but also 'why'. The 'why' understanding is crucial for participants to be able to adapt their strategy to the ever-changing business environments.

Case Study
Participants expressed their preference to see recent real-world case studies of digital marketing campaigns from other small businesses. The new training program could connect with digital marketing agencies and/or other small businesses to find a variety of case studies to showcase in the program.

Technical and Marketing Support
The BSBR participants appreciated technical support and expressed their need for additional marketing resources. The new program could connect with business schools and campus-linked accelerators/incubators, offering internship or coop opportunities. Participants could have additional marketing support while marketing students could gain valuable work experience, which may lead to future employment.

Appendix

Business Profile

Alpha

Section 2: Business Profile	From 6 months % Change	From 12 months % Change
How long has your business been operating?	n/a	n/a
How many people are working in your business? (including you)	106%	138%
How many locations does your business have?	100%	110%
Is your business online?	100%	100%
In which industry is your business operating?		
Where are your customers now? (1=province 2=Canada 3=World)	100%	122%
Where might your potential customers be if you can build your business online? (1=province 2=Canada 3=World)	100%	100%
What was your yearly revenue in the past 12 months?	132%	241%
What was your yearly revenue before the COVID-19 pandemic?	n/a	n/a
What is your total revenue 6 months prior?	125%	171%

- Business yearly revenue increased by 132% 6- months and 242% 12- months after the Program. There is more to this than post covid, revenue is up 113% over pre-covid sales.
- The number of employees increased by 106% 6- months and 138% 12- months after the Program.
- After 12-months the business locations increased by 110%.
- Customer expansion from Ontario to/or Canada to/or World increased after 12-months by 122%.

Beta

Section 2: Business Profile	6mnth % Change	0mnth % Change
How long has your business been operating?	112%	116%
How many people are working in your business? (including you)	112%	129%
How many locations does your business have?	101%	90%
Is your business online? (0=No 1=Yes)	90%	90%
In which industry is your business operating?	qualitative	qualitative
Where are your customers now? (1=province 2=Canada 3=World)	107%	127%
Where might your potential customers be if you can build your business online? (1=province 2=Canada 3=World)	103%	100%
What was your yearly revenue in the past 12 months?	138%	121%
What was your yearly revenue before the COVID-19 pandemic?	190%	100%
What is your total revenue 6 months prior?	162%	137%

- Business yearly revenue increased by 138% 6- months and 121% 12- months after the Program. Revenue is even with pre-covid sales.
- The number of employees increased by 112% 6- months and 129% 12- months after the Program.
- After 12-months the business locations decreased to 90%
- Customer expansion from Ontario to/or Canada to/or World increased after 12-months by 127%.

Digital Experience: Channel Engagement

Alpha

Section 3: Digital Experience - Channel Engagement	From 6 months	From 12 months
How much visits or followers do your digital channels have?	% Change	% Change
Website and Blog	105%	107%
Facebook Business page	95%	120%
Instagram Business profile	111%	105%
Twitter Business profile	99%	184%
LinkedIn Business page	108%	239%
YouTube Business Channel	116%	109%
TikTok Business Profile	n/a	n/a
Email Promotion	106%	171%
Others (Please specify)	qualitative	qualitative
	106%	**148%**

- Engagement across all channels increased by 106% 6- months and 148% 12- months after the Program.
- Most notably increases were in LinkedIn, Email, Twitter and Facebook.
- With the amount of work required to load content to YouTube, the increase there should be noted as well.

Beta

Section 3: Digital Experience - Channel Engagement	From 6 months	From 12 months
How much visits or followers do your digital channels have?	% Change	% Change
Website and Blog	172%	243%
Facebook Business page	96%	140%
Instagram Business profile	92%	122%
Twitter Business profile	91%	105%
LinkedIn Business page	110%	196%
YouTube Business Channel	313%	1096%
TikTok Business Profile	n/a	n/a
Email Promotion	94%	126%
Others (Please specify)	qualitative	qualitative
	138%	**290%**

- Engagement across all channels increased by 138% 6- months and 290% 12- months after the Program.
- Increases are notable across the majority of the channels, with the lowest being Twitter, Instagram and Email.
- As per the Alpha, with the amount of work required to load content to YouTube, the increase there should be noted as well.

Digital Experience: Channel Marketing

Alpha

Section 3: Digital Experience - Channel Marketing	From 6 months	From 12 months
How often do you update or post content on your digital channels per month?	% Change	% Change
Website updates and blog posts	55%	46%
Facebook posts	88%	65%
Instagram posts	84%	75%
Twitter posts	50%	50%
LinkedIn posts	110%	85%
YouTube videos	450%	300%
TikTok videos	n/a	n/a
Email promotions	104%	145%
	134%	**109%**

- Marketing across all channels increased by 134% 6- months and 109% 12-months after the Program.
- High-performance participants shifted marketing efforts from website to YouTube video and that somewhat skewed the results.

Beta

Section 3: Digital Experience - Channel Marketing	From 6 months	From 12 months
How often do you update or post content on your digital channels per month?	% Change	% Change
Website updates and blog posts	95%	189%
Facebook posts	54%	79%
Instagram posts	75%	112%
Twitter posts	114%	185%
LinkedIn posts	88%	150%
YouTube videos	75%	500%
TikTok videos	n/a	n/a
Email promotions	123%	167%
	89%	**197%**

- Marketing across all channels decreased to 89% over 6-months and then and then an increase of 197% 12-months after the Program.

Digital Experience: Paid Channel

Alpha

Section 3: Digital Experience - Paid Channels	From 6 months	From 12 months
Which online paid advertising are you using?	% Change	% Change
Google ads	100%	67%
Facebook/Instagram ads	67%	50%
Twitter ads	n/a	n/a
LinkedIn ads	n/a	n/a
YouTube ads	100%	100%
Others (Please specify)	qualitative	qualitative
None / No Adv	qualitative	qualitative
	89%	72%

- Paid channels decreased to 89% 6- months and 72% 12-months after the Program.

Beta

Section 3: Digital Experience - Paid Channels	From 6 months	From 12 months
Which online paid advertising are you using? (0=No, 1=Yes)	n/a	n/a
Google ads	n/a	n/a
Facebook/Instagram ads	135%	150%
Twitter ads	n/a	n/a
LinkedIn ads	n/a	n/a
YouTube ads	n/a	n/a
Others (Please specify)	qualitative	qualitative
None / No Adv	qualitative	qualitative
	135%	150%

- Paid channels are little utilized with one limited use in the results.

Digital Experience: Channel Importance

Alpha

Section 3: Digital Experience - Channel Importance	From 6 months	From 12 months
What knowledge and skills in digital marketing do you think are important for your business? DontKnow=1 NotImportant=2 GoodToKnow=3 Important=4	% Change	% Change
Digital strategy	100%	100%
Online paid advertising	90%	90%
Video marketing	103%	107%
Content marketing / content writing	106%	106%
Search engine optimization (SEO)	97%	97%
Social media marketing	100%	103%
Email marketing	106%	113%
Customer relationship management (CRM)	92%	85%
Graphic design	100%	104%
Data analytics	104%	97%
Influencer marketing	96%	92%
Others (please specify)	qualitative	qualitative
	99%	**99%**

- Overall the participant view on the importance of the channels was little affected by the Program.
- On an individual channel level, in order of increased importance was Email, followed by Video and Content writing. This is not surprising since the Program did emphasize the growing importance of these digital aspects.

Beta

Section 3: Digital Experience - Channel Importance	From 6 months	From 12 months
What knowledge and skills in digital marketing do you think are important for your business? DontKnow=1 NotImportant=2 GoodToKnow=3 Important=4	% Change	% Change
Digital strategy	103%	105%
Online paid advertising	108%	100%
Video marketing	105%	109%
Content marketing / content writing	103%	105%
Search engine optimization (SEO)	98%	103%
Social media marketing	100%	103%
Email marketing	101%	109%
Customer relationship management (CRM)	98%	97%
Graphic design	98%	100%
Data analytics	98%	103%
Influencer marketing	93%	94%
Others (please specify)	qualitative	qualitative
	100%	**102%**

- Like Alpha, overall the participant view was little affected by the Program.
- On an individual channel level, in order of increased importance was Email, followed by Video and Content writing (and Strategy).

Digital Experience: Channel Expertise

Alpha

Section 3: Digital Experience - Channel Expertise

How would you rank your knowledge and skills in digital marketing? DontKnow=1 Beginner=2 Intermediate=3 Advanced=4	From 6 months	From 12 months
	% Change	% Change
Digital strategy	105%	122%
Online advertising	100%	111%
Video marketing	100%	118%
Content marketing / content writing	105%	110%
Search engine optimization (SEO)	100%	111%
Social media marketing	100%	116%
Email marketing	100%	111%
Customer relationship management (CRM)	100%	105%
Graphic design	105%	110%
Data analytics	100%	105%
Influencer marketing	100%	119%
Others (please specify)	qualitative	qualitative
	101%	**112%**

- Participants stated that their expertise increased by 101% 6- months and 112% 12-months after the Program.
- The highest confidence recorded for Digital Strategy, Influencer Marketing, followed by Video Marketing, and Social Media Marketing.

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Section 3: Digital Experience - Channel Expertise	From 6 months	From 12 months
How would you rank your knowledge and skills in digital marketing? DontKnow=1 Beginner=2 Intermediate=3 Advanced=4	% Change	% Change
Digital strategy	104%	132%
Online advertising	102%	124%
Video marketing	113%	125%
Content marketing / content writing	109%	121%
Search engine optimization (SEO)	113%	138%
Social media marketing	115%	139%
Email marketing	106%	117%
Customer relationship management (CRM)	117%	130%
Graphic design	125%	133%
Data analytics	107%	132%
Influencer marketing	115%	121%
Others (please specify)	qualitative	qualitative
	111%	**128%**

- Participants stated that their expertise increased by 111% 6- months and 128% 12-months after the Program.
- The highest confidence recorded for Social Media Marketing, Search Engine Optimization, Digital Strategy, followed by Graphic Design, and Data Analytics.

Reference

[1] The World Bank (June, 2020). *COVID-19 to Plunge Global Economy into Worst Recession since World War II.* Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/08/covid-19-to-plunge-global-economy-into-worst-recession-since-world-war-ii

[2] Canadian Women's Chamber of Commerce (CWCC). (May 2020). *Falling Through the Cracks: Immediate Needs of Canada's Underrepresented Founders.* Retrieved from https://canwcc.ca/wp- conte