

A close-up, low-angle shot of a 3D printer's nozzle printing a part. The nozzle is positioned above a partially completed, textured object. The background is dark and out of focus, showing various mechanical components of the printer. The overall tone is industrial and technical.

# The Digital Marketing Opportunity for 3D Printing Service Providers

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# INTRODUCTION

The market for 3D printing services is becoming increasingly competitive.

Acquiring new customers and securing repeat business is critical, yet also an ongoing challenge for many 3D printing service bureaus.

As a result, service providers often struggle to differentiate themselves from the competition and generate greater awareness about their services.

One of the key tools service bureaus can use to deal with these challenges is digital marketing.

This white paper will focus on digital marketing techniques and tips that will help you:

- Define what differentiates your service bureau from the competition
- Create a digital strategy to increase visibility of your services
- Identify the digital channels you should use to boost your online presence
- Learn what tools can increase your online sales

# 1. MARKETING YOUR SERVICE BUREAU IN THE DIGITAL AGE

## Understand your customers

B2B buying behaviour has changed dramatically over the last decade with the advent of digital channels. Online purchasing has become a dominant channel and according to a recent report, 61% of B2B transactions begin online<sup>1</sup>.

Furthermore, 64% of B2B buyers check vendor websites prior to contacting sales representatives<sup>2</sup>.

In this digital landscape, the ability to **capture leads online** is vital to increasing sales revenue.

So, how can you achieve this?

The first step is having a clear understanding of your target customer.

Defining your target customer is especially important when developing your value proposition.

You will want to have a thorough understanding of your customer demographics and firmographics, including company size, buying habits, the challenges they face and where they spend their time online.

In this way, you can create representations of your potential customers, also known as buyer personas.

Two key benefits of having buyer persona profiles are:

1. They help you understand your customers and their pain points.
2. They help you identify how you can improve your services to better appeal to your potential customers.

Identifying these key areas will help you create a digital marketing strategy that considers your customers' needs and what makes your services unique.

## Create a unique value proposition

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There isn't a lot of value in being a business in the middle of the road.

**Scott Dunham**

VP of Research at SmarTech Analysis

According to an EY report, one third of companies are expected to design and produce parts with the help of AM service providers by 2022<sup>3</sup>. This market forecast creates an excellent opportunity to position your service bureau as a specialist solutions provider.

Scott Dunham, VP of Research at the leading market research firm, SmarTech Analysis, says, 'the [service bureau] specialists who can cultivate unmatched expertise in a specific area of AM are much more likely to succeed'<sup>4</sup>.

Defining what makes your business stand out from other service providers on the market will be the first step in establishing your value proposition.

A value proposition refers to the key benefits that differentiate your business from the competition and position your company as the best possible option on the market.

One of the best ways to define your value proposition is by communicating your unique expertise. By focusing on a niche, you can show your prospects that you understand their problem deeply enough to solve it.

Some examples of how you can differentiate your service bureau could include:

- In-house design or consultancy expertise;
- In-house post-processing/finishing;

1 "Make Music, Not Noise | Achieve Connected Growth With Ecosystem Orchestration", Accenture, 2017

2 "The New B2B Buyer Experience Report", Showpad, 2018

3 "3D printing: hype or game changer? A Global EY Report 2019", EY, 2019

4 "State Of The 3D Printing Industry Survey 2019: AM Service Providers", AMFG, 2019

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- Quick order and delivery process;
- Specific expertise/area of focus (e.g. metal 3D printing, prototyping, end-part production)

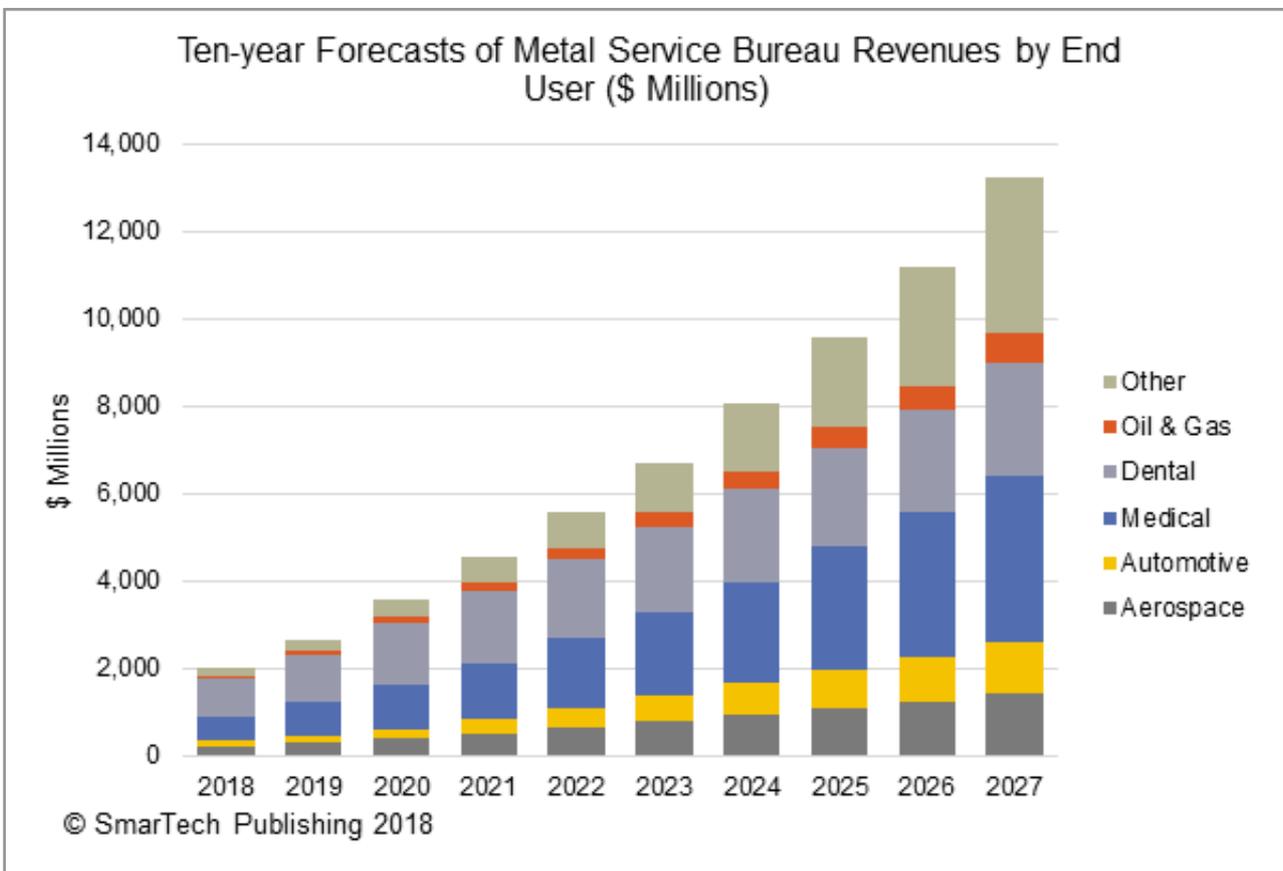
Metal 3D printing is an example of one area where service bureaus can offer specialised expertise. Due to the technical complexity of the process and the high initial investment needed, many companies are unwilling to adopt metal 3D printing in-house.

In this scenario, a service bureau can become a preferred supplier for these companies, offering an unrivalled area of expertise for metal 3D printing.

For many service bureaus, the temptation is to try and be all things to all people. With so many different materials and technologies out there, it's more important to specialise in certain areas and deliver.

**Jonathan Warbrick**

Business Development Manager at Graphite Additive Manufacturing<sup>5</sup>



The projected revenues of metal AM service providers across different industries. Medical and automotive are expected to be the two key revenue-generating sectors. [Image credit: SmarTech Analysis]

Developing a distinguishable brand is difficult and takes time. However, aligning your services with your business's area of expertise, will put your service bureau in an excellent position to succeed.

<sup>5</sup> "Expert Interview: Graphite Additive Manufacturing's Jonathan Warbrick on Achieving Success with 3D Printing", AMFG



## 2. GENERATING ONLINE AWARENESS OF YOUR SERVICE BUREAU

Once you have established your value proposition, the next step will be to enable your potential customers to discover your services.

The vast majority of queries relating to 3D printing services begin online, and **71% of all B2B queries begin as generic search terms in search engines like Google**. This means that when people are searching for 3D printing services, they are most likely searching using general terms and not a specific company name.

As a result, for you to capture those prospects, your business must be visible in their search results.

### Make SEO a priority

Ideally, your website should pop up as the first page on Google and other search engines when queries relating to 3D printing services are made. The best way to achieve this is through Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).

SEO is the process of optimising your website to get organic, unpaid traffic from search engines.

To boost the performance of your website in organic search results, you'll need to identify the keywords and phrases you would like to rank for. The keywords will coincide with what you have identified as the needs and wants of your target audience.

Once you have identified the keywords and phrases relating to your business, you will be able to implement them strategically throughout your website.

### Communicate your brand through content

AMFG's 2019 survey of AM service providers identified a lack of 3D printing knowledge as being one of the biggest challenges facing service providers today.<sup>6</sup>

**Tip:** You can use free tools like Google Keyword Planner and Google Trends or paid tools like Ahrefs and SEMrush to generate lists of potential target keywords. Look for keywords that have low competition, but relatively high search volume, as these will deliver the best results.

Since search engines pay special attention to the words in your headings and title tags to determine what a page is about, it's a good opportunity for you to include the main keyword or keywords you're targeting for that page. That makes it clear to a search engine that this page is relevant for anyone searching for that specific term.

The majority of respondents reported that a significant proportion of their customers have only a limited understanding of the capabilities and limitations of 3D printing technologies.

Evidently, there is still a strong need for more education about AM – and service bureaus are in a unique position to offer greater knowledge about the technology.

Therefore, creating and distributing educational content is one strategy a service bureau can implement to establish authority and thought leadership in the market.

While it may be tempting to write content to sell your services, your primary aim should be to educate your prospects and customers, thereby increasing their trust in and engagement with your business.

Content marketing works as a more subtle way to win new business – by raising awareness and trust in your brand, while making your website more visible to search engines.

A few examples of content you can produce include:

- Informative blog posts
- Engaging videos
- Case studies highlighting how your services solved a customer's pain point
- White papers delving more deeply into specific topics of interest to your customers

<sup>6</sup> "State Of The 3D Printing Industry Survey 2019: AM Service Providers", AMFG, 2019

# 3. BEING ACTIVE ACROSS DIGITAL CHANNELS

An active online presence is the sum total of everything that your current and potential customers can find about your business on the Internet. This can include everything from your website to your social media profiles.

The key to success will be to select the right digital channels for your business, and to integrate these channels as part of a clear digital marketing strategy.

## Social media

Social media can be a powerful way to boost your online presence, especially when coupled with consistent content. The equation is simple: the more quality content you create, the more material you will have to share on your social media channels, which aids in raising awareness about your business.

Furthermore, social media can play a crucial role in helping your sales process. B2B customers typically do research before they buy, with **55% stating that they look for information on social media** (MediaBistro).

However, since not every social media channel will be relevant to your business, it is good practice to identify where your potential customers spend the most time. Choosing the right platform will make it easier for your target audience to discover your business on social media.

For example, if you're a small service bureau focusing on prototyping, creating jewellery moulds and design projects, then Instagram and Facebook are great platforms to explore. For service providers specialising in industrial AM applications, professional social platforms like LinkedIn can be a better choice.

## Email marketing

Another powerful digital channel is email – and 77% of B2B companies use e-newsletters as part of their marketing.

Email marketing can be used to nurture customers and prospects by providing relevant, useful content. Such content can convert prospects into customers and generate more revenue from existing clients.

While the benefits of email marketing are well understood, service bureaus may not be using this channel to its fullest potential. One of the key challenges to using email marketing is building a mailing list.

Email list building can be done in various ways, including strategically placed newsletter sign-ups, calls to action or maintaining relationships with current customers.

Ultimately, a successful email marketing strategy will give your prospects and customers a way to stay connected to your brand. With the power of email you have the opportunity to provide value, build a strong customer relationship and take your business to the next level.



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**Tip:** Explore geotargeting. This lets you target your ads to only appear to customers in a certain location, or set of locations, specified by you. With geotargeting, you'll increase the chances that the people clicking on your ads are actually eligible to receive your services. Also explore using a specialist agency to help execute your ad campaigns.

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## Paid advertising

Testing paid ads, like Google Ads, can be a great tool to complement your SEO efforts. According to a recent survey, 63% of people said they'd click on a Google ad.<sup>7</sup> Unlike content and email marketing, which are usually have longer-term results, a paid ad campaign can bring results in the short-term.

To launch a paid ad campaign, you'll need to have a short but relevant ad copy, describing benefits and USPs of your services.

Make sure to create a separate landing page that includes messages that are specifically designed for advertising campaigns and target a specific customer segment. Having a relevant landing page increases the likelihood that people who clicked on the ad, if they are the right audience, will act.

## Retargeting

Thanks to your digital marketing efforts, people are starting to come to your website. But what if they aren't ready to order from you yet?

This is where retargeting comes in.

Retargeting is a type of advert that helps you convert website visitors into customers after they've left your website.

Once someone visits your site, they'll start to see your ads while browsing the Internet or social media. Your ads will remind them of the services you provide and bring them back to your site when they've decided to place an order.

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<sup>7</sup> "What makes people click on search ads?", Search Engine Land, 2019

# 4. BOOSTING SALES WITH THE RIGHT DIGITAL TOOLS

While social media, email marketing and paid ads can help you to enhance your online presence, your website remains the key piece of the puzzle.

Your website acts as a gateway to attracting more visitors and, if optimised correctly, is also your 24/7 sales tool.

Ease of purchase is regarded as one of the top selling points for B2B customers, alongside vendor reputation, price and customer loyalty.<sup>8</sup> This means that optimising your website, to make it easier for your customers to order from you online, can make the difference between making a sale and losing a lead.

## Chatbots

One way you can simplify an ordering process, while increasing your online presence, is with the help of a chatbot. A chatbot is a computer program which uses the chat interface to communicate with the website visitors.

To ease the purchasing process for the customer, your chatbot can pop up on any website page to offer additional information about your services or even a discount code.

## Automated quotation tools

An online quotation and ordering platform, embedded in your website, can help you boost sales. MES software for AM, like AMFG, is one of the most effective tools to set up such a platform.

52% of B2B buyers view self-service features, like online quoting and ordering, as the most important factor when assessing a company's overall online

experience. Moreover, nearly 90% of buyers prefer to complete transactions via self-service rather than any other method.<sup>9</sup>

And it's clear why. A web quotation platform allows customers to receive quotes instantly and without the need to send emails and make calls. It also helps them to place orders at any time (even outside of your working hours) and complete the buying process intuitively and in a matter of minutes, in the vast majority of cases.

With speed being at the top of modern customer expectations, the ability to provide quotes automatically and within seconds can become your competitive advantage.

Furthermore, implementing MES software isn't only beneficial for your customers – it's also one of the best things you can do for your team. Being able to automate important yet manual tasks, such as quoting, allows your team to focus on activities that bring in more revenue.

In one example, UK service bureau, Graphite Additive Manufacturing, implemented AMFG's web quotation tool in part to manage an increasing volume of orders. This has helped the company reduce the time needed to process orders and be able to respond to and serve their customers more quickly.

The increased level of automation achieved with the AMFG's software has ultimately helped Graphite translate better customer service into more sales.

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'Our turnover has increased by 20%+ year-on-year over the last three years. In the last year alone, we've generated over £50,000 revenue just through [AMFG's] quotation tool...This allows us to deal with the increasing volume of enquiries without compromising on service.'

### Jonathan Warbrick

Business Development Manager, Graphite Additive Manufacturing

<sup>8</sup> "B2B Ecommerce 2018: Transforming Buying and Selling", eMarketer, 2018

<sup>9</sup> "2018 B2B Ecommerce Buyer Expectations Report", Digital Commerce 360, 2018

## **Analytics tracking**

One of the important aspects of digital marketing is the ability to consistently track the performance of your website and optimise it to increase conversions.

One way MES software, like AMFG, can help you with this is through its integration with Google Analytics, a free tool that gives you insight into how users find and use your website.

This will allow you to track the customer journey as people use your quotation platform. For example, you can track where customers are dropping off and use this information to optimise customer experience, which, in turn, will boost conversions.

Furthermore, having an online ordering platform can become a natural part of your marketing campaigns. For example, a landing page that is designed to convert leads clicking on an ad can have a Call-To-Action (CTA) button, which leads to your online ordering portal.

Finally, you can place CTA buttons, linked to the platform, strategically on your website to enable visitors navigating the website to place an order instantly, without the need to contact your sales team.

# DRIVING SERVICE BUREAU DEMAND WITH DIGITAL MARKETING

With more and more companies and professionals searching for 3D printing services and placing orders online, digital marketing is becoming one of the key tools service providers must implement to remain

competitive. When integrated with more 'traditional' marketing channels, such as events and trade shows, digital marketing can make a significant impact on revenue.

With a digital marketing strategy in place, your 3D printing service bureau can build a strong brand, increase its online presence on social media and have a website optimised to bring in more prospects and convert them into sales.

We hope that this whitepaper has given you an insight into some of the digital marketing techniques that can benefit your company.

# ABOUT AMFG

AMFG provides MES workflow software that empowers companies to streamline and manage their entire additive manufacturing workflows.

With customers in 26 countries and across industries, AMFG's expertise is in working with companies to scale their additive manufacturing operations.

For more information, visit: [www.amfg.ai](http://www.amfg.ai) or contact [info@amfg.ai](mailto:info@amfg.ai).



[www.amfg.ai](http://www.amfg.ai)