Digital Marketing in the Irish Construction Industry

Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements

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At Dublin Business School

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Declaration:

I, Michael Kelly, declare that this research is my original work and that it has never been presented to any institution or university for the award of Degree or Diploma. In addition, I have referenced correctly all literature and sources used in this work and this work is fully compliant with the Dublin Business School’s academic honesty policy.

Signed: [Signature]

Date: 2018/16
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I would like to thank all the industry professionals from the Irish construction industry for their input and time with this research. Without their insight and expert knowledge this research would not have been possible.

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Abstract:

The Irish construction industry has long been recognised as one of the main driving forces behind the Irish economy. The modern construction business is challenged with competing in this sometimes harsh, fragmented sector. The Irish construction industry adopts more traditional business approaches, therefore is often viewed as being cynical in nature and reluctant to change. The uncertainty that has clouded the construction industry in particular since the Irish economic crisis seems to be diminishing and recent forecasts tentatively suggest the future is now looking promising.

This research aims to provide an insight into the Irish construction industry and the role digital marketing can play within that industry. The digital marketing industry in Ireland has grown over the last number of years in conjunction with continued advancements in technology and infrastructure. This study will investigate the attitudes of construction industry professionals towards digital marketing and will also analyse what benefits digital marketing can bring to the industry.

This research will also examine how the consumer views the Irish construction industry’s current digital presence. Irish digital consumers’ use of the existing digital and social media platforms will be explored. As the target end user group for the Irish construction industry the Irish consumer can offer valuable insight the wants and needs of the potential buyer as regards any future digital marketing campaigns by the Irish construction industry. This research aims to highlight if there is a niche for digital marketing within the Irish construction industry to facilitate future growth of this recovering sector.
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<td>B2C</td>
<td>Business to Consumer</td>
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<td>Building Information Modelling</td>
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<td>Consumer To Consumer</td>
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<td>Construction Industry Federation</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Central Statistics Office</td>
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<td>DBS</td>
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<td>Gross National Product</td>
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<td>PPC</td>
<td>Pay per Click</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Digital marketing can be defined as “the use of digital channels to promote or market products and services to consumers and businesses” (Digital Marketing 2016). In essence, the key objective is the promotion of brands through the various forms of digital media. Digital marketing encompasses the extensive selection of service, product and brand marketing tactics, employing the internet as the core promotional media, in conjunction with mobile and traditional TV and radio. The digital marketing industry has grown substantially over the last number of years, aided by the huge advancements in technology, and recently the digital landscape has advanced at a lightning pace. Many industries, including the Irish fashion industry, have successfully embraced these digital advances, employing social media platforms in a move which has made these particular industries as a whole more accessible.

However, despite the documented advances in the digital marketing field, digital marketing within the Irish construction industry trails well behind other industries in Ireland. Billions of Euro are spent annually on Irish construction projects encompassing both public and private sector spending. The construction industry in Ireland is very conservative and there is a huge lack of trust between stakeholders (Gunnigan 1999). This mistrust is underpinned by the tendering process through which many large projects are awarded, whereby in essence the lowest bidder secures the contract. The tender process is very secretive and sometimes means the contract is awarded to the lowest price rather than to the best overall package put forward.

Currently, there are approximately 40,000 different registered businesses in the Irish construction industry, employing approximately 280,000 people. The construction industry is a major driver on the Irish economy, with the performance of the economy and the construction industry very closely linked. During the height of the “Celtic tiger” era, figures from 2006 indicate that construction output represented 24% of total Gross National Product (GNP) (Mac An Bhaird 2010). By late 2008 the Irish banking crisis arose, and the
associated collapse of the construction industry was apparent, with the subsequent decline in construction employment directly accounting for approximately two thirds of the jump in the Irish unemployment rate after 2007 (Figure 1.1) (Mac An Bhaird 2010). Indeed, the collapse of the construction industry has been proposed as one of the major contributing factors to the recent Irish recession, with studies suggesting that Ireland would have been able to offset fiscal action had it not been for the collapse in construction-related tax revenues (Honohan 2009). Therefore the performance of the construction industry and its continued sustained growth will be directly linked to the recovery of Ireland’s economy.

![Figure 1.1: Employees within the Construction Industry (1000s) from 2000-2013](image)

1.2. Research Aims

The aim of this research is to ascertain how digital marketing is currently employed within the Irish construction industry. The research will examine the digital marketing platforms being currently used and will look at their effectiveness. In order to show this the following objectives/aims were established:

- Firstly, the research will investigate the current digital landscape for the construction industry in Ireland.
- Secondly, the research will analyse business behaviour online in Irish construction industry.
- Following on from this, this study aims to analyse the attitudes towards the online digital strategies currently employed by the Irish construction industry.
The attitude of the consumer or end user towards the Irish construction industry and the digital presence of that industry will be assessed.

The final objective will be to identify the main barriers to effective implementation of a digital marketing presence in the Irish construction industry.

1.3. Motivation for the research

The Irish construction industry is a huge contributor to the performance of the Irish economy, as well as the European economy as a whole. Having personally worked in the industry for many years it is clear the sector needs to be adaptable and open to new ideas. The Irish construction industry bases its very foundations on the low cost model, yet frequently numerous contracts overrun both on time and cost. The use of effective digital media channels may help, minimising disputes between all the different parties involved.

Due to the fragmented nature of the Irish construction industry, an integrated approach is required. On a typical construction project in Ireland there could be up to 30 different stakeholders involved, inevitably resulting in disputes, disruptions and high levels of inefficiency which are totally unsustainable.

The number of Internet users in 2011 exceeded 225 million in North America (Business Monitor Intelligence July 2012). These usage levels, coupled with over one billion active users on Facebook (Fisch 2010), indicates how both internet and social media have massively impacted on the daily lives of the world’s citizens. Research conducted by Leeflang et al. states that potential customers will carry out at least four online reviews before purchasing a product of service (Leeflang et al. 2014). Additionally, mobile media is driving a second internet revolution (Husson et al. 2013). A study by Shyu has attributed the surge in digital activity to the improved bandwidth wireless networks and improved mobile signal (Shyu 2015). These advances endow modern consumers with more decision making power and access to more information when making pre-purchase decisions. Digital media has expanded the possible markets for the Irish construction industry. This is an area that can offer competitive advantage so is of particular interest to businesses that work within the Irish construction industry.
The consumer market in Ireland has changed dramatically. Changes in consumer behaviour have forced firms to rethink their marketing strategies in the digital domain. Modern consumers can now gain expert knowledge from participation in popular social networks. In order to continue to expand and grow the Irish construction industry needs to be able to survive and remain relevant to the every changing marketplace. The online marketplace allows the consumer to browse without being disturbed. The businesses need to ensure they have a presence online in order to be able to communicate with potential customers. This research will investigate the ever changing landscape and interpret the positioning of the Irish construction industry.

1.4. Theoretical justification for this topic of research

Digital marketing has become more main stream in the last number of years. This type marketing has become the most important strategy in the current business landscape. Changes in consumer behaviour require firms to rethink their marketing strategies in the digital domain (Tiago et al. 2014). Digital marketing is promotion of products or services using all forms of digital advertising platforms to reach the target audience. This medium includes radio, mobile, television, social media marketing and other smaller less forms of digital media. Mobile marketing has become the most popular platform to engage and reach out to the target market. The digital advertising phenomenon began in October 1994 when the web magazine, Hotwired, sold the first “banner advertising” to AT&T, laying the foundations for the “banner advertising” approach evident today (Oberoi 2013). This movement to online advertising changed marketing approaches forever. The focus of business had to change in order to keep up with this fast pace environment.

Currently there are a number of digital marketing frameworks in existence. This research will investigate the available platforms and their implementation within the Irish construction industry. According to John O’Regan, AECOM’s Head of Programme, Cost and Consultancy in Ireland, the Irish construction industry is presently experiencing an upturn in business, with figures for 2015 showing a 14% increase compared to 2014 and the AECOM predicts double-digit growth for 2016 (AECOM Ireland Annual review 2016). Many of the
companies involved in the Irish construction industry would have very satisfactory offline marketing campaigns, however, there needs to be a link between online and offline campaigns. This research will investigate how this integration can be used to increase business visibility. In this digital age, potential consumers will automatically search online for information they require, therefore the digital marketing platforms create great opportunities for business. However, with so many messages and communications being sent and received through these platforms, the company need to ensure they are reaching their target audience.

The Irish construction industry is beginning to take an interest in digital marketing. Upon observing current trends in other industries, it is obvious that all types of companies and traders are utilising digital marketing to attract and secure new business. The Construction Industry Federation (CIF), the representative body for the Irish construction industry, has now entered into partnership with a digital marketing firm, Aspire Digital, to enhance the digital presence of its members. All aspects of digital marketing will be addressed with a specific emphasis on the social media aspect of digital marketing. This service will be provided free of charge to CIF members, offering them a substantial advantage in an increasingly busy marketplace. This move signifies a culture shift within the construction industry and demonstrates the willingness of the industry to change the old traditional methods which are rapidly becoming outdated.

1.5. Novelty of research

Very little research has been carried out to date within the Irish construction industry, in part due to the closed nature and culture within the industry. However, as a direct result of AECOM’s predicted growth for this year, research into mechanisms of sustaining this growth is a priority. Therefore, this research will provide some insight as to the positive impact digital media could have on the future of the construction industry. The results of this research will be very interesting for both the Irish Construction Industry and the marketing departments of all businesses associated with construction. The information will relevant to all stakeholders from the builders to the end users and all the intermediaries in between.
and will propose new avenues for current construction businesses to pursue in order to facilitate expansion and increased sustained profits.

1.6. Dissertation roadmap

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides a background to the Irish construction industry and the current standards of operation. The importance of the construction industry to the Irish economy is discussed. This chapter also gives an understanding of digital marketing and its need in the modern marketplace. The objectives which form the basis of this research are detailed. Additionally the justification for the research topic is explored in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter defines digital marketing and presents the different models and theories that exist within this field. Additionally, this chapter will demonstrate the application of these different models in the marketplace, critically reviewing the impact of each approach. Furthermore, the chapter compares digital and traditional marketing channels and strategies.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Methods

In this chapter, research methodology and methods will be outlined and discussed. From here, qualitative and quantitative research will be defined and the reasons for choosing each research method will be explained. The aims of this research will be presented. For this research both questionnaires and interviews will used to gather information. The reasoning for this will explained. The use of both quantitative and qualitative will allow for a better researched topic and ensure that the research is accurate and relevant. The time horizon and the process of data collection will be presented. The limitations to the research will be put forward and the process in which these overcome.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

In this chapter the information gathered from interviews and questionnaires will be presented. The research gathered from the quantitative process will be presented in the form of graphs, making it easier for the reader to understand. The feedback from the interviews with participants from both the Irish construction and Irish digital marketing sector will also be presented. This deductive research approach will allow the facts to be presented in an unbiased fashion.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter aims to explain all the data collected during the research process. The details from the interviews will be explained, the results from the questionnaires will be discussed and the data obtained from the literature review will be presented. All of the above will then be examined and how it relates to the Irish construction industry.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter, recommendations will be made based on the primary and secondary research gathered. The aims and the objectives of the research will be applied to the findings. This will then allow for conclusions and recommendations to be made. The results from this chapter will be of particular interest to the Irish construction industry.

Chapter 7: Self-Reflection

This chapter will summarise the whole experience of the dissertation research process. This will depict the journey of the research process and how the experience has impacted on the researcher. This will give an insight to the challenges and rewards associated with the research dissertation process.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction
Digital marketing is relatively misunderstood concept amongst the professional from the Irish construction industry. Indeed, the perception of digital marketing in the Irish construction industry from a worldwide viewpoint would indicate that this industry lags behind the same industry in other countries, when it comes to implementing digital marketing strategies. The leaders at the forefront of the digital marketing revolution in Ireland include the fashion and food industries, with the Irish construction industry very slow to embrace digital marketing. The aim of the literature review is to:

1. Provide an understanding of the current situation in the Irish construction industry
2. Review digital marketing and its benefits
3. Gain an understanding of how to implement a digital marketing strategy
4. Review the activity of the Irish digital consumer

2.2. Irish construction industry
The Irish construction industry is very traditional, with very little willingness to adapt to new ways of thinking or technology. Very significant inefficiencies and problems still exist in both paper transactions and non-integrated electronic solutions. The subsequent decline in the industry following the collapse of the “Celtic tiger” economy has hindered the assimilation of new innovations or strategies into the industry. The industry is plagued with conflict as a result of multiple stakeholders and the fragmented nature of the sector which means many different companies must attempt to work together in harmony. The tendering process for awarding contracts, often very lucrative, has bred secrecy and distrust as companies compete to outbid each other to secure projects. This has led to the development of a stifling atmosphere within the sector, with very little information or knowledge sharing among competitors and even between partners. With fixed price government contracts in the pipeline the industry now has to look towards its outdated marketing strategies in an effort to boost profits and business growth to pre-recession levels.
Recent years have heralded a shift in attitude towards digital marketing platforms and strategies. The construction industry has taken note of the successful implementation of digital marketing strategies in other industries, and buoyed by the hard proof of soaring profits and sales figures, the Irish construction industry is beginning to take its first hesitant steps into the digital marketing world. The backing of digital marketing participation by the Construction Industry Federation (CIF), the representative body for the Irish construction industry, has in essence acted as a starter’s gun in the race to beat the competitors in an industry which is known to prefer evidence based strategies. With the emergence of the Irish construction industry from the recession inflicted slowdown, CIF have teamed up with an Irish digital marketing company, Aspire, in a partnership focused on helping its members develop and expand their digital marketing presence (Construction Industry Federation 2014). This endeavour on behalf of CIF is strategic, the birth of digital marketing occurred at the precise time the Irish construction industry collapsed, meaning that CIF’s members are years behind other sectors when it comes to digital marketing knowledge. Recognisant of the advantages of a digital presence, CIF are willing to invest in digital marketing, in an effort to drive the continued recovery and growth of the crippled sector.

The Irish construction industry is also embracing other technological advances during this recovery period. The Building Information Modelling (BIM) program was developed in the United States and is gaining traction in the European market and most recently Ireland. BIM is a radical new software program used in the design process, is gaining in popularity among members of the construction industry. BIM is a computer aided modelling system producing a three dimensional representation of a building expected aesthetics upon completion. With international construction companies now including BIM in their tender applications worldwide the Irish construction industry must embrace these modern methods to retain competitiveness in an ever improving marketplace.

2.3. Digital marketing
Since its initial inception the field of marketing has changed dramatically. This marketing evolution can be linked to growing internet usage and technological advances which mean
consumers can now browse the web from smart devices on the go instead of from the confines of a pc desk (Figure 2.1). The 1990’s saw the emergence of social commerce, with new online retail models or marketing strategies incorporating established social networks, sometimes in combination with peer-to-peer communication, to drive sales (Fader et al. 2012; Indvik 2013). This social commerce approach has now evolved into the current field of digital marketing. The use of the internet and other digital media and technology in the support of modern marketing has given rise to a bewildering range of labels and jargon.

Figure 2.1: Mobile Web Use (Weckler 2015)

In the beginning marketing professionals in this new field were faced with four extreme challenges; large quantities of data, social media, proliferation of communication channels and the ever changing consumer demographics. The internet has revolutionised the way business is conducted globally. By the mid-2000s digital behaviour altered the power dynamic between buyer and seller dramatically, with consumers researching products online to arrive at their own decision before ever interacting with a salesperson. Social media was still in its infancy during this period, with marketers unprepared for social to emerge as one of the leading marketing outlets of the 21st century. During the latter half of
the 2000’s social networking hit its stride, with a raft of platforms launching into the unknown digital waters, aiming to reunite classmates, share photos with family globally or keep in touch with professionals working in your field. The world adopted social media platforms with open arms and today social networking has become a huge component of people’s lifestyles, firmly engrained into the fabric of everyday life (McClure 2009).

The last decade has wrought dramatic changes on the marketing landscape. The time of traditional marketing, where marketers were pushing out messages towards consumers via one-way communication channels has passed (Parker 2011). Previously, there was no direct link between the worlds of the company and consumer (Jaffe 2010). Through the emergence of Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, companies began to identify opportunities to exploit this unexplored marketing environment, taking advantage of the ever increasing usage to reach a larger target audience and build their brand (Ahlberg 2010). These platforms enabled the creation of a two way social communication channel facilitating interaction and feedback between the consumer and the brand; thus enabling greater flexibility and instant feedback (Hoyer et al. 2010; Kaplan et al. 2010). Given the abrupt rise in mobile computing, it is perhaps unsurprising that the popularity of social media platforms over the past several years has hinged on the capabilities of smartphones and mobile devices.

Online commerce is going from strength to strength. Statistics from Amazon for sales on the 26 November 2012 indicate that consumers ordered more than 26.5 million items globally, equating to a record 360 items per second (Cheredar 2012). Digital music sales outsold physical sales in the USA for the first time in 2011, suggesting a change in consumer attitudes and an appetite for online commerce (Fisch 2010). With global online populations in excess of 2.1 billion in 2011 the allure of digital marketing is now irresistible. Internet advertising is now seen as more of a ‘sure thing’ than most traditional media (Ryan et al. 2012). Major investment by industry, in particular the Irish construction industry, is required in both digital marketing and social media. 2011 saw worldwide spending of $4.3 billion on marketing in social media platforms alone (Williamson 2011). Technology and marketing are
inseparable, with technological advances underpinning each major milestone in the history of marketing since its inception.

There are many pros and cons as regards investing in a digital marketing campaign. Advantages include (1) lower costs in comparison to traditional offline campaigns, (2) effective customer targeting allowing a company to address a specific audience which can really make a difference to sales and growth, (3) real time direct interaction with your audience which can help to build a strong customer-supplier relationship for the company and (4) the ability to publish what you want, when you want without being constrained by strict marketing rules. Disadvantages include (1) banner blindness whereby customers have become immune or indifferent to the large volumes of ads displayed on social platforms and (2) risk of the company not been taken serious if attempts at digital marketing appear unprofessional to the target audience. Correctly designed digital marketing campaigns have the potential to greatly increase website footfall and increase sales. When it comes to digital marketing business owners are extremely sceptical, perceiving this approach as a risky investment, requiring a steep initial outlay and extensive time investments. However, as the world becomes more digitally-focused, companies must be adaptable and since it is likely that the competition has already invested in digital marketing it can be proposed that the initial start up costs of a digital marketing campaign is actually more cost-effective than advertising through traditional means alone. A well maintained website with quality content targeting the needs and adding value to your target audience can provide significant value, lead generation opportunities and increased sales conversions.

The business world has now entered a new era and this has lead to many challenges for the implementation of digital marketing. Studies suggest developing brand and customer relationships are imperative for success with digital marketing efforts (Leeflang et al. 2014). Porter says the key question is not whether to deploy internet technology - companies have no choice if they want to stay competitive - but how to deploy it (Porter 2001).
2.4. Digital Strategies

The digital marketing strategy refers to the definition of approach by which applying digital technology platforms will support marketing and business objectives (Chaffey et al. 2016). An effective digital marketing strategy will help a company make the right decisions to be successful online. Within the Irish construction industry many businesses may need to integrate with partners such as suppliers and distributors (Sultan et al. 2004). Wilkinson states collaboration through technology is the key to the evolution of partnering arrangements in construction (Wilkinson 2005), as a mechanism for overcoming the industry’s fragmentated nature. The employment of this integration should ensure meaningful engagement with the target audience. Focusing on the future, any digital marketing strategy must have the capability to integrate with multiple devices including mobile devices (Strauss et al. 2013) to facilitate a more geographically mobile, time strapped consumer.

Digital marketing and social media provide opportunities for businesses to reach customers, both existing and new, more efficiently (Taiminen et al. 20014). Numerous strategies can be employed to reach the target audience. Search engine optimisation (SEO), a process of affecting the visibility of a website in a search engines unpaid results, is one of the main strategies employed to reach the potential customer (Ortiz-Cordova et al. 2012). Companies who achieve a high rank in the search have more chance of being noticed by consumers. Another strategy employed is pay per click (PPC) where the company pays a fee to the host each time their advertisement is clicked, subsequently diverting traffic to the company’s website. Another popular strategy involves the use of social media by companies as a medium for interacting with their target audience. Social media marketing refers to tools and practises used to identify and analyse conversations, as well as to participate and initiate social interactions within communities and thus consumers. (Cavazza 2010). Social media interaction is easily measured, providing instant results to allow a company determine whether their strategies are effective.

Any digital marketing strategy employed will need to consider the consumer category they wish to connect with, either business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C).
Despite the similarities between B2B and B2C marketing, there are some important differences, especially on social media platforms. Marketing researchers currently use two differing strategies for each market (Wind 2006). B2B marketing will need to show more product specification as the audience can be more technically minded. Digital marketing will create new opportunities for efficiency and value creation in B2B relationships (Prentice 2014). B2B marketing content should deliver the right content to the right audience of users at exactly the right time to satisfy the users’ requirements (Swan 2014). The success of any B2B marketing is grounded in acquiring a deep understanding of customer profiles, behaviour and interaction preferences (Stone et al. 2014). B2C marketing needs to be relevant to convert prospects. Consumers do not necessarily make purchases during working hours so B2C digital strategies will need to consider this, ensuring accessibility of the utilised platform on mobile devices (Maoz et al. 2014). Profile segmentation variables can be used to group consumers together in a meaningful way so they can be reached by suitable media communication (Jobber et al. 2013). This allows a focused campaign, facilitating company communications to be seen by the desired target audience. These demographics will give a better understanding of the current marketplace.

If the company’s digital marketing strategy is successful in reaching the target audience, these visitors must be converted into customers or sales to ensure business growth. This can be achieved by optimising the website or digital platform in question, ensuring the content is engaging and the consumer has access to all the relevant information (Kaplan et al. 2010). In order to maximise the success of the chosen marketing strategy, a company must develop lead generation techniques. These techniques will enable the company to seek out and attract leads that will be converted into customers. The final stage of a digital marketing strategy is engagement. The engagement process, or pull marketing, aims to encourage brand loyalty and repeat custom, and can be easily achieved through content marketing involving the use of promotions or social media giveaways on platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. An active social media presence and interaction with potential customers can increase likes, shares and “e-word of mouth” which function to expand the target audience and boost the brands profile. The customer has a tendency to be less trusting of company advertisements (Neilsen 1997), therefore peer opinion is important in their decision to
interact with a business. All of the above approaches form part of a long term strategy which takes significant time, funds and effort. However by following these guidelines a company’s digital marketing campaign can achieve success, optimising the online experience for the company itself and the consumer, as well as resulting in increased profits.

2.5. Irish Digital Consumers

The Irish consumer has changed dramatically over the last decade, becoming more digitally aware and price-focused. Figures indicate that 90% of consumers now research a product or service online prior to purchase (Kee 2008). The digital landscape and the consumers view and engagement with brands has evolved, with evidence showing the customers journey does not begin or end with a purchase (Figure 2.2.) (Edelman 2010).

![Figure 2.2: Customer decision journey](Edelman 2010)

An increasingly younger internet user age (Teo 2001), coupled with a growing mobile device usage and the more discerning nature of the Irish consumer in comparison to their international counterparts presents some novel challenges for an digital marketer hoping to reach their selected target audience and foster brand loyalty in Ireland (Husson et al. 2013). Earning brand loyalty is a time consuming exercise, particularly in markets saturated with similar and sometimes cheaper competitors. Irish consumers will spend considerable time investigating and evaluating a brand, relying on reviews and recommendations from trusted sources before committing to a purchase. This loyalty loop is complete when the consumer purchases the product and then shares their experiences via social media for other potential
customers. The AIDA model, or ‘purchase funnel’, can also used to describe consumer behaviour (Figure 2.3). This model is somewhat outdated and has been upgraded to the AIDAS model to encompass the “share” element associated with social media platforms.

![Figure 2.3: AIDA model](image)

The Irish construction industry has a potential domestic target audience of 4.75 Million according to preliminary 2016 census figures stands at 4.75 million people (CSO 2016). The industry is unique for the following reasons: (1) many of the projects in construction are one-of-a-kind (Koskela 2009), (2) the temporary nature of each project (timeframe of project) does not allow for long-term planning (Koskela 2009), and (3) an existing supply chain structure that is very densely populated with many intermediaries. Therefore the construction industry is unique as many of the consumer/end users may not necessarily purchase the product or service directly. There are many types of consumers, all with different needs and wants (Persaud et al. 2012). The consumer in the Irish construction industry can fall into any of three categories; Business to Business (B2B), Business to Consumer (B2C) or the newest category of Consumer to Consumer (C2C). C2C has gained popularity with the emergence of websites like eBay and DoneDeal which allow consumers to purchase items from other consumers rather than directly from manufacturers/distributors. B2B consumers require efficiency and expertise while B2C consumer wants to be entertained and enjoy their online experience.
Research has shown purchasing decision makers conduct technology driven information searches before engaging with suppliers (Holliman et al. 2014). Today’s consumer has the power to make purchases at any time of the day with the advent of smartphones (Rose et al. 2010; Hathaway 2014) and 21st century marketing will be dominated by the consumer (Luck et al. 2009). Online shopping experiences are becoming very goal orientated (Perea et al, 2004). With continued developments in technology the digital landscape and the digital consumer is ever evolving. Digital marketing strategies have to provide value in exchange for people’s attention (Doctoroff 2015). If they provide added value to the consumer then this will lead to brand affinity or loyalty and will have a major influence on the consumer purchasing decisions.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & METHODS

3.1. Introduction

Saunders et al defines research as “the systemic collection and interpretation of information with a clear purpose, to fins things out” (Saunders et al. 2009). The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology that will be employed to conduct this research. There are numerous research vehicles available to the researcher. The research philosophy of the researcher will be presented and justification will be provided. The research approach will be discussed and why this form was taken. This research will contain both primary and secondary research which will give a better understanding on the topic being researched. The data collection methods will be discussed and why these methods were used will be explained. This study will use both quantitative and qualitative research to gather information. The process of this will be explained and the way in which these results will be analysed will all be explained. As with any research, there are always going to be research limitations, these will be identified. When conducting research, the researcher needs to remain ethical. The ethical issues involved in this research will also be presented.

3.2. Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is “an over-arching term relating to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge” (Saunders et al. 2009). Research philosophy can be defined as a belief about the way in which data about a phenomenon should be gathered, analysed and used (Galliers 1991). The research onion (Figure 3.1) is a metaphor used to describe the different philosophies adopted by the researcher when undertaking research. This research onion represents the many research layers with the outermost layers corresponding to the more general philosophies, which must be peeled away working inwards towards the core, in this case data collection (Saunders et al. 2009). Throughout the course of this research the research philosophy employed is positivism, whereby the researcher will adopt the philosophical stance of the natural scientist (Saunders et al. 2012). Positivism implies that the “researcher is independent of and neither affects nor is affected by the subject of the research” (Remenyi et al. 1998). Gill et al states the researcher will prefer collecting data
about an observable reality and search for regularities and casual relationships in the data to create law-like generalisations like those produced by scientists (Gill et al. 2010). The data collected will be collated and any conclusions reached will be as a result of the facts gathered (Crotty 1998).

![Image: Research Onion (Saunders et al. 2009)]

**Figure 3.1: Research Onion** (Saunders et al. 2009)

This research philosophy forms the foundations for the questions asked in the one-on-one interviews and establishes the basis for the questions posed in the questionnaires which will be distributed to industry professionals and consumers within the construction industry. This research will utilise quantifiable data that can be examined and discussed. The use of primary and secondary data will give research more creditability and will allow analysis between the existing research and this new research.

### 3.3. Research Approach

The research approach employed in this research is deductive. Deductive reasoning occurs when conclusions are derived logically from a set of premises (Ketokivi et al. 2010). The conclusions arrived at are true when the premises are true. The assumptions that will be
arrived at will be logical and justified. This research approach will either validate the current theories or it will be in conflict.

This research approach will test a theory or hypothesis. This deductive process has six steps which the research will progress through (Blaikie 2010):

1. The researcher puts forward an idea or set of hypotheses to form a theory.
2. A testable proposition is arrived at, using the existing research as the benchmark.
3. The logic of the argument needs to be studied. If this research is similar to the existing theories, move onto the next step.
4. Analyse the data collected by testing the premise.
5. If this test fails or is not consistent then the theory is deemed to be incorrect or false.
6. If the results of this research are in agreement with the premise set out then the theory will be ratified.

For this research, the aim is to see how digital marketing is used in the Irish construction industry. This research will look at the relationship that currently exists. This research approach will allow for more relevant recommendations. The current thinking will be tested and will be checked to see if it is really fit for purpose. This research approach follows the logical flow of data. The use of existing secondary data will be applied to the Irish construction industry. This process will allow for a clear conclusion. The approach will ensure that concepts will be operationalised in a way that enables facts to be measured quantitatively (Saunders et al. 2009). This deductive approach also includes generalisations, which are reached by logical thinking. The selection of research approach was based on my experience working within the Irish construction industry for many years. The researcher has a high level of expertise in this area which allows for research to be conducted in an efficient manner. The use of the questionnaires also justifies the reasoning for choosing the deductive research approach. The quantitative data collected can be measured, providing a structure which is regimented with very little room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation. The researcher will remain independent while researching and the
findings will not be tainted by any personal belief or opinions. This approach will be a perfect fit when researching the Irish construction industry.

3.4. Research Strategy

The research strategy describes the plan of action implemented in order to achieve research goals. Saunders et al define a research strategy as a plan of how a researcher will go about answering his or her research questions (Saunders et al. 2009). The research strategy is the methodological link between the research philosophy and the subsequent choice of methods to collect and analyse data (Denzin et al. 2005). For the purposes of this research a “pluralistic” strategy will be employed. This pluralistic or mixed-method approach uses both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Through these two approaches the researcher hopes to provide a suitable basis for testing the research hypothesis, allowing comparison between at least two variables when the data is analysed. The qualitative research will help to form the basis for the questionnaire design, which is quantitative research.

3.5. Time Horizon

The total length of time allocated for completion of this research is 3 months. Once the taught part of the MBA program was completed, then research on this topic could commence. Since the timeframe for completing the study is very short, a cross-sectional approach was employed, offering a snapshot of the state of the marketplace during a certain time period, in this case June to August 2016. The research was further complicated by the annual summer shutdown of the Irish construction industry for annual leave which further shortened the available research window. The individuals selected for the one-on-one interviews are all based either in Dublin or Galway city. This facilitated the organisation of meeting times that are convenient to all parties. With the current upturn in construction activity in Ireland at the moment, getting an industry professional to take time out of their day to conduct the interviews is challenging. The one-on-one interviews are designed to last between thirty to forty five minutes. Interviews were conducted on different days in order
to allow for adequate preparation time and also facilitate to collation of the previously collected data.

As both quantitative and qualitative research will be carried out, it was decided to conduct the one-on-one interviews as early as possible in the research process. The reasoning behind this decision is to allow time to transcribe the interviews and to collate all the information. The professionals from the Irish construction industry and the Irish marketing industry possess vital information and knowledge regarding their own industries which is centrally important to this research. This primary research is not available from any other source. This raw data is current and is very important to the Irish construction industry at this time. All of the participants have expert knowledge in their respective industries. Upon analysis, the information gathered from these interviews will form the basis of the questionnaires which will be distributed to the stakeholders in the industry. The questionnaire is a type of cross-sectional study as it is used to collect data on how a certain group of individuals feel about a particular topic. During the course of this research the questionnaires will be directed at two specific groups of recipients, professionals within the construction industry and consumers or end users. The questions will elicit responses from the recipients which the researcher can then analyse for useful data that will enable the formation of a theory.

3.6. Data Collection

Data collection is the process of collecting information which will allow the researcher to answer certain research questions and make recommendations based on the findings. Data will be collected using both primary and secondary research sources for the purposes of this research. This pluralistic approach will allow the researcher to examine existing literature that already exists as well as completing new research. This approach will facilitate comparisons between the existing literature in this topic and the newly collected primary data. Data collection is very important when conducting research as incorrect or inaccurate data will distort the final results and conclusions. Since this data will form the basis for the
research it is essential that it is relevant and trustworthy, therefore all resources will need to be utilised correctly in order to ensure data is mined and collected correctly.

3.6.1. **Secondary Data collection**

Secondary data can be defined as data that already exists but which can be further analysed to provide additional or different knowledge, interpretations or conclusions (Bulmer et al. 2009). This secondary data can be a very good barometer to determine levels of publications or written articles on a particular topic or subject. Secondary data can be obtained from many different sources; however researchers must validate the credibility of the author and collected data. Frequently, previously collected data, which may be very relevant to the research topic, is not available to the general public, a situation particularly relevant in the Irish construction industry. This data can be contained within company sales meetings or brainstorming sessions and but this information may be extremely hard to view.

3.6.1.1. **Secondary data types**

There are many different types of secondary data available in research, encompassing numeric (quantitative) and non-numeric (qualitative) data. Secondary data can be classified into three subgroups including (1) documentary data, (2) survey-based data and (3) multi-source data (Saunders et al. 2012).

3.6.1.1.1. **Documentary Data**

Documentary secondary data is made up of text and non-text data. Text data includes written materials such as journals, textbooks, newspapers articles and public notices. These sources will allow the researcher to easily compile research by mining the existing data; either qualitative research e.g. a manager’s reason for arriving at a decision, or quantitative research e.g. links between absenteeism and profitability from a company’s records (Bryman 1989; Saunders et al. 2012). Non-text documentary secondary data includes non-written materials such as television programmes, voice and video recordings, which can be analysed either quantitatively or qualitatively or can be utilised to test other existing data.
previously published in the research area (Robson 2011). Technological advancements and increased internet usage increases the availability of documentary secondary data to the researcher, however care must be taken to validate the trustworthiness of the data.

3.6.1.1.2. Survey based secondary data

Survey based secondary data is data collected through one of three distinct survey collection strategies; (1) census, (2) continuous or regular surveys or (3) ad hoc surveys (Saunders et al. 2012). Censuses are typically conducted by and participation is mandatory (Hakim 2000). For example, Ireland has been carrying out censuses of population, under the guidance of the Central Statistics Office (CSO), gathering accurate, clearly defined, high quality data on population numbers and the characteristics of the country’s inhabitants. The advent of the World Wide Web has facilitated easy storage and public access to the census records. The second survey type are continuous or regular surveys which are repeated over time and have been proposed as an excellent source of secondary data (Hakim 1982). An example of this type of survey is the European Union (EU) Labour Force Survey which is conducted quarterly in order to answer questions set by the member states of the EU. The final approach to surveys are the ad hoc survey which are more specific and are carried out on a smaller scale research project, for example, the research survey carried out for academic research. Ad hoc surveys gather quite specific information however the data may be extremely difficult to uncover.

3.6.1.1.3. Multiple-source secondary data

Multi-source secondary data refers to an amalgamation of documentary or survey data, whereby the different datasets are combined to form another database prior to your access to the data. The information within the database has been collated and presented but is still in raw data format. The main issues that can arise from the use of multi-source secondary data is the use of out-dated information or failures to take a major recent event into account, thus distorting any findings.
3.6.1.2. **Advantages of secondary data**

Secondary data can be very valuable to a researcher, especially if resources such as time and money are very scarce when conducting research (Ghauri et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2011). Employing secondary data may allow the researcher to analyse far larger datasets than would be possible if they had to collect new primary data manually (Stewart et al. 1993; Smith et al. 2011). As is often the case, secondary data will be very high quality due to high levels of investment in the research (Stewart et al. 1993; Saunders et al. 2012). Furthermore, secondary data can be collected unobtrusively, without the necessity for disturbing industry professionals, particularly relevant when researching sensitive topics (Cowton 1998). Additionally, secondary data is permanent and always available, allowing easy verification by peers and opening research findings up to public scrutiny (Denscombe 2007).

3.6.1.3. **Disadvantages of secondary data**

Secondary data may have been collected for different purposes or to answer different research questions, therefore the study population and data collected for one study may not be optimum for another study (Smith et al. 2011), distorting the findings since the research is not relevant to the research question. Particular care must be taken when utilising secondary data, with concerns arising over the validity of the findings and the lack of questioning in the secondary data (Wolf 2007). An online search may yield newspaper articles as a relevant source of data; however since many periodicals charge for access to articles, financial constraints may mean the researcher is unavailable to access the data. Secondary data may contain assumptions of the author rather than fully researched facts, leading to bias. Frequently the marketing department of a company will draft the company’s online reports, thereby introducing bias to the data, perhaps not always presenting a true reflection of the data since companies are concerned with profits and stakeholders. This is also the case with media outlets or publications. The culture of the organisation will also determine the tone of any publications. All of these will need to be considered when using secondary data for the purposes of data collection.
3.6.2. **Primary Qualitative Data Collection**

Qualitative research has been described as the “softer” side of market research, producing data which is deeper and more enlightening than quantitative data. Qualitative research incorporates studying “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin et al. 1994). It has been claimed that qualitative research relates to in-depth studies where there is an opportunity to collect “quality” responses (Biggam 2011). Qualitative methods are used to understand the “why”, “what”, or “how” of a particular research question. Qualitative methods offer more flexibility and ensure respondents feel comfortable and at ease. Qualitative research allows more interaction and adaption to a change in research direction (King 2004). Qualitative research stems from humanities-based research and is more personal, allowing researchers to gauge the response by reading body language or picking up on subconscious behaviour. The answers provided by respondents are less instant, some thought and feeling is put into the answers given. This form of data collection allows the researcher to enter the heart and mind of the research subject. There is more of a link with feelings and experiences than just dealing with hard numeric data.

The qualitative research employed for the purposes of this research is in the form of one-on-one interviews, in order to gain information from industry professionals. The interview format will be semi-structured, designed to last thirty to forty minutes in order to minimize disruptions to the industry professional and the researcher. The key benefits of these one-on-one interviews is that the respondents are removed from their immediate work environments to a private room, reducing the pressure to conform to company or industry norms, resulting in more honest responses which can uncover huge volumes of data and can even change the focus of research, if relevant to the research questions. No questions would be submitted to interviewees beforehand in order to ensure all responses would be genuine and not rehearsed, providing more accurate raw data. The questions are designed to be relevant and engaging for the interviewee, in an attempt to motivate the respondent to give serious thought to their answers whilst ensuring they feel comfortable in the interview.
Since this is the researchers first experience conducting such interviews, it is essential that the researcher probes for more in-depth answers rather than accepting simple yes or no answers. Extensive notes will be taken during the interview and will be transcribed upon completion of the interviews. The interview will provide a more relevant and free exchange of views, which could not be achieved if focus groups were used for this research. By utilising open ended questions bias can be reduced (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008) and appropriate follow up questions can be asked. As these interviews with industry professionals will be semi structured, the researcher will need to ensure that the conversation does not drift off topic. While the verbal data derived from these interviews will be documented, it may be hard to interpret some of the data in hindsight due to lack of context, for example body language. It is common knowledge the Irish construction can be a harsh environment to be associated with, to this end the significance of establishing the “personal” contact will be crucial and will ensure the best possible data can be collected.

3.6.3. **Primary Quantitative Data Collection**

Quantitative Data collection is concerned with gathering factual data, determining the different relationships between the factual data and establishing how this data relates to previous research on a certain research topic (Fellows et al. 2008). Quantitative data collection allows the researcher to present findings in statistical format using graphs or tables which increases a readers understanding (Tufte 2001). For the purposes of this research, questionnaires, one of the most widely used quantitative data collection methods, will be employed. Questionnaires ask respondents to answer the same set of questions in a predetermined order (deVaus 2002). All aspects of the research questions need to be addressed when formulating the questionnaire, with careful thought going into question selection in order to gather relevant data from the selected population. Several different questionnaire types exist, including self-completed or interviewer-completed. Self-completed questionnaires will be used for the purposes of this research, with each respondent filling out the questionnaire on their own without the presence of the researcher. The questionnaire is web-based utilising the Survey Monkey site and once an individual completes the questionnaire the researcher will be alerted by automatic updates.
All the data collected will be gathered and stored until the web based link is closed prior to analysis and presentation of the results in a clear and concise manner.

The design of the questionnaire is very important. The aim of the questionnaire is to obtain information and data from the respondents. The questions must be easy to understand which will allow the respondent to supply answers. The format of the questions must motivate the respondent to complete the full questionnaire. Each question should have instructions, so the respondent understands what is expected of them. The questionnaire should not be too long as the respondent will lose interest and may even abandon survey without completion. The layout of the questionnaire must be clear and show a logical flow. This will allow the respondent every chance to provide the best possible answers. The questionnaire is designed in conjunction with the research objectives of this research project. The questionnaire responses will provide answers to the research questions. More personal questions will be placed at the end, as the respondent will be more willing to answer these at this point. There will be a mix of multiple choice questions and dichotomous questions.

Foddy states the question must be understood by the respondent in the way the researcher intended and the answer given by the respondent must be understood by the researcher in the way intended by the respondent (Foddy 1994). To ensure this is the case, the questionnaires will be tested on a smaller group before sending out to the main population sample. The reasoning behind this is to allow for a review and to see if there are any issues presented. This is an extremely beneficial exercise as it ensures any mistakes can be eliminated. This will also test the validity of the questionnaire.

The design of individual questions is determined by the data required. Bourque and Clare state the researcher will do one of three things (Bourque et al. 1994):

1. Adopt questions used in previous questionnaires
2. Adapt questions used in other questionnaires
3. Develop their own questions

Adopting and adapting questions can be used if the researcher wishes to compare results with previous data collected. Caution is required with this process as the researcher will need to ensure these questions will provide the answers relevant to the current research question. Also, some existing questionnaires may be subject to copyright protection. If this is the case, permission will be needed to reproduce these questions, which is time consuming. Studies have stated that open ended questions allow the respondent to answer in their own way, whilst close ended questions are restrictive, limiting the responses to the predetermined options (Fink 2009).

This research will require two different questionnaires to be completed. There will be one questionnaire composed for the industry professionals from the Irish construction industry. The second questionnaire will be composed to gauge the attitudes of the consumer or end users towards the online digital presence of the Irish construction industry. Once these questionnaires are complete, the data will be analysed. These results will show how the industry professionals from the Irish construction industry use and view digital marketing. These results will also show the attitudes of the consumer towards the Irish construction industry. Analysis of these results will clearly show how far apart each side is and allow for recommendations to be proposed.

Due to time constraints on respondents, the questionnaires will be short and to the point. The questionnaire being distributed to the Irish construction industry professionals will have twelve questions, encompassing a mix of different question types. These will include list questions, which will allow the respondent to look at all the options and tick the answer that most relates to them. This option will also include an option to click “other”, this will allow the respondent to add their answer if not given in the options provided. Category questions will also be included. These types of questions allow the respondent to give one answer
only. This will be used to measure behaviour and attitude of the respondents. The response options should be arranged in logical order. Rating questions will also be included. Studies suggest that these types of questions should be presented in straight lines rather than multiple rows or columns, allowing respondents to answer more truthfully as they have a better understanding of what is required from them (Dillman 2009). A numeric rating scale will also be utilised in the questionnaire, ranging from 0 (low) to 100 (high), as marks obtained out of 100 can easily be understood and illustrates the feelings and attitude of the respondent clearly.

The questionnaires distributed to the Irish construction industry professionals will be accompanied by a cover note introducing the potential respondent to the research subject. Since this cover note will be the first part of the questionnaire to be viewed by the respondent it must be very clear and concise and often helps sway the potential respondents decision to complete the survey or not. The respondent must be made to feel comfortable and be reassured that the information provided will be confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this research. The web based element allows the respondent to remain anonymous. The respondent will be thanked for taking the time to complete the survey and the contact details of the researcher will be provided in case the respondent has any questions or queries regarding the questionnaire.

The use of questionnaires as the quantitative research method will be the best method for this research, allowing the researcher access to a large population sample in a relatively short time frame. The questionnaires will not be too intrusive and respondents will not experience too much disruption when completing these questionnaires. The analysis from these questionnaires can be easily quantifiable and will give great insight to the current situation in the Irish construction industry. The results gleamed from this research method will be used in conjunction with the qualitative research gathered to form the discussion and as a follow on from this, allow researcher to make any recommendations.
3.6.4. Data Analysis

As previously discussed, there will be quantitative and qualitative research carried out for this research. This data is often referred to as raw data, and prior to processing and analysis this data format is not very useful. Upon subsequent analysis can the data be presented in a format that is easily understood. Analysis will allow the researcher to make logical assumptions based on the information collected during the research process.

The quantitative data will be presented in graph format, facilitated by the online survey tool, Survey Monkey which will collate the information contained within the responses and show exactly how each question was answered by each respondent. This online tool is very useful as it will use computer generated files containing the information. These files will be in multiple formats and will allow the researcher to compare and contrast all the variables. The graphs and tables generated here will form the basis for Chapter 4 which will focus on the research findings. Whilst this online tool incurs a service charge its use will ensure the numeric data is correct and presented in a format and style that is easy to understand. Its use will also reduce any possible errors that could be encountered with manual input of raw data. This computerised data checking will ensure coding errors do not distort the findings. With questions that multiple answers are supplied the information will be presented in table format, allowing the calculation of the weighted average.

The qualitative research data will also have to be analysed and the deductive approach utilised in this research means the research will be interpreted in a certain way. Qualitative data will be more ambiguous than quantitative data; answers provided by quantitative data are “thin” while answers provided by qualitative data are “thick” or “thorough” (Dey 1993). Therefore, there is a clear answer to quantitative data while qualitative data has numerous connotations attached. Results will be analysed from words, not numbers as with qualitative data, requiring data to be carefully analysed as words can have numerous meanings. The notes taken during the process of the qualitative data collection will need to be carefully scrutinised and summarised. The data collected here will not be uniformed as expressions and feelings will be communicated differently. The researcher may need to analyse the
qualitative data differently in order to retrieve answers to the research questions posed. Comparison of each of the qualitative data sources will be used to look for common themes or trends. The one-on-one interviews will be transcribed, facilitating easier analysis. As there will be interviews held with people from the Irish construction industry and the marketing industry, the analysis can be compared, allowing the relationship between these two industries to be examined. Five interviews will be conducted for the purposes of this research, with three participants from the construction industry and two from the marketing sector, supplying sufficient information for this study without an information overload. The data can be analysed and will give a snapshot of the Irish construction industry at a particular moment in time.

3.7. Population and Sample

In an ideal study, every individual with a connection to the Irish construction industry would have input into this research; however this is impossible so instead a representative sample population will be investigated. The sample population will need to have common characteristics and will need to be relevant in regards to the research questions. This sample or subgroup will then be selected to form part of the research. The target population will be defined in terms of elements (respondent), sampling unit (industry), extent (Geographical location) and time (date of research). The sample for this research will be construction professionals in construction companies based in Ireland, July 2016. This target population will incorporate all aspects of the Irish construction industry and will ensure input can be given form all levels within the industry.

The participants who will take part in the one-on-one interviews have to meet certain criteria before they can be considered to be part of the research. The criteria set out for this research was as follows:

1. Each participant has to be over the age of eighteen years
2. Each participant has to be employed in the Irish construction industry or digital marketing
3. Each participant must not have a conflict of interest with the research or the researcher
4. Each participant will be willing to allow the information they provided to be used for the purposes of this research

3.8. Ethical Issues

Ethics can be defined as moral principles that govern a person’s behaviour or the conducting of an activity (Berry 2004). Research ethics implies ensuring the design of the research methodology is sound and morally defensible (Saunders et al. 2009). This research is undertaken in accordance with the Dublin Business School (DBS) code of ethics at all times.

The main ethical issue in this research relates to data collection and objectivity. In accordance with recommendations, participants in this study are required to provide permission for the researcher to utilise their responses in their research (Saunders et al. 2012). Any amendments made by the researcher to the provided responses are considered unethical behaviour. Furthermore, participants are free to withdraw permission to use their responses at any time. Another ethical issue relating to this research concerns the privacy of the participants and the confidentiality of their responses. To address this issue, the interview participants’ names and associated company will be removed to guarantee confidentiality. Additionally the information provided from the construction industry, although shared for the purposes of this research, is still confidential.

As questionnaires will be used for the quantitative element of this research, care has been taken to prevent traceability of the correspondents. The questionnaires will be emailed in five bulk mailing lists, with each participant bcc’d on the mail. This will ensure the information provided will be confidential and will not show who answered a particular question.
3.10. Limitations to the research

The Irish construction industry is extremely fragmented. All of this fragmentation can lead to disputes. Projects are awarded on a tender basis. The best tender is usually the lowest price. Due to this traditional method, projects are awarded to the best price rather than the best proposal. As the initial tender is so low, the main contractor then needs to turn a profit on the project. The main contractor usually sub contracts the work, again for the best price. If any issues arise, each party tries to blame the other. In this environment, the industry professionals are not very eager to share information. As many of the organisations are private limited companies, they do not want to hand competitive advantage to their rivals. The fear is that the information supplied will be vague and may not extract all the information available.

The timeframe for this research is very short, therefore the questionnaires will be sent out via email with the email link only remaining open for fifteen days. Due to a propensity to procrastinate some respondents may not fill out the questionnaires within the timeframe. There will be 136 questionnaires sent out as this is the sample population being chosen, however as a result of the recent recession and current understaffing which is evident in many organisations, individuals may fail to respond since replying to a questionnaire will not be top of their priorities. Additionally, the harsh working conditions within the industry can lead to low morale which in turn could have a negative effect on the response rate. The construction industry is renowned for slow and low response rates to survey questionnaires (Yang et al. 2011).

This research will only be focused on the Irish construction industry. There will be no in-depth research into any other industry operating within Ireland. Any issues identified will only apply to the Irish construction. While comparisons will be made with other industries that exist, within Ireland research will not be carried out for the specific issues for that industry.
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS / FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction
This chapter will present the findings of my primary and secondary research, encompassing the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data obtained throughout the study. The quantitative data obtained from questionnaires sent to both the Irish construction industry professionals and the consumers or end users. The information presented in this section represents the views of the correspondents and illustrates how each question was answered in the completion of the surveys.

4.2. Analysis of quantitative data obtained from industry professionals
This first section is devoted to the questionnaires sent out to the professionals working in the Irish construction industry. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) consisted of 12 questions focused on 11 topics detailed in the sub-sections below.

4.2.1. Response rates by industry professionals
As part of the study's primary research questionnaires were distributed to the sample population. In total 136 questionnaires were distributed via email link. The survey link remained open for fifteen days to allow participants every possible opportunity to complete the survey. Of the 136 distributed 104 were completed fully, corresponding to a response rate of 76.47%. These responses were all submitted within 10 days of issue.

4.2.2. Importance of digital marketing and promotion activities to business
The respondents' perception of the importance of digital marketing and promotional activities to their business was assessed. The results showed that 26 respondents (25%) deemed digital marketing / promotion activities crucial to their business, while 50 respondents (48.08%) indicated these activities were seen as important to their businesses. A further 20 respondents (19.23%) felt digital marketing activities were of average
importance to their business. A total of 7 respondents (6.73%) said digital marketing / promotion activities had not much importance at all as regards their businesses. Finally only 1 respondent (0.96%) felt digital marketing activities were not important at all to their business.

![Figure 4.1: Consumer perception of the importance of digital marketing](image)

**4.2.3. Communication channels currently employed**

Respondents were questioned as to which of the current communication channels was currently employed by their company to communicate with their target audience. This question was designed as a multiple entry query. The analysis showed that 81 respondents (83.51%) said they utilise the internet/website as a communication channel. Sales promotion was the next largest choice with 69 respondents (71.13%) saying their company employed this channel. PR was selected as their company’s chosen communication channel by 60.82% of the respondents. 41.21% of respondents indicated that their company employed direct mail as a communication channel. The least utilised communication channel was found to be the medium of television, with only 21 respondents (21.65%) stating that their company has used this medium for promotion. Respondents had the option to offer additional communication channels which have been employed by their company to communicate with customers, with 29 respondents (27.884%) of the sample population indicating that their company had used print media, including national, regional and local print media, as a channel for communication.
4.2.4. Existing use of digital marketing to grow business

Participants were questioned as to whether their company currently used digital marketing to increase business. The data demonstrated that 82 respondents (79.61%) stated that their company used digital media while 21 respondents (20.39%) indicated that their company is not currently utilising digital marketing.
4.2.5. **Presence of a designated marketing department**

This question was asked in order to establish whether each company currently had a department dedicated to marketing. The results showed that 60 of respondents (57.69%) said their company had designated marketing resources while 44 respondents (42.31%) stated that there was currently no designated marketing department in their company.

![Figure 4.4: Employment of a designated marketing department](image)

4.2.6. **Company level of digital marketing interaction**

This question aimed to gauge the degree of digital marketing interaction in the Irish construction industry. Analysis indicated that 50 respondents (49.50%) felt their company’s interaction was moderate. 37 respondents (36.63%) said their company’s interacted less frequently. 3 correspondents (2.88%) commented that their company’s didn’t interact at all with digital marketing while only 14 respondents (13.86%) claim to be in the heavy usage category.

![Figure 4.5: Digital marketing interaction](image)
4.2.7. Company’s Social media Presence

This question aimed to identify the most popular social media platforms currently utilised by different companies, offering respondents multiple choices. The analysis found that Facebook was the most commonly employed platform with 85 participants (88.54%) saying that their company operated a Facebook account. Twitter was the next popular social media platform with 57 respondents (59.38%) indicating their company’s presence on this platform. Youtube was selected by 35 correspondents (36.46%) while LinkedIn was used by the companies of 56 respondents (58.33%). Google + was used by the companies of 30 correspondents (31.25%) while 14 respondents (14.58%) stated their companies utilised Instagram and Pinterest. In the “other” section an application / website called Houzz was highlighted as another social media platform being employed by companies, with 3 respondents companies (2.88%) have an online presence on this site. Snapchat is not currently being employed as a social media platform with 104 respondents (100%) indicating their companies do not use this marketing tool. Finally only 8 correspondents (7.69%) claim their companies do not have a current social media presence.

Figure 4.6: Social media platform usage
4.2.8. Influence of a digital marketing presence on decisions to deal with a company

When questioned regarding the importance of a digital marketing presence in the respondents’ decision to deal with a company 24 respondents (23.08%) stated that this presence would be very important while 31 respondents (29.81%) indicated that this would be somewhat important. 30 respondents (28.85%) indicated that a digital marketing presence was moderate when deciding whether to do business with a company. Finally 15 respondents (14.42%) said a digital presence was not very important while only 4 respondents (3.85%) felt a digital presence was not important at all.

Figure 4.7: Importance of digital marketing presence

4.2.9. Reasons for company use of social media

Analysis of the responses indicated that the companies of 79 respondents (82.29%) utilised social media to create brand awareness. 55 correspondents (57.29%) indicated their company used social media to build relationships. 29 respondents (30.21%) said they monitor competitors on social media. Monitoring and comparison of prices offered as the reason for their company’s social media usage by 27 respondents (28.13%). Finally 8 respondents (7.69%) did not to choose any of the options, citing a lack of any social media presence for their company.
4.2.10. Effect of social media campaign on business growth

This question aimed to determine the attitude of the respondent to a social media campaign. 80 respondents (77.67%) agreed that social media would help grow their business, while 22 respondents (21.36%) took a neutral stance on this issue. Finally, 1 respondent (0.97%) felt social media would not help grow their business. 1 respondent (0.96%) did not provide an answer for this question.

Figure 4.8: Reasons for social media usage

Figure 4.9: Perception of social media impact
4.2.11. Likelihood of future digital marketing campaign

The reason for asking this question was to find out if digital marketing was in the future plans of these industry professionals. 3 respondents (2.88%) suggested their company would not run a digital campaign while 6 respondents (5.77%) said it was not likely. 11 respondents (10.58%) said they felt neutral on this issue. 34 respondents (32.69%) said their company would be very likely to run a digital marketing campaign. The largest response to this question saw 50 respondents (40.08%) confirming they would be somewhat likely to run a digital campaign in the future.

![Likelihood of future digital marketing campaigns](image)

**Figure 4.10: Likelihood of future digital campaigns**

4.2.12. Employees in company

This question explored the different sized organisations that exist within the Irish construction industry. The results showed that 28 respondents (26.92%) stated their businesses employed 101 employees or more. 27 respondents (26.96%) were employed by organisations with between 11-50 employees. 25 respondents (24.04%) were employed in companies with between 51-100 employees, while 24 respondents (23.08%) worked in companies with 10 or less staff.
4.2.13. Additional feedback from industry professionals

The industry questionnaire allowed the respondents to provide their own thoughts and feeling on digital marketing in the Irish construction industry which is summarised below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good way to create awareness. Needs to have digital backup for offline methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will improve digital profile with business picking back up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a one man show I do not have time or know how to do this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A company needs to be digitally aware. So much potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole trader so do not have digital profile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to have digital marketing presence. Social media is huge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have the resources available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intend upping profile on digital marketing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital marketing and social media presence is extremely important to grow business and has a proven record for increasing sales to those already actively using these platforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From my experience in working in the construction industry, the most successful method of engaging with our prospect base is to use a mix of online / offline strategies as many companies in this market still work offline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Industry professionals’ personal responses.
4.3. Analysis of quantitative data obtained from consumers

This second section is devoted to the questionnaires sent out to the consumers which aimed to ascertain consumer attitudes towards the digital presence of firms within the Irish construction industry. The questionnaire (Appendix 2) consisted of 11 questions focused on 10 topics detailed in the sub-sections below.

4.3.1. Response rates by consumers

The consumer questionnaires were conducted via iPad on a Saturday morning on the grounds of a busy hardware store in Galway. There was a draw open to all participants who completed the survey to win a €20 voucher for the hardware store. In total 28 individuals completed the survey.

4.3.2. Occurrence of renovations or a building project in the preceding year

This question aimed to ensure the respondents had interacted with the Irish construction industry within the past year and was the determining factor in whether participants were allowed to continue on and answer the remaining questions. In total 21 respondents (75%) answered yes and completed the remaining questions. The 7 respondents (25%) that answered no were not permitted to answer the remaining questions. Therefore all the remaining analysis in this section was based on a maximum of 21 respondents.

![Figure 4.12: Recent Renovations](image-url)
4.3.3. Expenditure on recent building or renovation project

This question provided an insight into the consumers monetary spend on the previously indicated renovation/building projects. A combined total of 12 respondents (57.14%) indicated a total expenditure in excess of €5000, with a further 5 respondents (23.81%) spending between €2001 - €5000. Additionally 3 respondents (3%) of the consumer sample population stated recent renovations / building projects costing approximately €501 - €2000. Finally only 1 respondent (4.76%) specified expenditures of less than €500 on a renovation / building project in the past year.

Figure 4.13: Expenditure on renovation projects

4.3.4. Consumer view on the use of the internet in a recent renovation or building project

This question aims to determine the consumers feeling on the impact of internet use during their recent project. The finds are summarised below (Table 4.2.; Figure 4.14). In summary, 57.14% of consumers thought the internet saved time. 42.86% agree that the websites were easy to navigate. 42.86% agree they enjoyed learning about construction products online. 52.38% agreed that all the information was available. A combined total of 85.72% agreed in some capacity that a n instant chat service for advice would be desirable. Only 19.05% of customers strongly agreed their previous internet usage for a construction project led them to be a loyal repeat customer. 38.10% of respondents indicated they would share the company on social media.
Figure 4.14: Consumer attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weighted Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet saved time when gathering information</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to navigate website</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyed learning about construction products online</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the information needed was online</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>52.38%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like an instant chat service for advice</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have become a loyal repeat customer</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| I would share a company on social media   | 33.33%         | 38.10%         | 28.57%  | 0.00%             | 0.00%             | 21    | 1.95             

Table 4.2: Consumer attitudes
4.3.5. **Consumer attitude to direct contact from companies following website visit**
Consumer participants were asked for their opinion on the notion of direct contact from a company following a visit to their website. Of the 21 respondents, 15 respondents (71.43%) said they would welcome direct contact from the company after visiting their website, while 6 respondents (28.57%) indicated that they would not wish to be contacted directly by a company as a result of visiting the company website.

![Figure 4.15: Follow-up from company](image)

4.3.6. **Consumer concerns regarding online shopping for construction products**
The importance of several factors, including delivery time, risk of fraud, difficulty returning products, inability to feel or touch products, the quality of the products and the ability to gather all relevant information, to a consumer’s decision to buy construction material online was assessed *(Figure 4.16, Table 4.3).*

![Figure 4.16: Consumer concerns regarding online transactions](image)
Chapter 4

Data Analysis / Findings

4.3.7. Consumer choice regarding purchase of construction materials

Consumers were polled in order to assess the purchasing habits of the consumer in the Irish construction industry. Analysis demonstrated that 18 respondents (85.71%) expressed confidence in purchasing construction materials though the hardware or builders provider and 12 respondents (57.14%) stated they would be happy purchasing construction materials via an Irish website. The hiring of a professional was the preferred choice of 10 respondents (47.62%), while 9 respondents (42.86%) indicated that they would purchase construction materials from an international website.

Table 4.3: Concerns associated with online shopping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weighted Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery Time</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk of Fraud</td>
<td>95.24%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in returning products</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>61.90%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not able to feel / touch product</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of product</td>
<td>76.19%</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to gather all information</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>55.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.17: Construction materials purchase habits
4.3.8. **Most visited websites relating to building or construction Products**

Respondents highlighted a variety of websites which they visited when investigating contraction materials. These websites vary from hardware and building provider websites, search engines, sanitary ware providers, heating and plumbing supplies as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chadwicks, Topline, B&amp;Q, Woodies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heating and Plumbing Suppliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warmflow, Firebird, Joule, Purmo, Stanley, RT Large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanitary ware</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Standard, Sonas, RT Large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electrical Suppliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert, Indiset, Hoover, Candy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tile &amp; Ceramic Suppliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Halo Tiles, Tilestyle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paint Suppliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crown, Dulux, Johnstone paints, Berger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concrete Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish cement, Ormonde Bricks, Roadstone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roofing Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capco, Kingspan, Fakro, Velux, Tegral, Murray timber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Window Suppliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Munster Joinery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power tool Manufacturers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dewalt, Makita</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search engines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handyman.ie, Google, Bing, Houzz, YouTube</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.4: Recently visited construction associated websites**
4.3.9. **Consumer rating of the Irish construction industry’s digital presence**

Consumers were asked to rate the construction industry’s digital presence out of 100. The analysis shows that consumers’ average rating was 50 out of 100.

4.3.10. **Age profile of consumer respondents**

This question identified the age group of the respondents. There was no respondent over the age of 65 years. 18-24 years and 35-44 years made up the majority of the respondents.

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**Figure 4.18: Age profile of participants**
4.3.11. Gender of consumer respondents

11 of the respondents (52.38%) were female. 10 male respondents (47.82%) made up the remainder.

![Bar chart showing gender distribution]

Figure 4.19: Gender of participants

4.4. Analysis of qualitative data obtained from industry professionals

The data collected from the individual interviews offered great insight into the attitudes of both the Irish construction industry professionals and the digital marketing sector. The interview structure allowed the platform for the industry professionals to communicate their opinions on the research. It was decided not to provide questions previous to the meeting. This ensured the answers provided were accurate and were not premeditated. The four interviews were carried out in private and surroundings that facilitated a calm environment for both the researcher and respondent. The notes taken from these interviews have been transcribed and are available to view in Appendix 2.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction
This chapter will focus on the analysis of the data collected through both the qualitative and quantitative research methods. This chapter will discuss the questionnaire results from both the industry professionals and the consumers, investigating whether the industry and its end users are in agreement as regards the use of digital marketing. Additionally the data derived from the one-on-one interviews with marketing and construction professionals will be discussed. The consumer/end user behaviour and attitudes will also be discussed. The discussion of all this data will give a clear indication of the current position of the Irish construction and the relationship with digital marketing.

5.2. Current industry attitudes to digital marketing
According to the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI), the colossal decline in the value of output of the Irish construction industry from €39 billion in 2006 to just €8.8 billion in 2013 was a major factor in the economic recession (Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland 2012). The Irish construction industry has been in a deep depression since the crash of the “Celtic tiger” and is currently singularly focused on survival. The resulting financial constraints on companies operating within the Irish construction industry means little resources are currently allocated towards marketing.

Analysis of the data suggests that the Irish construction industry does not employ digital marketing to its full potential. The main reason for this lack of use, which was highlighted in particular in the one-on-one interviews, is a lack of allocation of necessary resources. Interviewee # 1, a sales director for a large sanitary ware company with responsibilities for Ireland and Iberia (Spain and Portugal), vocalised the current business strategy employed within the construction industry concisely stating “any available future resources will be allocated to expanding our currently understaffed sales team rather than marketing activities” and “more feet on the ground mean more sales”. This thinking is endemic
throughout the Irish construction industry at present, with higher level personnel, including sales managers and directors, convinced that repopulation of the employee ranks, rather than investment in developing a marketing strategy, will function to drive sales and grow the business towards pre-recession profitability. This is mirrored by the findings of the industry professional questionnaires, in which 42.31% of respondents indicated that their company does not at present have a designated marketing department (Figure 4.4). Further supporting evidence for the lack of focus on marketing in the Irish construction industry is evidenced by the finding that only 13.86% of industry professionals rate their companies level of interaction with digital marketing as heavy (Figure 4.5). These findings are a reflection on the current thinking in the Irish construction industry with regards to the concept of digital marketing and marketing in general.

It is widely accepted that the Irish construction industry is very much traditional in their approach to business, with a focus on profitability and minimizing costs. The highly regulated environment surrounding the construction industry, particularly in this post-recession era, has led most construction companies to be more cautious and conservative, preferring to utilise evidence-backed ‘tried and tested’ approaches to business and to be wary of untested strategies. All attempts to implement marketing, even through the more traditional streams are motivated by economic benefits (Naranjo et al. 2011). Once again interviewee #1 exemplifies the industry’s position stating “conversion rates from adverts to sales interests me” and “I would like to know the potential return on investment before a campaign would be implemented”. This wariness of digital marketing is a product of the recent slump in the construction industry, where the industry’s recession-induced hibernation coincided with the birth of the digital marketing world. Despite the recent improvements in the construction industry, its companies are now years behind other industries as regards marketing approaches and have not as yet accepted the associated benefits.

However this research highlights that perhaps not every individual within the Irish construction industry is ambivalent to digital marketing. Indeed, data derived from the one-
on-one interviews with industry professionals suggests there is in fact an eagerness for companies to become more interactive on the currently available digital platforms. Interviewee #2, who is currently employed as a marketing and sales manager in one of the leading sanitary ware manufacturers within Ireland stated “the engagement of a company with available social media platforms as an avenue for marketing will be critical moving forward in terms of business growth”.

5.3. The Digital Marketing Awakening within the Construction Industry

There has been a social media explosion in recent years and many business sectors are utilising these platforms as avenues to connect with their target audience. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Snapchat offer businesses an avenue to connect and interact with current and potential consumers. Statistics show that up to 70% of Irish Social media users follow brands and businesses across the various platforms, thereby presenting huge opportunities for the Irish construction industry to connect and grow its business (Kane 2015). Data from the industry questionnaires demonstrates that 77.67% of professionals within the sector believe social media can grow business (Figure 4.9), with only 7.69% of respondents claiming their companies did not have a social media presence (Figure 4.6). Analysis of the industry questionnaires indicate that companies within this sector are currently utilising seven different social media platforms as advertising or marketing tools (Figure 4.6).

Facebook was shown to be the most commonly employed platform, with 88.4% of respondents stating their company had an online Facebook presence (Figure 4.6). This finding is in line with trends in other Irish business sectors, with approximately 70% of all Irish businesses creating a business Facebook page in order to reach the 1.8 million Irish people who use the social media platform daily (Kane 2015). This is perhaps unsurprising since a recent survey from BBMM marketing, confirms Facebook can increase sales by up to 20% (Harmon 2015). The power of Facebook as a digital marketing tool was confirmed by Interviewee #3, who was employed as sales manager with one of Ireland’s leading kitchen manufacturers. Their company recently advertised a bank holiday discount promotion
through their Facebook platform, with customers required to quote “Facebook” upon purchase in order for the discount to be applied. The company received 147 new business enquiries as a direct consequence of this Facebook promotion, with 60% of these interactions converting into sales. As a result of this successful foray into digital marketing, the company has since created two new positions with sole responsibility for managing the company’s digital marketing activities. The availability of live broadcast streaming on Facebook increases the potential impact the Facebook platform can offer as a marketing tool. However, the platform is in the process of changing its policy as regards business pages, with companies now having to pay for advertising space and banners, thus increasing a company’s marketing expenditure.

The second most popular social media platform in Ireland in terms of regular usage is Twitter, which currently has 700,000 Irish users sending 1 million tweets daily (Kane 2015). Ireland has the tenth highest number of Twitter users per capita in the world. This is supported by data from the industry professional questionnaires, which ranked Twitter second in the social media platform within the Irish construction industry, with 59.38% of the respondents saying their businesses utilised the service (Figure 4.6). While the number of Irish users of Twitter is significantly lower than Facebook, it is accepted that Twitter has more impact, with Twitter users more comfortable sharing opinions and interacting with brands (Kane 2015). Research has shown that Twitter is busiest in Ireland between 10-11pm, perhaps reflective of the busy lifestyles of the population, with most users checking their accounts at the end of the day for a summary of events. This research has highlighted a potential timeframe in which businesses using Twitter as a marketing tool will have the greatest impact (Abbott 2015).

YouTube has gained popularity as a digital marketing tool, allowing businesses to reach out to consumers. However this platform is only effective if you have something interesting and relevant to show your target audience. Statistics of Irish usage of YouTube show 77% of its users access the platform at least once a week, making it a less reliable marketing tool for businesses. However YouTube may find a niche as a marketing tool within the Irish
construction industry as studies have shown that greater than 30% of Irish users view tutorial videos regularly on the site, perhaps tailoring its use for the hardware and DIY sectors (Kane 2015). The industry professional questionnaires indicate that 36.46% of their companies employ YouTube as a form of digital marketing (Figure 4.6.).

LinkedIn has been documented as the most powerful marketing tool of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, allowing businesses to form strategic partnerships and find clients (Chansamooth 2014), with studies confirming that LinkedIn sends nearly four times more visitors to your company homepage than the other popular social media such as Facebook and Twitter (Lee 2014). The platform allows companies to precisely target their audience based on persona filtering criteria including job function and title, industry, skills and company name. Interviewee #2, a marketing and sales manager, echoes this sentiment stating “LinkedIn is important in our business for identifying potential leads and building relationships” and “provides accurate background information for upcoming meetings about our potential client”. Therefore the LinkedIn platform offers a brand or company access to a host of educated, skilled and influential people within their industry. Audience mindset is a major advantage to the employment of LinkedIn as a marketing tool, with users already having donned their industry cap and actively seeking knowledge. Brian Thome, product marketing director at LinkedIn states that the LinkedIn audience is proven to be highly engaged with content, with 60% of users actively searching for industry insights (LinkedIn 2013). Analysis of the industry questionnaires shows that 58.33% of the respondents companies use LinkedIn as a marketing tool (Figure 4.6.).

The quantitative data derived from the industry questionnaires also highlighted some less popular social media platforms which are been employed within the Irish construction industry at present as digital marketing tools. These platforms include Google +, with activity on this platform shown to have a positive effect on Google search rankings, increasing brand visibility. A seamless integration with other platforms such as Youtube facilitates the sharing of images and videos. Data from this study indicates that Google + is being utilised by 31.25% of respondents companies (Figure 4.6.), a figure most likely
resulting from the linking of every Gmail email account with a Google +. The data shows that 14.58% of respondents companies are using Instagram and Pinterest in their digital marketing strategy at present (Figure 4.6). Instagram’s business usage has skyrocketed in recent years, billed as the perfect platform for brands to get quick messages and photos to their target audience. The advent of Instagram profiles expands the potential audience with the removal of restrictions to solely mobile devices. Clever use by marketers of photo competitions and hashtag contests creates engagement with brands, while companies reward followers with discount codes to foster brand loyalty (Sprung 2013). Pinterest has seen massive growth since its conception in 2010, with a strong female user base, utilising images to inspire prospective consumers into action. By making boards public you can bring residual traffic to your brand or company website for months and these boards are also picked up and highly ranked by Google search, thus helping companies to reach beyond their followers (Oliver 2014). The industry questionnaires highlighted a novel digital marketing platform in the guise of the website and application Houzz, with 2.88% of respondents claiming their company has a presence on this site. Houzz is a visual and opportunistic website ideally suited to the construction industry, whereby businesses sell the idea of the perfect home and décor to potential customers. Ideabooks allow photos to be uploaded with the added feature of sale tags which will link to the item’s provider’s website when clicked which drives sales.

Snapchat has evolved from a simple photo and video sharing application to a creative marketing tool which should not be ignored (DeMers 2014). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the industry professional questionnaires determined that none of the respondents companies employ Snapchat as a digital marketing tool at present. This may be due to the current young user age profile or the limitations on how long video and photos remain available on the application, however marketers have successfully embraced the concept, offering teasers to their followers of upcoming products and services their company may be offering (DeMers 2014).
5.3. Motivation to implement digital marketing strategies

It is evident from this research that construction industry professionals recognise the advantages that digital marketing can offer their business, with the data illustrating 48.08% of industry respondents see digital marketing activities as important for their business (Figure 4.1). There is a clear awareness of the ability of effective digital marketing to increase profits, with figures showing 77.67% of respondents saying they agreed social media campaigns can grow business (Figure 4.3).

The industry questionnaires offered respondents the opportunity to voice their individual opinions on digital marketing (Table 4.1). Feedback highlighted one key point whereby there is a need for employing digital marketing in conjunction with current offline traditional methods, in order to reach modern online consumers as well as the less digitally minded consumers. From the one-on-one interviews, there appears to be a willingness to embrace digital marketing approaches. There is an awareness of the current failings of the construction industry to successfully implement digital marketing strategies to the same extent as other industries. Interviewee # 4 and 5, both marketing professionals, state that “the Irish construction industry is way behind other industries operating in Ireland as regards digital marketing; especially the food and fashion industries” and “the sector will have to work hard to increase their digital presence to maintain competitiveness” (Appendix 3).

The one-on-one interviews highlight one particular advantage of digital marketing which they believe should motivate more interaction with these platforms by the sector in the future. These social media platforms enable instant end user feedback, through likes, comments and shares, which can be utilised by a company to redefine strategy. The end game in business is to give the consumer what they want and this feedback mechanism is a direct window into the mindset of your potential customer. Interviewee #2 pinpoints the use of an opt-in feature for more information, which is less intrusive than the traditional cold calling method saying “the opt-in feature was very important as it allows my company to distribute information to interested consumers”. Interviewee #3, a sales manager,
highlights the relative low cost associated with employing social media as a digital marketing platform, which could increase digital approaches popularity within the sector in coming years, stating “there are no software costs, the platform is already established, all you need to do is set up your business page”. As the industry moves forward, investment in digital marketing will pay dividends, as evidenced by previously mentioned Bank holiday promotion success. “Interviewee # 2 stressed the future need for firms to invest in the establish of marketing departments stating “ I will have to put a business case forward to high level management to ensure funding is secured for a designated digital marketing campaign” (Appendix 3). With 80.77% of questionnaire respondents indicating that their company will potentially run a digital marketing campaign in the future (Figure 4.10) investment is necessary to ensure that the correct people with the expert knowledge are in place in order to convert this investment into profits.

5.4. Barriers to implementation of digital marketing strategies
The main barrier to the implementation of digital marketing strategies is the lack of allocated resources. In this price-led industry, each business decision is weighed based on cost implementation versus potential profits. With the construction industry’s late arrival into the field of digital marketing, there is a lack of faith in the approaches ability to drive sales and deliver profits. Therefore current investment is funnelled into human resources rather than marketing, as echoed by the sentiment of Interviewee # 1 saying funds would be allocated to personnel as “more feet on the ground mean more sales” (Appendix 3). This is supported by Interviewee #2’s statement that a business case would have to be put forward to secure funds for digital marketing, which suggests that marketing activities are currently far down the list of priorities for high level business managers (Appendix 3). The Irish construction industry has failed to fully embrace marketing, as evidenced by only 57.69% of the respondents’ employers having an established marketing department (Figure 4.4.). Data obtained from the industry questionnaires indicated this lack of a designated department and personnel specific to marketing is not a small firm phenomenon, with the survey showing an equal proportion of sole trader, small to medium firms and large organisations (Figure 4.11).
Without investment in marketing personnel and campaigns, digital marketing will never produce the evidence of success needed to sway this traditional conservative industry. Interviewee # 4, a digital marketing expert, indicates that “one in four SMEs do not have a website or online presence at all to list their products or conduct e-commerce transactions with potential customers” and “have no plans to develop a website in the future” (Appendix 3). Current marketing budgets within the industry are swallowed churning out brochures for retail show rooms. This close mindedness to the potential benefits of social media platforms and digital marketing to any business will only act to hamper the Irish construction industry’s future recovery. The questionnaires show that there are a number of businesses, approximately 23.08%, with less than ten employees or operating as a sole trader (Figure 4.11) which possibly do not have the necessary resource, both financial, time and personnel, required to establish and maintain a digital presence (Table 4.1).

The one theme that is apparent from the individual one-on-one interviews is the lack of expert knowledge in the area of digital marketing which professional view as an insurmountable barrier to full scale implementation. Interviewees #1, 2 and 3 all indicated that they will be consulting with a digital marketing expert in order to implement their company’s digital strategy (Appendix 3). Interviewees # 4 and 5 both suggest that the late arrival of the Irish construction industry to these digital platforms will inevitably mean the companies will require the aid of a digital marketing expert to maximise the impact of their new digital presence (Appendix 3). This is due to the fact that the industry is entering a digital marketing environment which is now well advanced and the companies will be unaware of the tricks of the trade employed to maximise footfall to a website and attract new business.

The fragmented nature of the Irish construction industry translates to a complicated supply chain, with many intermediaries involved before product reaches the end user. This means that a company must put thought into any marketing strategy, developing partnerships throughout the different social media platforms with importers, wholesalers, distributors, and consumers in order to maximise brand awareness and engagement. This implies that
many businesses within the Irish construction industry will need to collaborate in order to ensure that the relevant information and support is available to the end user. The level of background work involved in maintaining these partnerships and collaborations may seem prohibitive to smaller companies lacking the time and personnel to dedicate to these activities.

5.5. Consumer attitudes and behaviour

Recent years has seen some improvements within the construction industry, with figures from 2015 illustrating a surge in employment within the sector with 13.3% more employees within the sector compared to 2014. This is indicative of increased contact agreements within the industry itself and an upturn in the number of new projects commencements, both large-scale and domestic. Data from the consumer questionnaire indicate that of a massive 75% of respondents had renovated or been involved in a building project within the past year (Figure 4.12). These projects have generated significant revenues for businesses within the construction industry, with 57.14% of respondents indicating they had spent €5000 or more on a recent project (Figure 4.13). Interestingly, the customer surveys which were conducted on the premises of a busy hardware store, indicated a near equal spread of gender across the respondents (48% male versus 52% female), suggesting that the selection and decision making process as regards construction materials and DIY purchases is no longer a male domain (Figure 4.18).

Irish consumer attitude and behaviour has changed drastically since the “Celtic tiger” crash with Euromonitor reporting that “78% of Irish consumers actively seek out cheaper ways of living after the recession” (Euromonitor International 2015). The Irish consumer has become price-savvy, frequently shopping around both online and in-store to find the best deal. This is evidenced by data from the questionnaires whereby respondents listed multiple websites relating to the construction industry that they had visited when researching their recent construction project (Table 4.4). The Euromonitor report states that Ireland has shown continued growth rates with regards to online shopping, with the most commonly purchased items online include electronic devices and accessories (Euromonitor International
Businesses operating in the current economic climate must be aware of the changing nature and focus of the end user, tailoring their marketing with this in mind. Companies such as Ryanair have adopted this ethos, establishing a low price culture for flights. Companies such as Parcel Motel now allow consumers to buy products at a cheaper price from outside of the country.

Consumers were questioned regarding their views on using the internet during their recent construction project. The data shows that consumers strongly agreed that the internet saved time when gathering information (57.14%) and expressed a desire for an instant chat service which could address their issues or questions (42.86%) (Table 4.2). The consumers also agreed that they enjoyed learning about construction products online (42.86%), all the information was available online (52.38%) and the sites were easy to navigate (42.86%) (Table 4.2). Interestingly 42.86% of respondents suggested they would be neutral as regards becoming a loyal repeat customer (Table 4.2), however this may be due to the one off nature of the recent construction project. The results of this study indicate that consumers would welcome direct contact from a company if they have visited their website, with 71.43% of respondents saying they would like follow up by the company (Figure 4.15).

The consumer questionnaires demonstrated that 85.71% of respondents expressed a preference for purchasing construction material from a hardware or builders providers (Figure 4.16). The study highlights several concerns held by consumers with regards to online shopping, in particular for construction materials. The perception is that Ireland falls is well behind other European countries with regards the efficiency and safety of electronic payment methods (Euromonitor International 2015), with 95.24% of respondent citing risk of fraud as a major concern (Table 4.3). Consumers prefer to buy construction materials from a physical shop rather than purchase items online (Figure 4.16). Other issues regarding shopping online for building material raised by 76.19% of the respondents involve the inability to visibly assess the quality of the product (Table 4.3). The questionnaires demonstrate that delivery times, difficulty in returning a product, inability to touch or feel
the product and the ability to gather all information would not impact on a consumer's decision to buy construction materials online (*Table 4.3*).

Finally, an interesting statistic arising from the consumer questionnaires is that the age profile with the highest response rate of 33.33% was the 18-24 year olds, followed closely by 28.57% of respondents in the 33-44 years category (*Figure 4.17*). This is reflective of the activity of consumers in the Irish construction industry, with the younger generation embarking on building their first home, while the 33-44 year olds are either renovating, extending or up-scaling to bigger properties to house their growing family. Therefore considering both the age profile and gender of respondents, companies may need to adjust their current marketing strategies which are currently very much male focused as well as employing social media platforms as a digital marketing approach in order to reach this more technologically savvy population. This will force the construction industry to engage on the social media platforms, researching which platform is most popular with their target audience based on age and gender. For example, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are used equally by both genders, but differ on user age profile with popular with those between 30-49 years of age and Twitter appealing to the widest age range from 18-49 (Duggan 2015). Social media has become an important platform for the Irish consumer, with 63% operating a Facebook account (*Figure 5.2*) and 74% of these users accessing the platform on a daily basis (*Figure 5.3*). The familiarity of the consumer respondents with the Facebook culture is clearly demonstrated by the data which shows that a grand total of 71.43% agreeing they would “share” a company on social media, with nobody refusing to share (*Table 4.2*). This phenomenon is referred to as “E-word of mouth” and is similar to the traditional word of mouth marketing the industry currently relies on. Interviewee # 2 indicates that businesses in the sector are aware of the power of sharing and “trending” on social media platforms stating they “would love to see their company trending on social media platforms” (*Appendix 3*).
On the residential market, the young age profile of the industry’s target audience will impact on future decisions regarding marketing. Over 80% of the Irish population own a smartphone, with 78% of the population preferring to use these smart devices to go online (Figure 5.4). The younger generation prefer mobile devices and will interact with a given brand to a larger extent if the company is utilising platforms or applications which are compatible with these devices. Additionally the ability to purchase across an array of devices will increase profitability for a company.
Figure 5.4: Ireland versus Global mobile usage (O’Leary 2016)
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusions

The purpose of this dissertation was the analysis of the current use of digital marketing in the Irish construction industry and assessment of whether the adoption of digital marketing strategies in the future can aid the growth of this recovering sector. This is an unexplored topic with little or no research available at present. The decision was made to adopt two separate methods of research in this study:

1. Primary research:
   a. Qualitative: One-on-one interviews with construction industry professionals.
   b. Quantitative: Questionnaires for the industry professional and the consumer.

2. Secondary research: Existing literature was employed to assess the current marketing practices and trends within the Irish construction industry.

Two questionnaires were designed to elicit meaningful responses from the two separate target groups. The first questionnaire was targeted at architects, builders, marketing, management and sales personnel within the Irish construction industry, and aimed to ascertain the degree, if any, to which digital marketing was currently employed within the sector as well as to determine whether this sample population, as a reflection on the wider industry, considered digital marketing as an important strategy for the future. The second questionnaire targeted consumers within the Irish construction industry and aimed to determine the willingness of consumers to conduct business on a digital level with online purchases of construction materials. This second questionnaire also assessed the consumers’ feelings on how they would like to receive information if the Irish construction industry does in fact embrace the digital platforms.

6.2. The Irish construction industry has not embraced digital marketing

The industry professional questionnaire data indicates that the professionals employed in this sector believe more effort is required as regards their company’s digital presence. The study highlights that these industry personnel are all very much aware of the how digital
strategies can benefit their business. While the companies within the Irish construction industry are present across the social media platforms, there appears to be a lack of backing, both on a personnel and financial level, with regards to fully utilising these marketing mediums. The qualitative interview data indicates this traditional industry has been focused on old price-driven business approaches which had been implemented successfully in the decade prior to the recession, with the “more feet on the ground means more sales” mentality dominating the allocation of funds. Indeed, the industry professional questionnaires highlight the lack of funding for marketing, with 42.3% of companies devoid of a marketing department. The general consensus from industry personnel is that their companies inhabited the social platforms to monitor the marketplace and price fluctuations. Whilst these activities are useful in maintaining a competitive edge over rival companies it is clear that the Irish construction industry is underutilising the Social platforms. This oversight is costly, with companies missing out on a valuable opportunity for new lead generation and the creation of a loyal customer base. However, the successful implementation of digital marketing strategies by other industries including the food and fashion industries, as well as the international construction industry, has hit a chord within the Irish construction industry and it now appears that this traditional sector is now beginning to slowly adopt this ethos and implement a digital marketing campaign. The industry questionnaires suggest that more than 80% of their firms are likely to launch a digital campaign within the next six months. This promising move is supported by the one-on-one interviews with industry professionals, where high-ranking sales and marketing managers indicated they will be meeting with a digital marketing professional to help their company implement a successful digital strategy. While these findings are promising, a large portion of the Irish construction industry currently remains unenlightened as regards the benefits of a correctly managed digital presence, instead solely reliant on offline marketing approaches such as brochures and showrooms. However, it must be cautioned that a move to an entirely digital marketing approach is perhaps not suited to this industry; an dual approach combining both digital social media marketing with the brick and mortar showroom where customers can see and touch the products *in situ* is likely to produce the best results for this recovering industry, facilitating future growth.
6.3. Potential benefits from implementation of digital marketing

Digital marketing platforms can offer many benefits to the Irish construction industry, particularly when utilised in conjunction with the more traditional offline methods. The data derived from professionals within the Irish construction industry highlight the resilience and adaptability of this sector. Having weathered the recession and come out the other side with growth rated predicted to double in 2016 (AECOM Ireland Annual review 2016), the industry has shown that it is driven and forward thinking, accepting that new approaches must be implemented in order to reach a target audience which is now substantially more discerning and digitally advanced. Efforts to develop and implement digital strategies will reap rewards for these companies, especially if a focus is placed on converting the inevitable increase in website traffic into sales. Other industries have proven return on investment is substantial following funding of a digital campaign, with increased profits and business growth. For example, Cadbury attained an ROI that was four times greater than its TV campaign with its “Chocolate Charmer” online advertising campaign (Digital Training Academy 2010). However, this initial success needs to be maintained; social media engagement should be cultivated to benefit from “e-word of mouth” through likes, shares and retweets, all of which serve to increase customer acquisition and increase brand awareness. Bearing in mind that a business’s main aim to turn a profit for its shareholders, implementation of successful well maintained digital marketing strategies have been proven to greatly increase the consumer base and brand interaction, which has a positive knock-on effect on sales and inevitably a company’s bottom line.

6.4. Potential barriers which prevent implementation of digital marketing strategies

There are many barriers present in the Irish construction industry which are not allowing implementation of digital marketing strategies. These barriers will need to be addressed and removed in order to improve digital presence in the Irish marketplace.

The Irish construction industry has long held a reputation as an extremely harsh and conflict riddled work environment. Due to its manual nature, traditionally this sector has been male dominated, with statistics indicating only 5% of the entire Irish construction workforce was
female (CSO 2013). Prior to the recession, the Irish construction industry was synonymous with attractive salaries, structuring their annual budgets to provide high salaries to attract new talent from third level graduates to the sector (McCoy and Smyth 2011). The industry’s traditional business mentality means that in the past the sector hasn’t adopted new techniques or strategies. This dated approach to business, coupled with a recession driven focus on low-cost strategies, means that in recent years the industry has concentrated on funnelling investments into rebuilding the company ranks with very little investment dedicated to supporting marketing activities designed to build the business.

Currently, one of the main barriers to digital marketing implementation is a lack of support from top level management. Data from the one-on-one interviews highlights the nervousness of top level management regarding investment in digital marketing. The popular consensus was that they were interested but needed more information before any funds would be allocated, citing a lack of knowledge as an issue. This is perhaps unsurprising as top level management success is measured by profitability; therefore the degree of uncertainty regarding a precise monetary return on a substantially large investment in digital marketing is daunting. Additionally, a digital marketing campaign is not a one-off expense, requiring ongoing revenue input to maximise and maintain the company’s digital presence. Forecasting a budget long-term can be difficult, with digital marketing costs creeping upwards especially if the campaign needs to be refined. The additional costs of instating and staffing a designated marketing department focused solely on the digital marketing platforms can also be prohibitive, especially to a smaller company. For those companies with an established marketing department, there are also associated costs of hiring trained digital marketers onto the team to work solely on maintaining and improving the company’s digital presence. Without these investments in trained personnel it is likely that attempts at digital marketing campaigns will inevitably fail. An additional barrier to the successful implementation of a digital marketing campaign includes the fragmentation which is evident within the industry. The existing supply chain structure with numerous intermediaries currently in operation within the industry means that digital marketers are not faced with the traditional business to consumer model. Any digital marketing plan will be complicated by the necessity to reach level of the supply chain.
6.5. **Consumer attitudes towards the Irish construction industry’s digital presence**

As previously stated the Irish consumer is an ever evolving entity, currently focused on fully researching any potential purchase before committing. This increased awareness of quality and cost, coupled with an increasing online presence means that a company’s active online presence and reputation are paramount. While consumers in general are untrusting of company advertisements, the consumer is more trusting of their peers in the online community, searching for user reviews, testimonials and feedback on social media platforms to substantiate the company’s claims. The modern Irish digital consumer holds all the power when it comes to online shopping; placing the onus on the company’s to enshrine trust in their brand or product.

The consumer questionnaire data suggests that most purchases of goods relating to construction occur in store, not online, with 86% of respondents indicating a preference for the physical store with available knowledgeable staff. Currently the Irish consumer is somewhat unwilling to purchase expensive construction materials via digital mediums. The consumer data scored the Irish construction industry’s digital presence as fifty out of one hundred, suggesting that the sector must invest substantial effort into integrating the digital platforms into their future marketing strategies. In line with previous findings stating that consumers are now researching potential purchases online, the questionnaire data indicates that the Irish construction industry consumers enjoy researching and learning about construction products online. Consumers list the main deterrents to online purchasing of construction materials as risk of fraud and an inability to touch and feel the product prior to purchase. This study also found that digital consumers would prefer the option of an instant chat service, to advise and offer information, with 43% of respondents strongly agreeing that this facility would be welcomed. According to the presented data 71% of consumers polled said that they would like to be contacted directly by the company after visiting their website. By providing sufficient information and increasing two-way communication on the social media platforms businesses can increase the numbers of consumers visiting stores to physically see and buy their products. However, with the ever increasing security measures to protect online transactions and the adoption of digital marketing by the Irish construction industry to build brand reputation and trust, it is conceivable that Ireland’s digital consumer
could be convinced to conduct all their DIY and construction purchases online in the near future.

6.7. Recommendations for further research

Explore the necessity to create industry specific digital marketing strategies

With the current upturn in the Irish construction industry it is imperative that the sector as a whole establishes some long-term strategic decisions and goals. Due to the somewhat unique fragmented nature of the industry, further research is necessary to determine which, if any, industry-specific digital marketing strategies could be implemented. The newly cemented partnership between CIF and the marketing firm Aspire should investigate the successful digital marketing strategies currently utilised by their international counterparts, assessing the adaptability of these approaches to the Irish market.

Explore the use of information technology to aid implementation of digital strategies

With the constant updates available in technology, further research needs to be carried out to see if technology can be harnessed and used in a more productive way by the construction industry to implement digital strategies.

Explore the need for Re-intermediation

Consumers are not very confident when purchasing construction products online. They use digital platforms as research tools before travelling to traditional hardware stores to purchase construction products and services. Some research could be carried out to determine if the consumer would like a comparison or a recommendation platform specifically for the construction industry.
Chapter 7: Reflection

7.1. Introduction
This chapter offers an in-depth account of my experiences in the completion of this dissertation and the completion of the MBA course in general. After attaining my undergraduate degree almost a decade ago, I realised the time had come to refresh my education and made the decision to enrol in an MBA course on a part time basis. This chapter will examine my experiences in the MBA course and will include my personal reflection on the dissertation process.

7.2. MBA
From the moment I received my Bachelor in Business I was hopeful of carrying on in full time education. Beginning my working career in the local hardware shop I progressed to working for one of Europe’s largest sanitary ware manufacturers. Having worked full time in the Irish construction industry throughout the economic downturn, I felt that I need to refresh and update my own personal skill set. To continue the learning process I enrolled in Dublin Business School (DBS). The decision to undertake the general MBA was based on the opportunity to study all aspects offered rather than focus on one particular area. The part-time nature of the course was time-consuming, particularly learning to juggle work and study activities. As the course was part time, this did require great effort juggling work and study activities.

The general MBA offers wide ranging and very interesting subjects, enveloping every aspect of business management. Through the available modules, including finance, marketing and project management, I feel I have attained valuable knowledge which will be invaluable in the business environment. Other modules such as research methods and personal and professional development offered great insight to conducting research and how to conduct self reflection. The continuous assessment format of the modules allowed for group and individual assignments. This format was very beneficial and added to my capacity to
perform in the professional world. Upon completion of the taught section of the MBA, I was permitted to complete dissertation.

![Diagram of dissertation process]

**Figure 7.1: The evolution of the dissertation**

### 7.3. Dissertation process:

This completion of this dissertation has been one of the most challenging experiences of my academic studies to date. The dissertation process was very well planned and with the help of my dissertation supervisor plans were made and work commenced. When the opportunity arose to carry out academic research, I decided to conduct research on my current industry of employment. The chosen topic was relevant to me personally and the
Irish construction industry. The experience of conducting interviews and creating questionnaires was very beneficial and a very worthwhile experience.

The dissertation process allowed me to utilise all the skills and techniques acquired during the taught aspect of my MBA. The theory learned in each of the modules was now applied in a business situation. The decision to research digital marketing was a direct result from learning about the digital marketing landscape in our marketing modules over the two year course. Once the research question was formulated, I began the research process. The initial stage of my research employed secondary research, expanding my knowledge in digital marketing. Following on from this, primary research was conducted employing one-on-one interviews and questionnaires. With each piece of newly acquired information, a general picture of the digital landscape within the Irish construction industry was becoming clear.

As I was gathering all this information I began to structure my research. As I had gathered so much information I needed to keep this knowledge bank secure. I kept folders on my pc and added new research to these folders as I found it. Using my laptop and applications like Dropbox and iCloud I was able to store relevant information in a safe and secure location. The information obtained could be accessed remotely at any time which was very convenient and most importantly very secure. The information gathered from my primary research, the one on one interviews and the questionnaires distributed to respondents were confidential so the upmost care was required in their storage. There was a duty of care upon me to ensure the information contained within these files would be protected.

The dissertation needed to be presented in a structure which allowed the reader to easily understand the process followed. The early chapters discuss what research would be carried out, focusing on “what and why”, while the later chapters focused on “what was done, the how”. I would hope that this dissertation can provide some insight for both the Irish construction industry and the marketing industry. The research will enable a better understanding of how the digital marketing can be used to grow business in the current
market place. With the Irish construction industry being so competitive, there is always a need to gain competitive advantage. Using current relevant academic research can prove to be very useful to gain market share and competitive advantage. It is hoped this dissertation can be used as a platform to gain an understanding of the topic discussed and that any findings or recommendations can be used to grow and expand the Irish construction industry. The formatting and the compilation of the dissertation bring the process to an end.

7.4. Self reflection

7.4.1. Introduction
Before completing the personal and professional core module, I was not really aware of the self reflection concept. One of the aims of this module was to provide a framework form which students can develop the essential skills for success in career development. Another aim of the module was to foster in participants a reflective community of professional practice. As part of this module we had to develop our own e-portfolio using the Mahara software program. This module focused on me as a person and my own development. This module was very interesting and educated me greatly on personal and professional development.

7.4.2. Self Appraisal
At the beginning of the MBA the students were required to give a five minute presentation as a way of introducing themselves to fellow classmates. This presentation was general and allowed the student to give details in name, current role of employment and hopes for the MBA along with career goals. These presentations were very interesting as it allowed the students to learn about fellow classmates. It also showed that the group was very diverse and came from several different industries. In the presentation we were asked what we wanted form achieve form the completion of the MBA. In my presentation I had said I wanted to forge new relationships, build my professional network and wanted to learn new skills and processes that I could apply in the business world. Looking back to this statement, I feel that I have achieved all of these aspects. The group of students engaged in discussions
and conversations on business topics. Each student was given the chance to detail their own experience and was able to learn from the experience of others.

The MBA programme has helped me develop as a person. I feel that it has boosted my confidence and imparted skills and techniques to me which I can applied in the business world. Over the course of the MBA I have partaken in numerous presentations. The ability to research and collate the information was learned through the relevant modules. The understanding of the material and the ability to communicate this is a meaningful way was a direct result of the content of the MBA modules.

The research methods modules undertaken were of huge benefit in the completion of this dissertation, teaching me how to conduct research, what questions to ask and how to present the collated data. I feel the research methods modules provided a platform upon which I could build and complete my dissertation. All of this information was applied to the research process and enabled me to make decisions that would lead to the best outcome for my topic. The feedback received was crucial here also and this allowed me to evaluate the direction my research was going.

### 7.4.3 Problem Solving

I feel I was always going to research a topic that was connected with the Irish construction industry. The Irish construction industry is very traditional and very wary of sharing information. There is a culture of secrecy in the industry. This may be down to the fact that so many of the companies within the Irish Construction industry are private limited companies. To gain the relevant information I required, I had to approach people I had a very good relationship with to participate in the one-on-one interviews. I felt these people trusted me and knew I would only use the information provided for the purposes of this academic research.
When completing my research into the consumer attitudes towards the Irish construction industry’s digital presence, I felt I needed to offer a reward to the people who completed the survey. I knew from my own experience, being approached outside a shop or business to complete a survey is usually an inconvenience. To gain interest I offered the incentive of a twenty euro voucher for the host premises. This incentive increased each individual's willingness to stop and participate in the short questionnaire.

7.4.4. Added value

My primary aim in undertaking and completing this MBA was to upgrade my skill set. I felt the skills I had obtained previously in my undergraduate studies were outdated and needed to be refreshed. For example, the concepts of project management were not so important when I completed my undergraduate programme. I have put many of the practises learned on the MBA course into practise in my current employment. Marketing campaigns have been launched as a direct result of material learned during the completion of the MBA modules. I have adapted the new techniques learned to improve my own productivity and to grow my business further. In my current role as sales administrator for a large sanitary ware manufacturer, I have recently put forward a proposal to grow the business of one of our customers. The skills and practical experience I learned were all used to research the problem, gather all the information needed and present the solution.

Figure 7.2: Perceived Career Value
7.5. Conclusion

Having completed this MBA I feel that I have accomplished a great deal. The experience gained from this MBA has helped me to develop both personally and professionally. I have made lifelong connections, expanding my professional network immensely. I have learned a great deal about relevant topics which will be applied in my daily professional life. Having taken this opportunity to upgrade my skills I now feel encouraged to undertake another academic course. The knowledge gained is invaluable and I will look forward to partaking in further education that will be relevant to me.


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1. How important are digital marketing and promotion activities for your company?
   - Crucial
   - Important
   - Average
   - Not much importance
   - Not important at all

2. What communication channels does your company use for promotion? (Click all that apply)
   - PR
   - Sales promotion
   - Direct Mail
   - Internet/website
   - E-newsletter
   - Radio
   - Television
   - Other (please specify)

3. Does your company use digital marketing to grow your business?
   - Yes
   - No

4. Does your company have a designated marketing department?
   - Yes
   - No
5. How would you describe your company's level of Digital Marketing interaction?

- Light
- Moderate
- Heavy

Other (please specify)

6. Which of the following social media platforms does your company have a presence in? (Click all that apply)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Pinterest
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- LinkedIn
- Google +

Other (please specify)

7. How important do you feel a digital marketing presence is in influencing your decision to deal with a company?

- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Moderate
- Not very important
- Not important at all
8. What does your company use social media for? (Click all that apply)

- To build relationships
- To create brand awareness
- To monitor your competitors
- To monitor or compare prices

Other (please specify) [ ]

9. Do you feel a social media campaign can grow your business?

- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree

10. How likely is your company to run a digital marketing campaign in the future?

- Very Likely
- Somewhat Likely
- Neutral
- Not Likely
- Most Unlikely

11. How many people are employed in your company?

- 1-10
- 11-50
- 51-100
- 101+

12. Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?

[ ]
1. Have you renovated or carried out building project in the last 12 months?
   - Yes
   - No

2. How much money did you spend on your last building/renovation project?
   - Less than £500
   - £501-£2000
   - £2001-£5000
   - More than £5000

3. How would you rate the following in relation to your last project?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The internet saved time when gathering information</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The websites I visited were easy to navigate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoyed learning about construction products online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the information I needed was available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would have liked an instant chat service for advice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have become a loyal and repeat customer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would &quot;share&quot; a company on social media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Would you like to be contacted directly by the company after visiting their website?
   - Yes
   - No
5. How important are the following as a concern to you regarding online shopping for construction products?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk of fraud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in returning products</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not able to feel/touch the product</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of product</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to gather all information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Where are you most likely to purchase construction materials? (tick all that apply)

- Multi-national website
- Irish website
- Hardware/Builders providers
- Hire a professional
- Other (please specify)

7. Can you recall any of the websites you visited related to building/construction products?

8. Using any number from 0 to 100, please rate the Irish construction industry's digital presence.
9. What is your age?
- 16-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75 or over

10. What is your gender?
- Female
- Male

11. Any other comments or suggestions?
What digital platforms do you use to promote in Ireland?

In Ireland they use the two main websites. Also mentions the spare parts website which is a huge revenue stream in the UK. Hope to extend this facility to Ireland but the preferred model in Ireland is to continue with B2B trading. Ideal standard have a big presence on social media platforms but again very few of these are available or run by Ireland. The hope is to allocate power and control to the Irish office and allow them to streamline their efforts. The cost of a marketing campaign was raised twice in the early moments of the meeting. Big worry/emphasis on the perceived costs involved with a digital plan. “Any available future resources will be allocated to expanding our currently understaffed sales team rather than marketing activities” “more feet on the grind mean more sales”. The websites are very important as a sales tool and allow the user to browse and make their mind up.

Feels social media is very important. He says that a presence on social media is a must for any company wishing to do well in the Irish market. He feels that the company is perceived to be modern and “cool” when spoken about in the social media circuit. Spoke of going viral and all that could come about as a result of this. The social media platforms mentioned were Facebook Twitter and Youtube. John did say he was not familiar with any of these and did not have personal accounts on any of these platforms.

What platforms do you consider to be most successful? Please rank in order of importance 10 being most important?

10 website 1 (comprehensive site with very technical information. Needs to be updated and modernised and updated)

9 website 2 (very well presented site with a comprehensive overview of the products available. Can also plan your bathroom with the 3D planner)
Appendix 3

Industry Interview

8 YouTube (good for videos to showcase products. Also likes the way their products are featured in other peoples videos. There is no such thing as bad publicity)

7 Twitter (very good for quick updates. Thinks it is good to be able to add pictures. A picture speaks volumes)

6 Linkedin (excellent for making contacts and associations, uses this platform for relationship building in order to do business in the future. Has a personal account.)

5 Facebook (feels this is a must as “every has a Facebook profile”. Feels this medium should be used to draw people in and make them want to visit website or buy product. Like the notion of competitions to spread the word (digital word of mouth)

4 Planner APP (not current available in Ireland, plan to implement in future)

3 APP (not available in Ireland due to licence requirements. Cost seen as a major stumbling block here)

2 Email Shots (not a huge fan of these. Says they can get lost in the fog. Feels emails are only useful when action is required. Feels database of recipients has to maintained too regularly and no real way to measure effectiveness, just because someone opens your email does not mean they read it.

1 E-newsletter (feels that these are too time consuming and too expensive. Feels the sales force should be able to communicate anything that people need to know about)

Who is responsible in Ireland for managing digital marketing?

This is looked after by the marketing department in Hull in the UK. The Irish digital marketing plan is effectively a copy of the UK plan, adapted for the Irish market. The websites are the same but just the details are tailored for the Irish sites. As sales director there is no direct involvement with the marketing department. There is a head of marketing over this department so is happy to let them decide what course of action to take when it comes to marketing. John likes facts and figures and would like to know exactly how much ROI will come back from a campaign. MARKETING IS NOT LIKE THIS.
Do you feel there is enough invested in creating, monitoring and responding to content? (uploading, updating & responding to queries)

Feels the digital presence is ok. The websites are updated regularly with new products and product lines. Feels a revamp of main websites is needed to freshen up and look more exciting. Did mention that a news section on the websites could be more prominent and easier to follow. Feels that the Irish division needs to communicate better. Make people more aware of the projects they have won and supplied. ISI have been involved with some of the largest projects in Ireland but not too many people know about this. (Central bank, hospitals schools) He feels that the investment is needed in the social media but does not really have confidence in the process. (OLD SCHOOL SALES MAN) again budgets were mentioned and this was the excuse for not having a strong digital presence.

Do you measure activities regularly on digital Marketing platforms to identify trends and preference?

No interest in this topic. Was able to say you can count followers on the social media sites but was not to aware of the cookies or the tracking software available. Said the IT or marketing department would have this information if it was required. Did say that resources would be needed to ensure success of any digital campaign. Was not interested in this question and moved on from here very quickly.

How important do you feel your digital marketing presence is?

Feels this is important but only as a back up to the sales force. Likes the face to face meetings and the thrill closing a sale. Firmly believes that there has to be a digital presence as the world is getting smaller and no longer your average 9 hour working day. If he had to choose between investing in a digital marketing plan or investing on another sales person he would pick the sales person every time (admits himself to being OLD School.
How different and unique do you feel your DM platforms are?

The websites are unique and offer a platform that is second to none. Likes the register option as this shows people want to be associated with your products and company. Gives the company contact details that the sales team can pursue. Feels the social medial platforms are hit and miss. Need to be standardised and hopes the new strategy will make the brand image more uniform and will allow ISI to become more popular. The conversion rate from advert to sale interests him. “Would like to know the potential return on investment before a campaign would be implemented”

How do you feel you compare to the competition in the market?

Thinks the website offers total solutions. Feels the competition are better on social media but can’t compete with the website and after sales service. Feels the competition are trying to emulate ISI but does not want to be associated with the competition. Would like to think ISI would be a market leader in all divisions and would like to be more popular than the competition. Again cost was brought up. Costs are very important as they take from the bottom line. Feels the company need to maintain high standards and to improve on areas where they weak.

Do you feel ISI platforms differ from market or do you have a common trend?

Common approach throughout Europe with some tweaks for local markets. The ISI future strategy will align all efforts to communicate a common message across many markets. The company is large and feels the common approach will be more successful as many people move from area to area. Would like the same image to be visible in Spain, Ireland and Denmark! Seems to be a drive for standardisation.
What would you see as the difference? How unique is the Irish market?

The Irish market is “different” Having worked in both Ireland & UK the difference is staggering. The Irish market is more fast moving and decisions are made a lot quicker. There is no waiting around. “time is money in this market”. Brexit is huge here. John is a UK citizen so is anxious to see how the UK vote. He is open and backs the remain campaign. Feels there would be huge consequences for Ireland if the UK leave. The border controls are a major concern. Ireland was always price sensitive. Changing slowly currently. Large institutions now picking Ireland as base do the demand for more upmarket goods may increase. Says the B2B model will remain and will continue to use the merchant trades to distribute their products. Loves working with the Irish and love the culture.
INTERVIEWEE # 2

What platforms do you use to promote sanitary products in Ireland?

In Ireland we use a number of digital marketing platforms. We use the main specification website, and we also use the second website. These would be the main websites, there is a dedicated spare parts website, which is only for spare parts reference. Only sell to UK residents from this site. The online shop is not available to ROI residents. Did say there was a hope that this would be extended to ROI in early 2017. The feeling is that there is not enough man power to run the website from Irish office. ISI use many social media outlets in Ireland but the UK branch of the company runs and maintains these websites and any social media accounts. The social media accounts are as follows:

Linkedin, Twitter, Facebook, Google +, Pinterest, Youtube.

All of the above are UK run and contain UK stories/projects. The hope is to expand these or to set Irish Specific accounts. This will be the plan end 2016/early 2017.

ISI also send an e-newsletter every quarter. This is distributed to architects and to builders. It is up to each account manager to distribute to his/her customers if they so wish. The newsletter would contain product launches, news and upcoming events.

YouTube is used to promote product. There are installation videos on Youtube and are linked form the websites also. Searched urinals and the Youtube video was 7th on the list on the home page. The video had been viewed 5421 time with only 8 emotions left (5 likes & 3 dislikes) Was a little disappointed in this as he had used this video at a presentation recently and felt it was good and popular. Took note of this and seemed like he was learning as the interview was been conducted. Also when searched on Youtube own site their videos could not be found easily.
Which platforms do you consider to be most successful? Please rank in order of importance, 10 being most successful

9 website 1 (all the product information on this site, person can log in and get more benefits from the site. Allows the user to gather information and shows what parts are compatible) Run by UK. Visitors can opt in to receive further information in form of newsletter.

8 website 2 (the bathroom planner allows user to get a 3d view of their potential bathroom. Limitations though as not all products available to upload. Limited room types also) Run by UK. Visitors can opt in to receive further information in form of newsletter.

7 Linkedin (uses this to make contact with builders/plumbers and architects. More for personal use as there is no Irish company account)

6 Twitter (as above, used for information gathering. No Irish admin/account)

5 Youtube (used videos in presentations and found it useful. Likes how external people have used their products in videos) again no control from an Irish view point

4 Facebook (not a fan personally of this but agrees company needs a presence as a company can go viral in minutes on this platform) again run by uk

3 Pinterest (is aware of this only because of the logo on the bottom of the website, not aware how to run account. UK run again.

2 Google + (as above)

1 email shots (feel these can be useful if they are relevant and sent to the correct person, the business is so diverse that different sectors/intermediaries that each sector needs to have tailored emails. Will be looking into this and trying to change this. Cheap way of gaining publicity)

Who is responsible in Ireland for managing the Digital Marketing?

All content is run/maintained by the UK. The plan is to give control to the Irish office. The new strategy will incorporate a common message across all companies in Europe with some
minor alterations for each market. The images and the “branding” will be centralised and the same throughout. Again, the lack of manpower is mentioned as it has been easier to copy the UK model and change the prices to €. As resources are scarce he feels a digital marketing strategy is needed to ensure ISI is getting its message across and reaching the intended audience. The low set up cost is the way he feels he can implement this strategy. He would hope to be able to recruit a person for the marketing division and indeed allow himself more time to develop the department. Will have to put business case forward as resources will be earmarked for sales teams.

**Do you feel there is enough invested in creating, monitoring and responding to content? (uploading, updating & responding to queries)**

In short, NO, in Ireland. There needs to be a full time position created or at least a person assigned to look after any queries that are lodged. Feels that a rapid response to a query can be the difference to capturing the potential customer or losing them. He made reference to his wife who posted a private message on the Facebook accounts of two Companies. One responded the very next morning, while the other did not respond for 3 days. He said they purchased the product from the first responder. Company is B2B but deal with any number of people. The deal with end users, plumbers, builders, Qs, architects, merchants. This is why he feels a quick response is crucial to start the engagement process. Using this engagement and the info supplied form Cookies (presently this information is not available to ROI) can help to see who is using these DM platforms and will allow for better focus of assets and resources) Hopes to be in a position to make good business decisions once he has all this up to date information)

Showed screen shot of google search of sanitary ware. Company was not on the home page. He was unaware of this. Sat back in chair and began to think that the keyword search was critical to being noticed. He thanked me at this stage for this information and took down some notes on this in his diary.
Do you measure activities regularly on digital Marketing platforms to measure and to identify trends and preferences? (clicks)

All the DM is run and maintained by UK. The information has not been passed onto him as of yet but has requested this. Wants to take over ownership of the social media accounts (set up in some case) feels the younger members of staff in the office should be consulted on this as they are well educated and know how to use these platforms. Once he has control of the Social Media platforms he feels he will be in a better position to make decisions. The Irish part of the business was looking to hire a digital marketing agency to help set up run a DM campaign. However this was shelved due to costs. This will be looked at in the future but not before Q3 in 2017.

UK Twitter followers = 8732

INTERNATIONAL Linkedin followers = 5834

How important do you feel your digital marketing presence is? Why on the above??

DM presence is very NB as a backup to the “traditional salesman” he feels this is vital due to the nature of the Irish Industry. Relationship building is key and the digital stuff will back up the people. Goes on to say the DM platforms are good for picking up on “out of hours” business but need to be responded to asap. Work life is not simply 9-5. The advances in technology make it easier to go on line. Everybody has a smart phone and internet penetration is very good around the country. The Irish construction industry and the people within it are more old school. They prefer to see the product and touch it with their hands before making a decision. Uses the example of providing samples to each large job for site meeting to ensure all stakeholders are happy and confident with the products selected.

Feels the website is the best out there and is very unique and allows the user the power and freedom to explore. He does feel an upgrade is due to “freshen” up the website and make it more appealing. Also feel the social media logos need to be on the top of the website to show that they have a presence on the various accounts. Also maybe make the
home page a little easier to navigate. Huge amount of information thrown at the user on their website. The user will be able to access all the information they require. Backed up by opt in option.

**How different and unique do you feel your DM platforms are?**

The website is unique and very useful. Most of the info is available but if you register you can log in to gain access to more services. The fact the user registers means the company have information on the people that visit their site. The ability to create a schedule form the website and to plan your own bathroom are unique and create a better experience for the user. Need to be able to tap into the stored information and use it to grow the business. (databases)

**How do you feel they compare to the competition in the market?**

Says that the main competitor in Ireland has a very similar website (comments that they revamped their website and copied them) was happy with this as it showed they were the leaders and competition were followers. Feels that the brand/logo needs to be common across all digital platforms. With the use of multiple logos messages can get lost as people do not know what to look out for. The new strategy will make the brand common throughout the company. Would like to see the company logo in more main stream media channels. Feels that people are unaware of who the company are and what products/services they offer.

**Do you feel the your platforms differ from market to market or do you have a common trend?**

Very common with some differences for local markets. This will be copper fastened in the new strategy being implemented in the coming years. The products are the same but are marketed differently. More and more technology is being used in the products and feels the use of technology should be used to sell the products.
What would you see as the difference? How unique is the Irish marketplace?

The Irish marketplace is totally different to any other. The Irish tend to do everything last minute and do not have a willingness to wait. The industry is fast moving but is very price sensitive, this has changed with the influx of vulture funds buying up properties. They are more about the design and the ascetics. The company is B2B and this will remain the policy for the long term. They will always try to reach out to the end user and will use intermediaries to deliver the messages. The Brexit debate worries him as he feels it could have a negative impact on company due to the fact how close they are to UK.

Need to work with our supplier network and covey the same messages. Need to have joined up thinking, because in the long run we can all turn a profit from increased sales. They are the ones with direct contact with the consumer. We can help and advice but ultimately the consumer purchases direct from the retailer.
INTERVIEWEE # 3

What digital platforms do you use to promote products in Ireland?

Very active on the digital media platforms. They are active on social media. A quick google search shows they also pay for advert to be top of the list. They will not be replaced by a substitute. There is a digital marketing presence. They have employed the services of a digital marketing specialist (the results show on a google search) On their website there is a “request brochure link” Once this is requested they aim to reply within 1 working day. The potential customer is contacted by sales staff and straight away there is a link and a relationship. This way they feel they can get a feel for what the customer requires and tailor a package to suit their needs. The website is informative about the products and services. They have handy tips section to offer advice on what to buy. They offer a call centre in Dublin with 15 branches nationwide with showrooms.

As regards to social media they are most prominent on facebook. They use this regularly and also run numerous competitions to increase footfall in the showrooms. In the Galway branch recently they offered discounts of 10% to anyone who ordered a kitchen over the bank holiday weekend, quoting the facebook competition. They received 147 new customers directly from this advert. Out of these 147 60% of people spent money in the branch. The smallest invoice was €650 while the largest was €16,560. This was seen as a major impact and the management were extremely happy with this outcome. Very easy to measure the conversion rate. They will be running these in the future and hope to expand and grow the business using the social media platform. Currently they do not have an active presence on twitter of pinterest or instagram. They are currently exploring options here and hope to be very prominent on these social media platforms by the end of 2016. There is a directive from management to expand this area and will be part of their long term plans. Company are also “tagged” by installers and happy customers. This show cases their products and also boosts their standing in the workplace.
What platforms do you consider to be most successful? Please rank in order of importance 10 being most important?

5 Facebook (seen as the most important social media platform). Very happy with their use of it and happy with business generated as a result)

4 website (feels this website is up to date and showcases all their products and services) would like to publicise the fact they are on Facebook more.

3 E Newsletter (this is aimed at their installers mainly. They make them aware of new products and upcoming promotions. This is a way of keeping installers motivated and happy)

2 Linkedin (excellent for making contacts and associations, uses this platform for relationship building in order to do business in the future. Has a personal account.)

1 Email Shots (send mails to people who opt in on the website. Feels these could be more relevant and no real way to ensure the message is being communicated correctly)

Who is responsible for managing digital marketing?

They have a marketing department who works along a digital marketing company. The marketing department are driving home the messages. The dm company is no longer employed but they have plans to hire an agency again. There are two people full time involved with marketing and 2 more on a part time basis. There are plans to recruit but at the moment resources are being reserved for transport and logistics.

Do you feel there is enough invested in creating, monitoring and responding to content (uploading, updating & responding to queries?)

Feel the sales team need to be more involved in this process. They are very busy and do not have the time to monitor all the queries. Feels there should be more professional photo shoots uploaded. Does not think tagged photos are of high enough quality. Can see people holding phone in reflections of glass or mirrors. Would like to showcase the product and
discard the myth they do cheap kitchens. Feels the content is up to date and relevant. Would like more control in each branch to allow them to gather more information on their current marketplace

Do you measure activities regularly on digital Marketing platforms to identify trends and preference?

Head office would have these figures but not shared among the branch network. Assumes the digital marketing agency would have provided info and measurability. The strategy employed would be reflective of these results. The company took on board suggestions and when results improved they were able to link back to the Digital Marketing activities. Feels the feedback from customers should be harvested in form of questionnaires. This could be incorporated into the digital strategy of the company going forward.

How important do you feel your digital marketing presence is?

Huge. As per example above. Has many personal accounts on all the social media and believes they are very important. Wants company to be more active and would like to be in control of the accounts for his own branch. Always on aspect of digital is huge as many decisions are made at home in the evenings via internet.

How different and unique do you feel your Digital Marketing platforms are?

Not very unique digitally. Have standard website and standard Facebook account. Do not have any special features but do have a very good sales team that can follow any lead. They do use EDI in the purchasing of raw materials to supply the Cork based factory. This ensures that they do not run out of stock and let customers down.
How do you feel you compare to the competition in the market?

A little behind some others in the market. Do not offer a 3d planner. Would like this feature added as it can be easier at pricing stage as a lot of the work is done (by the customer) feels their website lags behind the competition. Allows communication of message but does not grab the attention of the user. Fears people would lose interest if not appealing enough.

Do you feel platforms differ from market or do you have a common trend?

As above. All info through-out the branches is common. There is no room for individuality. Control is centrally held and managed. Feels uniformity is good but would like to see some of the benchmarks to see if they could be improved on.

What would you see as the difference? How unique Is the Irish market?

Irish market is terribly rushed and last minute. People do not want to wait. Told story of a builder offering huge price for a display mode just so the job could be completed. Brexit is a concern. Worried about exports as many of their products are sourced in UK and through UK agents. The currency is also an issue as they buy in € and £. Top level management have a contingency plan if the worst happens. No one wants to see that being implemented.
INTERVIEWEE # 4

**How did you decide you wanted a job in the Digital Marketing Industry in Ireland?**

I have always been very interested in technology from a young age. When younger we had all the games consoles at home and were always around computers and cable TV. I was always playing with gadgets and embraced technology. Computer studies were very advanced in post primary school so I was used to working with computers. As technology improved and became more popular I found myself wanting the latest devices. Spending so much time on line I became interested in advertising. There is a synergy between advertising/marketing and the use of technology so they go hand in hand. As part of my studies in DCU I was in placement in a digital marketing company and started working there after my studies.

**Do you feel that Digital Marketing is better than Traditional Marketing?**

With the advancement in technology I feel that the use of DM is now essential. The DM platforms are always on and allow messages to be communicated regardless of time zones or geographical locations. The DM platforms allow any business, regardless of size to compete. Smaller businesses would not have the same resources as larger ones but DM still allows them to showcase their products/services online. The low cost of implementation of a DM campaign has many advantages over traditional methods. The cost of TV time and newspaper inches out-way the cost of social media or website design and maintenance. Of course this is linked to the size of the campaign. Huge volumes of resources (human & money) can be pumped into DM also.

The likes of Google have helped hugely with DM. The analytics allow for instant information and give real time information. This will allow a change of focus if the current process is not working. You can also track visitors with cookies. This is not so easy in the traditional platforms. Once a potential customer walks out the door you will have very little info on
them. In Digital you will know where they go and why!! The info gleamed shows the peak
time of visits and engagement.

A website that is constantly updated and maintained can be huge in delivering success. 
Once you engage the target audience you can get them to sign up for updates. You can also
track your company’s positioning on social media. (facebook likes & shares, hashtag
mentions on twitter, trending). These have more impact that a flyer through the door (junk
mail)

The word viral is now an obsession for many companies. The greater exposure form DM
gets the word out there quicker. (STAT average fb user has 190 friends, if one person
posts/likes then at least some of these will see the activity) Note, bad word can spread just a
quick so this needs to be monitored and reaction needs to be swift.

DM allows for better info gathering and data collection. The email opt in guarantees that
you will get some info on potential customers. In traditional methods you need to make a
phone call or house call. This is expensive and time consuming. DM is less intrusive as it
allows the user to show interest. They look for you! Emails on topics that interest them are
welcomed and not treated as spam/junk. Data protection is easier to maintain online with
encrypted files etc.

DM allows for greater engagement. Website linked to social media accounts and vice versa.
The key is to use the correct keywords and not get lost in the fog.

**Which Digital platforms do you feel are the most commonly used in Ireland?**

Websites are the most common. They are owned media which the business have control
over. The content is theirs and they can showcase their product/services. Can use an-opt in
option to allow for further interaction. Even in this age of huge technology penetration
many SME’s do not have a website. This is staggering. I recommend that all companies have a website, but more importantly an active and up to date site. The social media platforms are huge in Ireland. Again these need to be updated and relevant to the target audience. This is where budgets get mentioned as many smaller SME’s do not have the resources to implement prolonged DM strategies. The Irish construction Industry is very far behind the UK, this is mainly down to the economic downturn and the over dependency of the state on the construction sector over the years.

**As a Digital Marketing consultant what services do you offer clients?**

When a business uses my services they are looking to create, maintain or improve their online presence, depending on their starting base. My main aim is to improve the online presence of my clients business. This can be easier if they have a poor online presence but this gets more difficult if they have a prominent online presence. Market research is carried out while this strategy is implemented. All the info from the market place and target audience is gathered and attitudes can be understood. Integration of online and offline strategies is also a huge area. The company needs to be focused and all aspects of the business need to be synchronised.

I will design a modern website with relevant content. Show links to SM platforms. I will perform search engine marketing (SEM) and social media marketing (SMM) We will place online adds in the correct places which will allow the business be seen. With mobile phone penetration nearly saturated we would look at mobile marketing (adapting to the smaller screen) and investigating if APPS could be used. Brand awareness is created by key word placement. SEO is also implemented.

At all stages I am in consultation with the client as no one knows their business better than they do. This part is critical as it allows the client to see what is being done and shows progress also. My job is to show the improvement being made and this will boost the bottom line of the client. This is the main aim of a campaign like this. Most of my clients cite return on investment as critical. They need to see what they are getting for their investment.
I distribute all the online content for the business. The content would be compiled by both parties. I feel I can use the best channels for the content being distributed. Paid social marketing would be also under my remit.

Specific strategy for construction industry:

You have 0-8 seconds to make a compelling headline and landing page. Customers need to be welcomed by personalized landing pages. Landing pages are critical; they must make your unique value proposition clear.

Long term success of websites depends on being found and interacted with. All websites can benefit from regular SEO techniques. This process increases your visitor's experience and your performance in search engine results.

Many businesses fail to reach potential customers because they rank too low in search. More often than not it is simply a matter of operating in a crowded online marketplace. Very few users will click past that first page of results.

Social media marketing refers to the process of gaining traffic or attention through social media sites. Linked-in is critical for construction companies; I would argue that a YouTube channel is critical as well.

On average most websites only get around 2% conversions, the other 98% is bounced traffic. Retargeting will allow your company to continue to reach that 98% Cookies used here.

Currently working with a large Irish company from the construction industry. (not named to protect company) Will be a striking campaign and will be prominent in all digital media platforms. Will be a huge shift in policy. The hope is to contact consumers, that may not necessarily be direct customers. This industry is fragmented and the supply chain has many stakeholders.
INTERVIEWEE # 5

How did you decide you wanted a job in the digital marketing industry in Ireland?

I was working for a marketing company. Position came available in a new digital marketing department so put myself forward for that. It was a logical career progression. I was always “tech savvy” so was very familiar with digital platforms and their influence. The constant updates in the technology sector are very exciting and this is linked with my position.

Do you feel that digital marketing is more advantageous than traditional marketing?

I believe that a business has to have a mix of traditional and digital activities. There is still a huge audience that will only have access to traditional platforms. (internet has not killed newspapers) but agree that you must have a digital presence to be successful. The potential customers are online at varied times throughout the day and they are hungry for information. The smaller businesses will need to react quicker as they will not have resources to run digital campaign like the large multinationals. Smaller initial start-up costs but continued investment is needed to remain relevant.

There are many experts offering knowledge in the DM area. These companies are making it easier for companies to embrace digital media. Social media is now a must, this allows for traffic to be measured. (likes, shares, mentions, trending) Viral is the new buzz word!!! Note of caution, viral may not always be good, need to have resources to react to situations. If good viral need to publicise, if bad viral company need to address issue asap.

The DM allows better data collection and gives better idea of where the company is positioned. Databases allow company to segment better and target better. An email is easier to send or track than a sales call. There is less interruption to consumer with an email. They can opt in or opt out if they change minds. Saves wasting resources on them if not interested. The digital platforms allow for more debate. (engagement) direct with consumer. The use of SEO will allow for better search results. People are anxious and will not waste time while searching, if not present on 1st couple of pages of search engine, company will not be seen.
What digital platforms do you feel are the most commonly used in Ireland?

Website is the most common. Then social media is next. Social media should send traffic to website to showcase the company. Some companies send people to the social media from the website. This can be dangerous as you open the platform to potential competitors. Should keep audience entertained on own website and provide all they need for this. More and more enquiry’s from companies asking about digital marketing offerings and what our company can do for them! There is a need to improve as some companies have poor digital representation, especially Irish companies. The multinational companies are more used to running digital campaigns and they seem to be able to tweak for the UK/Irish market.

As a digital marketing consultant what services do you offer clients?

We offer full range of digital marketing services.

- Website build and design (update if websites exist already)
- Specification tools (these are a must for construction industry) Online specification tools and applications give architect and specifier prospects and customers the ability to complete tasks online. Make the specifiers life easier – preventing them leaving company website. Allow for options to designs. Show them what your products are capable of. Show them what you can offer them.
- Digital Marketing training programmes. Improved skills and workshops. Update existing skills. Social media training. Online network profile training. Training takes place in relaxed environments
Any other comments?

Construction industry is different to others so one size does not fit all. Need to tailor for each business as they are in different stages. (manufacturer, supplier, agent) (supply chain positioning.)