Digital Marketing Guide:

How you can outperform the top 100 UK VARs

We evaluate the digital footprint of some of the UK's biggest IT companies, and give you best practice tips on how to improve yours.

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Partner marketing & value proposition experts

In partnership with

SHARP AHEAD

B2B DIGITAL MARKETING FOR GROWTH

What's inside:

This report examines the digital health of the top 100 UK IT resellers—and explains how you can improve the performance of your own digital estate.

Read this report if you want to:

- Understand digital best practice
- Evaluate the health of your own digital presence
- Get pro tips on quick fixes
- Understand where to invest digital marketing resource in 2019

Don't read this report if you:

- Have already achieved digital Utopia
- Don't mind losing prospective customers to better performing competitors
- Don't have 10 minutes to spare on digital marketing best practice

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of UK VARs are missing at least one basic digital marketing best practice

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The Results

We analysed the “digital footprint” of the Top 100 UK VARs* and divided them into four groups based on the maturity of their digital marketing:

LEADERS

13%

are using the full suite of digital marketing tools, enjoying competitive advantage online.

CONTENDERS

23%

are using nearly all of those tools and have their eyes on the prize.

STRAGGLERS

41%

use some of the tools available, leaving themselves vulnerable to more ambitious competitors.

SPECTATORS

23%

are using very few digital marketing best practices, forcing their Sales team to pick up the slack—and leaving the door wide open to competitors.

*As ranked by CRN on https://www.channelweb.co.uk/series/profile/top-vars

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What is your digital footprint?

It's the imprint your business makes on the online world.



Google your company name, for example, and you'll get an idea of what other people might see. Or try ours.

Try it now. You may be surprised.

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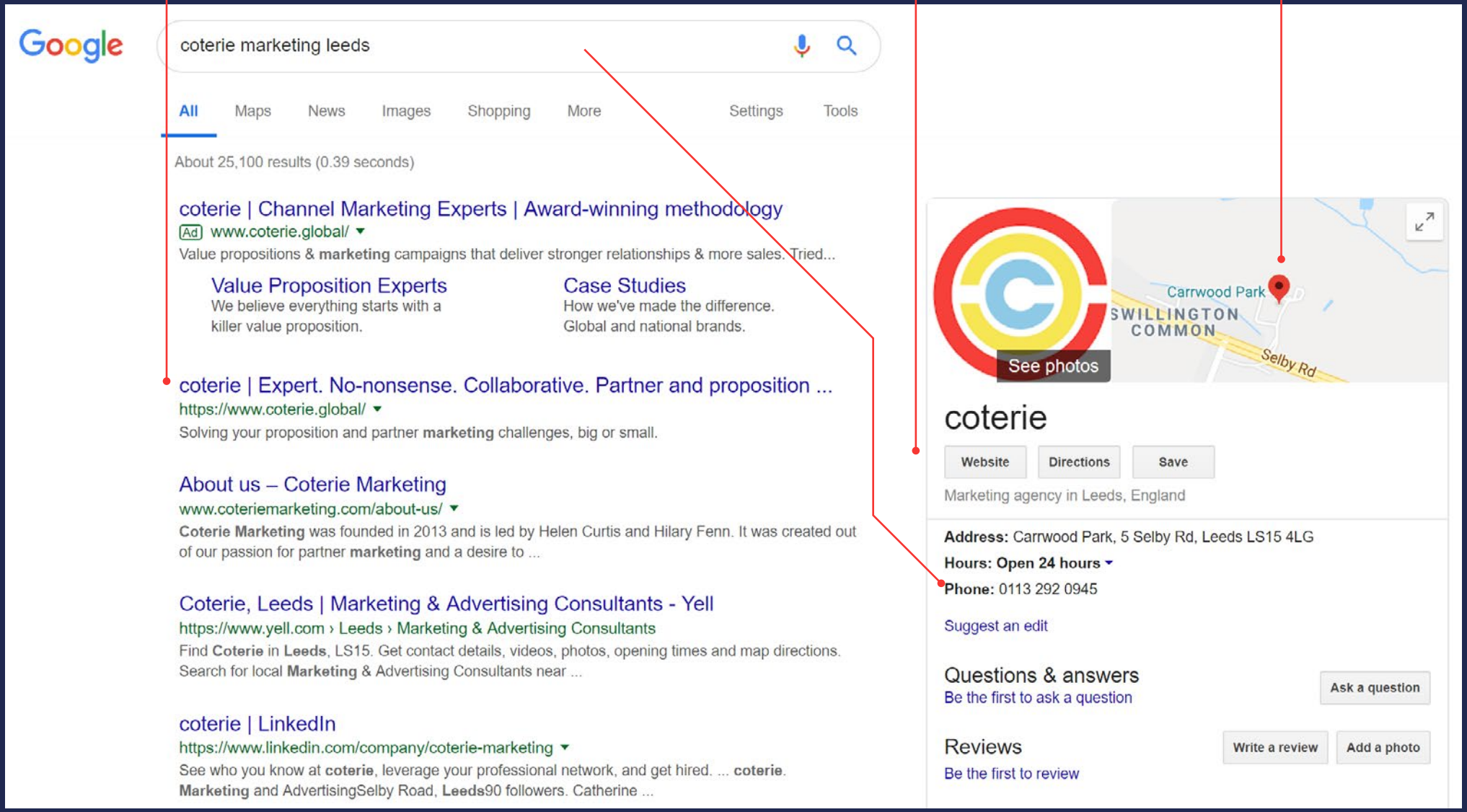
This is what happens when you search coterie

Top position in search results

Phone number easy to find and consistent

Key property info in sidebar

Location pin appears on Google map



Are you one of the 61%?

To be a Digital Marketing Leader, or even a Contender, you need to know what good looks like.

90% of B2B buyers will search online before making a decision.

If they can't find you, they won't buy from you.

That's what good looks like, prospects & customers find you and engage with you online.

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There are over **1.9 billion** live websites today.*

And the UK alone has thousands of VARs, distributors, vendors and IT consultants.

Many are based in the same places, with similar names, offering similar products or services. All are competing for your prospect's attention.

* Source: http://www.internetlivestats.com/total-number-of-websites/

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If your digital presence is poor:

- New prospects will struggle to find you online
- Existing customers will lose confidence in you, or worse, get distracted by better performing competitors
- Your sales efforts will be hampered by outdated content, difficult to find resources and poor lead conversion practices

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Remember:

Google is your homepage.

You'll often hear people say that your website home page is your shop window.

But the Google search engine result page (SERP), now offers prospects and customers so much information, there's a chance that prospects will make their mind up about you before they even reach your website.

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Methodology

We looked at 4 significant areas of the digital footprint for every one of the top 100 VARs.

1. Search user experience
2. Website best practice
3. Content marketing
4. Marketing technology

Then we scored them based on digital marketing best practice.

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Let’s start with Brand search experience



After all, that’s where prospects and customers usually start.

Search for brand term

This is where a company appears on the search engine result page for its own brand name.

6%

of VARs were NOT at position 1 for their brand term

Only

6%

could be seen using AdWords for their brand term

This matters because even if a prospective customer is actively looking for you, they might not find you!

Why is this happening?

1

Because your brand name is generic or easily confused with something, or someone else

2

Because a competitor is bidding on your brand name

3

Because Google doesn't recognise your brand name as a business

Why buy an ad when I'm already P1?

1

It allows you to own more of the real estate on your search engine results page pushing out competitors and noise from third party sites.

2

It enables you to control the messages that your prospects and customers see. We bet your careers page appears as one of your site links, is that really relevant for prospective customers?

3

It won't cost much. It's unlikely that you'll be in a very competitive auction and in any case Google will reward you with a high quality score and a lower overall CPC.

Google Knowledge Panel

Google has two types of Knowledge Panels, local and branded panels. They're really important for displaying key business information such as contact details and opening hours, plus they increase the amount of real estate you own on the search engine results page for your brand.



53%

of VARs either did not display a listing or had not claimed (and updated) their listing.

Google Knowledge Panel

For example, if other businesses have similar names to yours,
not claiming your Google Knowledge Panel will do one of two things:







71%

of business-to-business buyers start with a generic search.*

AdWords can help you generate business by making sure these buyers see you before they see your competitors.

*Research by Snyder and Hilal 2015.

Brand searches:

we looked at important prospect searches for each company, such as their brand name plus contact, solutions and one of their key service offerings.

42%

of VARs were P1 for all of their brand searches

58%

have at least one important issue with their brand-related searches

How to perfect the search user experience

Ensure that your site has been submitted to Google and is visible to search engines

Check that the “headings” and “metadata” correctly represent your business

Claim and/or update your Google Knowledge Panel listing

Buy your brand name as an AdWords search term

Website user experience

To evaluate the user experience, we looked at five key signals:

RESPONSIVENESS:
is a site responsive or has a mobile version

HTTPS:
is a site secure, using https

OVERALL UX:
how easily can a prospect find information such as services, contact details, and accreditations or other social proof

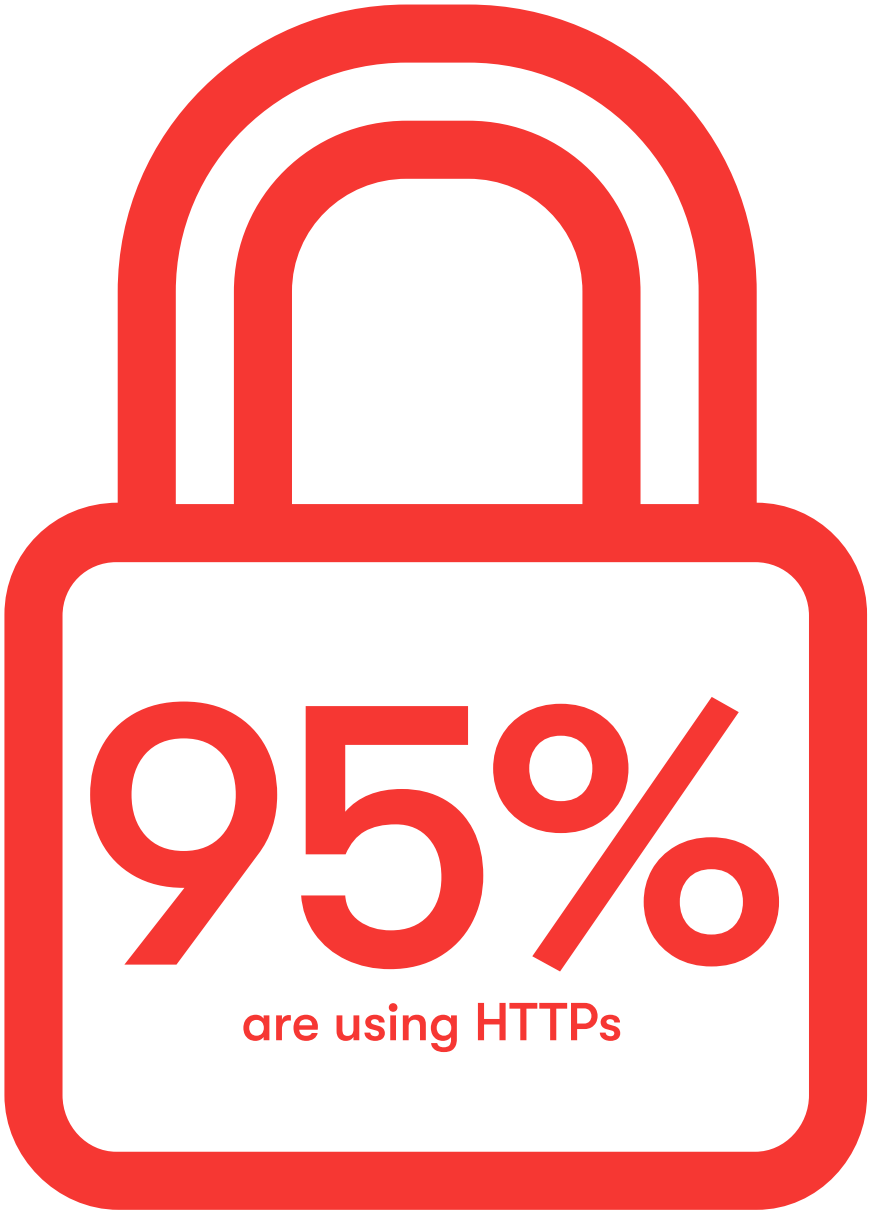
CONVERSION FEATURES:
does the site have features in place to capture prospect information and bring them into the sales funnel

VALUE PROPOSITION:
does the homepage have a clear value proposition statement communicating what the company does

95%

of the VARs had a responsive or mobile version of their site.

For the five lagging behind, it means their site is virtually unusable for approximately half the traffic that will visit it EVERY day.



HTTPS

Google displays a “not secure” warning in its Chrome browser for any site not using https. Over 70% of desktop users and over 50% of mobile users are on Chrome, so well over half of your visitors will see this warning!

Overall On-Site User Experience



We created a scoring system for the websites in our survey based on the ease of use of the site, its layout and design.

In our survey, only **35% of businesses** offered a “good” user experience.*

* We worked this out using a combination of Nielsen’s usability criteria with our own analysis of the primary audience for the site.

What's a good user experience?

An average of 7 different people are involved in any business-to-business buying decision in the UK today.*

A good user experience will allow any one of these people (from CEO to procurement manager to junior administrator) to get from the page where they arrive at the site to the information they need, in the quickest and easiest way possible.

* Source: Gartner.

Conversion Features

Your website should make it enticing, and easy, for prospective customers to get in touch with you and offer you their contact details for future contact.

Good conversion features include:

- **Clearly visible phone number**
- **Newsletter or blog subscription**
- **Valuable, gated content**
- **Live chat**

Only 49% of VARs had good conversion features on their sites.

Which means over half are missing out on valuable opportunities to generate and nurture sales leads.

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Value Proposition Statement

Only 36% of VARs had a clear, well defined and easy to find statement of who they are and what they offer prospects.

Which means 64% failed the Ronseal test, resulting in unnecesary confusion and missed conversion opportunities.

Content Marketing

Creating valuable content for prospects and customers is a key activity for supporting the sales cycle and retaining existing customers.

We looked at a key content features including:

Pulse:
did the site offer new or recent content

Newsletter:
did the site have an easily discoverable newsletter (or blog) subscription

Gated content:
was valuable content such as whitepapers easily discoverable from the homepage and was it gated in a sensible, ux-friendly way

Social:
was there recent activity on LinkedIn and Twitter

14% of sites had no discernible pulse

(some even had significantly out of date copyright notices)

Only 33% had an easily discoverable newsletter

(or subscription sign up)

Even more worryingly, 94% of VARs offering a newsletter subscription did not use double opt-in. A key best practice all the more urgent and important because of GDPR.

17% are totally neglecting at least one of their key social channels

Marketing Technology

There are several technology best practices available to support digital marketing.

- Google Analytics
- Google Tag Manager (GTM)
- LinkedIn Insight tag
- Remarketing
- Marketing Automation

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Google Analytics and Google Tag Manager

A whopping **95% of VARs are using Google Analytics**

But only **61% were using GTM**

GTM allows website administrators to add and change tags to allow you to manage your digital footprint without editing the website code.

This can help you improve the user experience both in search mode and on-site.

LinkedIn Insight Tag

This is a free tool from LinkedIn that will enable better campaign reporting and provide valuable insights about your website visitors. If you're doing any LinkedIn advertising, you can use the LinkedIn Insight Tag to track conversions, retarget website visitors, and unlock additional insights about members interacting with your ads.

Only 28% of VARs are taking advantage of this free tool

Remarketing

Showing ads to prospects, customers and stakeholders (such as investors) who have visited your website, or landing pages, is a great way to stay front of mind during long consideration cycles. There are number of platforms that offer low cost remarketing opportunities, including the Google display network, LinkedIn and even Facebook.

But...

Only 53% of VARs were obviously using remarketing (based on our methodology), missing out on a key best practice to amplify their sales and marketing activities.

Marketing Automation

Marketing automation adoption is a valuable tool for tracking and nurturing leads, as well improving the quality and efficiency of content marketing efforts.

Only 38% of VARs appear to have adopted marketing automation technology.

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You want to outperform your competitors?

Invest the time now to get best practice right.

Quick Pro Tips:

1 Clearly articulate your value proposition on your homepage

2 Buy your brand name on Google Ads

3 Claim your Google Knowledge panel (both brand and local)

4 Add your phone number to the header of your site and landing pages

5 Implement the LinkedIn insight tag

6 Ensure your site is HTTPs

Longer Term Investment:

1 Create a remarketing programme

2 Make your site responsive (or develop a mobile version) and improve UX

3 Develop longer, valuable content that can be gated for lead capture

4 Invest in Marketing Automation

5 Focus joint marketing efforts on non-competing lead generation activities

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Want to evaluate the health of your digital footprint? Get in touch.



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