How to close the digital skills gap in marketing – expert views

From workplace culture to coding, here are the best comments from our webchat on the digital skills gap in media and marketing

 Embrace the notion of constant learning and build a network of people around you to support what you know. Illustration: Ikon Images/Alamy

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Thursday 15 October 2015 13.30 BSTLast modified on Thursday 15 October 201513.33 BST

**Why is there a digital skills gap in marketing and media?**

**Patrick Mills, director of professional development,**[**IPA**](http://www.ipa.co.uk/)To a degree it’s the pace of change; there will always be a perceived skills gap as everyone in marketing and media wants their comms to be at the leading edge. We need to define what people need to know. There will be some who absolutely should focus on technical digital skills, however there’s still a huge need for creativity, strategy and people skills (ie making the connections with people to build brands and sell goods). We also need people who can connect the two, so my question in response is: should everyone be a tech guru in the future, or could we focus our energies more efficiently?

**Marie-Claire Barker, chief talent officer,**[**MEC**](http://www.mecglobal.co.uk/)As leaders we need a paradigm shift in how we view digital talent. Having a generation of individuals who habitually use technology in their daily lives does not necessarily mean that they are digital natives. They are digital consumers and we need to be smarter about how we equip them with the skills to translate their user knowledge into solutions for clients. As an industry we need to be more nimble and innovative in how we encourage them to think about technology in our business.

**How big is the problem?**

**Shuvo Saha, director,**[**Google Digital Academy**](http://googledigitalacademy.com/talentrevolution/)Our latest [Talent Revolution survey](https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-gb/research-study/the-talent-revolution-in-digital-marketing/), run with [BCG](https://www.bcg.com/), has revealed that there is a much larger gap in digital skills than we might have thought before – even in some of the largest and most well-resourced companies in the UK and Germany, which are digitally advanced markets. If “full adoption of all digital best practices” was a score out of 100, the industry scored itself 57, and it looks like there are quite significant capability gaps in mobile, video and use of ad technology.

Perhaps more fundamentally, the survey also showed that in many companies there’s a need for transformation in training and culture. Many senior leaders are not yet walking the talk. There’s a lot of emphasis on the importance of digital, but a lack of focus and investment on developing digital skills and talent. Training and development programs have been ineffective or insufficient. Organisation structures do not always support this either.

**What skills will marketing and media professionals need to thrive in the coming year?**

**Shuvo Saha**Fundamentals such as leadership and strategy will endure as critical skills now and in the future. The interesting piece is how the digital world has changed the environment and what we mean when we talk about these skills. For example, a classic marketer might have a very clear “who-what-how” strategy – starting with customer segmentation, brand proposition, advertising and a media plan – locked and loaded for a year, which will be reviewed at the end of it.

These days we have to be more nimble. The who-what-how fundamentals are the same but the data we have to make decisions on this is constant and always on. The ability to shift your strategy and plans on the fly, informed by digital data that is emerging all the time (rather than once a year) will distinguish those who pull ahead from those who fall behind.

**Rich Wilson, CMO,**[**Relative Insight**](https://relativeinsight.com/)
Coding is rapidly becoming a core skill for everyone in digital/marketing, so anyone who cannot will quickly find themselves disadvantaged.

**What would your one top tip be for fostering a culture of learning, development and training?**

**Joanne Bolger, education and partnership manager,**[**IAB UK**](https://www.iabuk.net/)Effective leadership is key to driving the digital success of a business, as is allocation of funding for digital training. All too often there is a fear of digital at a senior level that filters down through an organisation, hindering essential learning.

**Patrick Mills**I cannot emphasise enough the value of high-quality continuing professional development framework. The IPA programme has been running for 15 years and there is powerful evidence that an active learning culture driven by senior management can help drive business growth.

**Shuvo Saha**Take the time to properly understand and scope the problem. What skills gap, with whom and which specific skills? Where are you ahead or behind the competition? Which skills are business-critical? It’s impossible to fix everything with everyone. Be specific, prioritise and focus.

**Rich Wilson**While acknowledging there is no silver bullet here, I would encourage people to get out of the office to talk to peers at events, meet-ups, networking nights and so on. It’s an invaluable way to stimulate ideas and crystallise thoughts.

**Michelle Morgan, co-founder, [Livity](http://livity.co.uk/)**For SMEs I would say: identify the area that feels most critical and relevant to your business and get the whole business/agency on the journey together – one area and topic at a time. You can’t tackle it all at once, but you can iteratively get better, more confident and clearer. What’s most needed in your business or sector? What will be of most value to your future, clients and customers? Stay interested in the other stuff but don’t sweat about knowing everything. Become brilliant and confident about one or two areas and weave it into your learning and development plans, and people objectives. Get individuals to take ownership over it, as well as the leaders of the business.

**Luisa Cameron, head of digital, [Vizeum UK](http://vizeum.co.uk/)**
Build digital confidence across the whole workforce. It’s not just the responsibility of a few. Instil a culture that ongoing learning is an everyday part of all roles, whether that be a course or spending 10 minutes a day reading a tech blog.

**Marie-Claire Barker**Understand that one size does not fit all, and that you need a range of development activities to stimulate the entire workforce.

**Final thoughts**

**Marie-Claire Barker**Tech has changed the game. It’s no longer necessary to measure output based on hours spent at desks when we can engage with a multinational mobile workforce that’s always connected in real-time. As leaders we need to move away from the concept of owning talent and be brave enough to embrace the shared economy, borrowing the best for when and where it’s needed. This will require a paradigm shift in how we see talent, but if the industry carries on holding tightly to what’s safe and familiar, it may miss out on a better solution within reach.

**Luisa Cameron**From an individual’s perspective, embrace the notion of constant learning and lean in to all sources (blogs, articles, trade bodies, individual experts) – and build a network of people around you to support what you know. From a company perspective, nurture a culture that encourages people to minimise their own skill and knowledge gap. Also, provide training and learning initiatives that will not only attract digital talent, but grow it from within.

*Read the webchat in full*[*here*](http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/sep/25/digital-skills-gap-media-marketing-webchat#comments)

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