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Digital reset and refresh, in a recession

The pandemic-fuelled downturn is an opportunity to gain valuable digital skills.



Digital-marketing knowledge can help young and mid-career employees adapt to rapidly evolving economic conditions and take advantage of new employment opportunities. Photo: Shutterstock

Due to the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Singapore recently entered a technical recession. Singaporeans at all stages of their careers – from business owners to mid-level employees and fresh graduates – are facing uncertainty.

However, there are still spots of light in the economy, such as the increased demand for software, computing and IT workers. As businesses adapt and digitalise in order to continue operating in a post-pandemic world, digital skills will be even more in demand than before.

The statistics point to strong growth for professionals with the right digital skills. For instance, according to the 2019 Infocomm Media Manpower Survey, 220,800 infocomm media professionals were employed in 2018, with demand projected to grow by 68,000 people between 2019 and 2021.

Minister for Communications and Information S Iswaran said that the ICT sector has grown 3.5 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2020, creating 1,100 new jobs.

A CRUCIAL EDGE, STRAIGHT OUT OF SCHOOL

For fresh graduates about to enter a competitive job market, having the right skill-set could give them an edge that sets them apart.

Mr Frank Ng, a digital marketing trainer at Smartcademy, explains that digital marketers – who are a key growth lever for any company – usually work with many other teams within the organisation, such as brand marketing, market research, finance, strategy and operations, and management.

Thus, having a grasp of digital marketing can stand young employees in good stead, no matter which department they are in.

Said Mr Ng: “Whether young employees specialise in digital marketing or otherwise, basic knowledge of the field will enable them to make good business decisions in related aspects such as products, budgeting and sales strategies.”

Mr Ng’s students have found that digital marketing is more technical, multifaceted and complex than anticipated.

Said Mr Ng: “Digital marketing is indeed often more challenging than students expect. It involves a technical understanding of how to interpret data, manage platforms and work with ever-changing algorithms. Digital marketing is also all about an iterative and scientific approach to testing and learning hypotheses.”

A REINVENTED RESUME

Upskilling can also give mid-career employees the advantages needed to maintain a job or shift to a desired career despite the turbulent economy.

In recent years, digital tools like data analytics, user interface design and digital marketing have become essential in a wide variety of industries. In particular, small and medium enterprises have embraced the flexibility, empowerment and growth opportunities that digital marketing offers. Many have chosen to send their employees for upskilling in digital solutions, especially during the circuit breaker period.

“Google and Facebook increasingly provide dedicated support, training sessions and streamlined solutions for smaller companies,” Mr Ng pointed out.

“COVID-19 has just accelerated this approach, as more businesses take their products and services online, with some traditional retail companies like Nike and Lululemon seeing a huge growth in online sales.”

Those currently working in marketing will also benefit from keeping in touch with changing global trends. Mr Ng cites user privacy as one fundamental shift that will have a major impact on marketers. Organisations like the Coalition for Better Ads and the Interactive Advertising Bureau are evolving the standards of online advertising, in order to better address consumer expectations.

“As marketers, it’s important to keep user preferences in mind and think about whether we really need to send that extra Facebook post, email or push notification,” he added.

LOOKING FOR LOCAL INNOVATORS

Before the COVID-19 epidemic occurred, Singapore was already making significant efforts to develop local innovation and start-ups. Digital marketing skills have proven essential for those wanting to strike out on their own.

“A number of my former students have gone on to utilise the tactics and platforms learnt from the Smartcademy course in their jobs and personal businesses. Some have extra consultations with me to discuss specific strategies and ideas.

With COVID-19’s impact, consumer lifestyles have been changed so drastically – thanks in part to unpredictable supply chains, fluctuating product demand and a massive shift to online retail – that local start-ups will need to be more creative than ever to survive.

“A fundamental appreciation for the experimental and a growth mindset help to differentiate a successful digital marketer,” said Mr Ng.

“Digital marketing is ultimately a blend of art and science. While mastery over data and algorithms is important, so is a fundamental understanding of users and how the businesses we represent genuinely can add value to their lives.”

Visit [Smartcademy.sg](https://www.smartcademy.sg), a smart educator and digital career transformer in Singapore, to find out more about digital skills courses. Singaporeans and Permanent Residents may be eligible for up to 90 per cent of funding support (terms and conditions apply).

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