



# IMPROVING YOUR SALES PIPELINE WITH DIGITAL MARKETING



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## INTRODUCTION

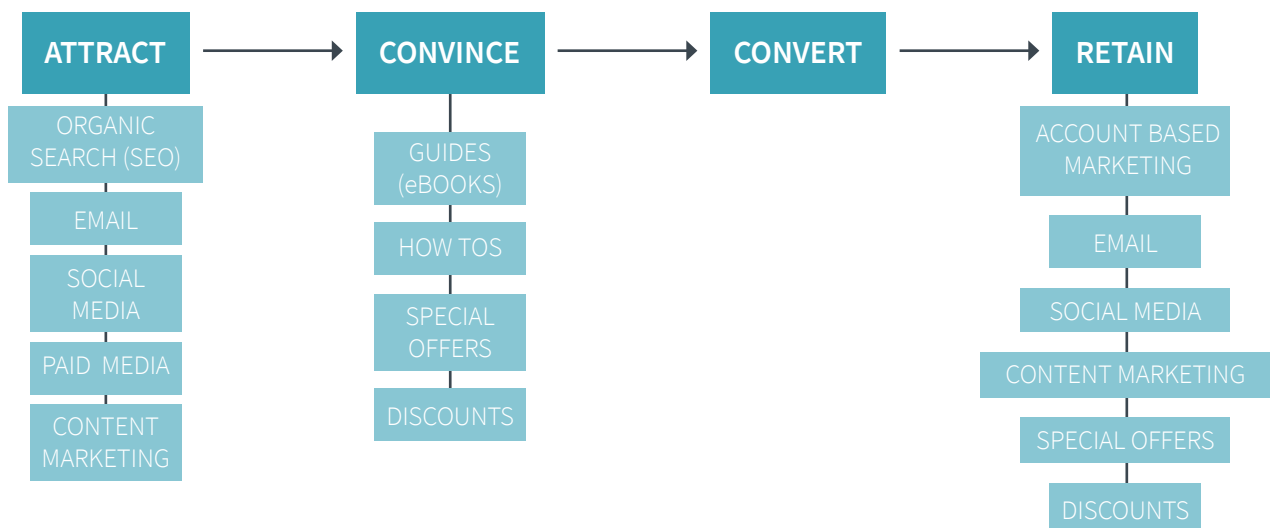
Whatever industry or sector your brand operates in, you will have a sales pipeline – a measurable process through which your users progress and, while some may enter the pipeline further along than others and there will be those that drop out along the way, this is a process that all brands should develop a deep understanding of and detailed strategy for.

Working on your sales pipeline is not just about increasing numbers at one end or another – though that is certainly a part of it, it's about taking accurate stock of your strengths and weaknesses to develop each junction of that pipeline to be as leak proof as possible.

By ensuring that we sketch out and analyse our pipeline, we can develop each part and also monitor progress over time – ensuring that we don't miss opportunities in the future either.

## WHAT IS A SALES PIPELINE?

The sales pipeline is a set of touchpoints with your brand that consumers can be expected to make on their way to converting (whether that's an eCommerce transaction or signing a contract). This typically consists of four stages – attracting the user to your site, convincing them that yours is the brand for them, converting them from a prospect to a customer and then to retain that customer.



Whether we know it by the name of 'sales pipeline' or by any other, this is the process that brands should be familiar with if operating online. Without knowing what represents your pipeline, it's impossible to improve it.

In the example on the right, we can see an oversimplified example flow for a brand:

- The customers begin by seeing a paid ad or a piece of external content.
- They visit the website and browse, providing an email address.
- They receive a special offer by email or a piece of further content tailored to their interests.
- They add a product to a basket but don't purchase.
- They receive an abandoned basket follow up email with a discount code.
- They go on to purchase.

PAID SEARCH AD OR EXTERNAL CONTENT	100 CUSTOMERS	
BLOG POST OR GUIDE	60 CUSTOMERS	DROP OFF 40%
SPECIAL OFFER EMAIL, FOLLOW UP GUIDE OR HOW TO	40 CUSTOMERS	DROP OFF 33%
ADDS TO BASKET, SUBMITS QUOTE REQUEST	30 CUSTOMERS	DROP OFF 25%
ABANDONED BASKET EMAIL, QUOTE OFFERED	10 CUSTOMERS	DROP OFF 66%
PURCHASE OR DEAL CLOSED	5 CUSTOMERS	DROP OFF 50%

In this example, we can see a relatively common larger early drop off of consumers, some of these may return later, some of them will have been searching speculatively with no real purchase intent. Following this pipeline, we can see that the main issue comes at the point where the consumer is adding products to their basket or requesting the quote.

This is a pain point – we see a larger than expected drop off, making this the point we need to address – whether that's through the checkout process or the auto-response from a form submission, this needs to be improved. An improvement in retention here of 10%, for example, could leave us with 17 customers in the next bucket, and a consequent increase of 60% conversion (5 to 8 customers) if we maintain the same drop off level.

However, to make that improvement, we need to be able to identify the stages in our pipeline.

## ATTRACT

The attract stage of the funnel is much as it sounds – we’re providing material to a target demographic rather than specific people. In this respect, we need to ensure that we’re attempting to attract the right demographics – this is done through keyword strategy, consumer profiling, buyer personas and the like.

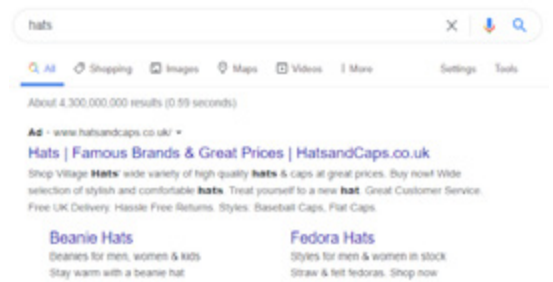
## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media posts at this level will be introductions to the brand – with the intention of reaching micro-influencers, previous consumers, using newsjacking or other types of post which aim to extend a brand’s reach.



## PAID MEDIA

Paid media ads for this level are often referred to as ‘awareness’ level ads – which address consumers that have become aware of a need. This means you’ll be bidding on fairly low purchase intent keywords, but the reason for these campaigns is not conversion, but to plant seeds.



## CONTENT MARKETING

As with the other two mentioned here, content marketing at this level is aimed at fairly low intention keywords – it represents content which defines a problem and offers your brand as a solution, and that’s what campaigns in this area of pipeline should do – whether that’s onsite content, or working with bloggers and influencers, the aim here as with the other two types is to raise awareness of the brand and the problem you solve.



## **ORGANIC SEARCH**

Organic search is one of the most important parts of any online strategy – but is especially important to this stage of your sales pipeline. It's second nature for us to pull out our phones when we become aware of an issue, problem, need or want. We Google the query and we'll scroll a bit around the first page (maybe, occasionally to the second page) and have a look to see if there's an easy, desirable, affordable solution for the issue.

Implementing a solid organic search (SEO) strategy is the only way you'll be discovered this way – it is almost impossible to find yourself top of the SERPs without a concerted effort to get there. There's a reason SEO is a core part of the strategy of successful brands. With the right keyword strategy, the right technical approach and all round SEO strategy, you can build a strong flow of users in to your sales pipeline.

## **MEASUREMENT**

In order to know how many users are entering at this level, you need to be tracking multiple sources – and the easiest way to do that is through UTM tracking with a shared campaign name for all aspects of 'Attract' level campaigns.

## NURTURE

The nurture section of the pipeline requires you to convince users on multiple levels, you're not just convincing them that your solution is the right one for their problem, but also that yours is the right brand to provide it and that you do so at a good price. Obviously, you can still use the campaign types listed in the first section for this section of the pipeline – and the same would be true of the tracking method (unique UTM tracking links) – but we're going to try to offer a few unique items for each.

## HOW TOS

I'm using how tos to describe a broad range of content here – from FAQs to tutorials and comparison pieces. The aim is to give the consumer enough information to make the right choice. You want to, again, outline the problem your brand addresses and describe how exactly your brand solves it. Take the following from Monday.com:

### The CRM platform that is simple to set up and easy to use

Manage everything in one place. monday.com lets you handle sales pipelines, customer onboarding, clients' projects, marketing, and much more!

Get Started >

This is the above the fold copy on their paid search advert landing page (for the term 'Salesforce' cheekily enough). It makes a strong point of its low bar for entry in terms of skill, outlines the number of potential problems it can tackle and then, with a scroll down the page, shows how it can help rather than just telling you it can.



A further scroll down and they compare their offering against that of their competitors.

So on the one page, we have:

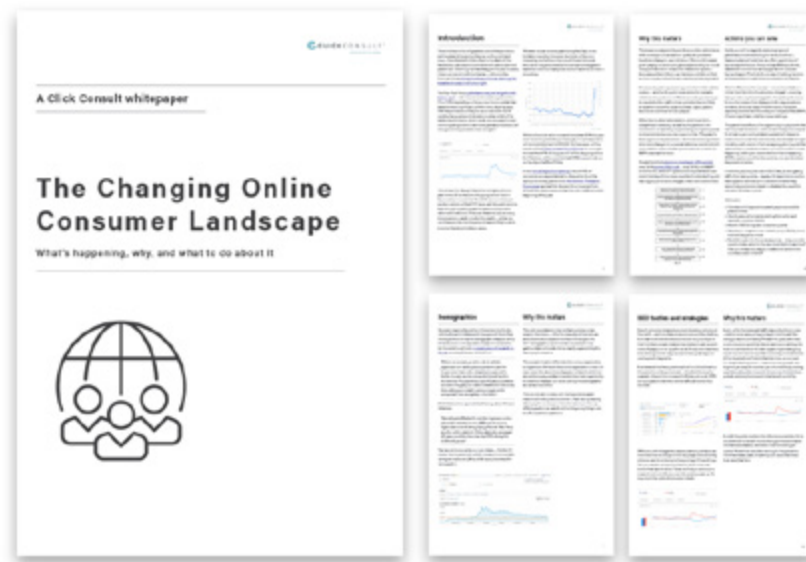
- The problem
- The solution
- That they can help
- How they can help
- How they compare

## EBOOKS

Again, the purpose of eBooks is to educate – though the eBook can increase the perception of value to the user, making it more likely that you can earn a user’s email address in exchange for the asset; though it’s perfectly acceptable to offer eBooks ungated.

The benefit (and also a drawback) of eBooks is that they are much more comprehensive than blogs or infographics (and therefore more labour intensive). They shouldn’t be a sales piece, but genuine efforts to inform users on either the problem your service resolves or a tangential one.

A peek behind the curtain, here – this is a process we use (are using here). For most of the people reading, this eBook may be enough to resolve the issues they are experiencing and that is rewarding in and of itself, but for a few brands it will represent (we hope) a degree of expertise that can help to reinforce our authority in the service area they are looking to contract for.



Obviously, this means that it takes quite a lot of time – you want to be able to make sure that the content does what it’s supposed to, and also that it showcases the aforementioned authority. This makes eBooks quite hard work – but rewarding in its own right, and we’re always pleased to hear from people that have been helped out of a pickle by one of ours.



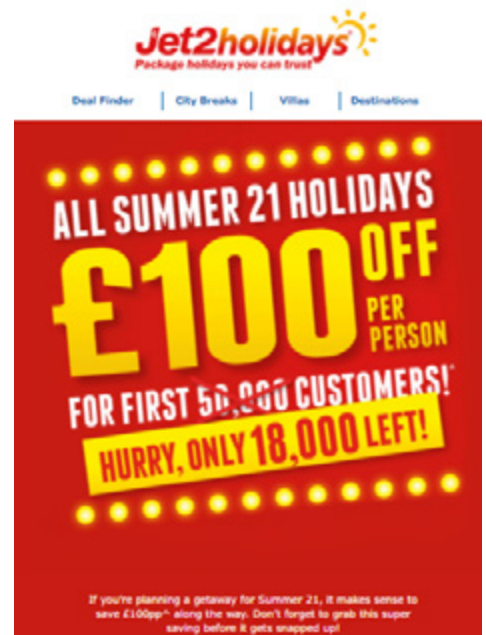
## SPECIAL OFFERS

I'm guessing that you won't need too much explaining about special offers – a click on the promotions tab of any Gmail account will give you all the special offers you could ask for, but here's one from my personal email account.

This rather optimistic special offer is of £100 off a summer holiday to be cancelled in 2021. With CV19, impending climate collapse and a lack of funds stopping me, it's less tempting – but not completely un-tempting.

You can see here that they have used the manufactured scarcity technique by seeming to limit the offer, the time-limited technique by suggesting that fewer than half of the original number of discounts.

Again, we're looking at an effort in persuasion – offering a unique incentive for the user to take action.



## MEASUREMENT

Without adding specific Google Analytics views to filter for users that entered at the first stage, it's impossible to guarantee that you're dealing with the same users at this stage – some may join at this stage specifically, so may have dropped back from further on in the pipeline, but by comparing your campaign traffic from the attraction stage to the general organic traffic you receive, you can make reasonable estimates.

Again, for anything external to your site, use UTM tracking to determine which campaign they're arriving as part of – whether on links in eBooks or on social media or paid search ads – otherwise you can check for specific landing page traffic and track it that way – you can use the funnel visualisations in Google Analytics to see how users behave upon entering at a specific page.

## CONVERT

Conversion is more of an effort in facilitation than in sales – which is why I left it off the first diagram. The process of persuasion should have already taken place by this point and now we just want to make it as easy as possible for the consumer to do what you want them to do. This means considering the following:

### CHECKOUT OR FORM SUBMISSION PROCESS

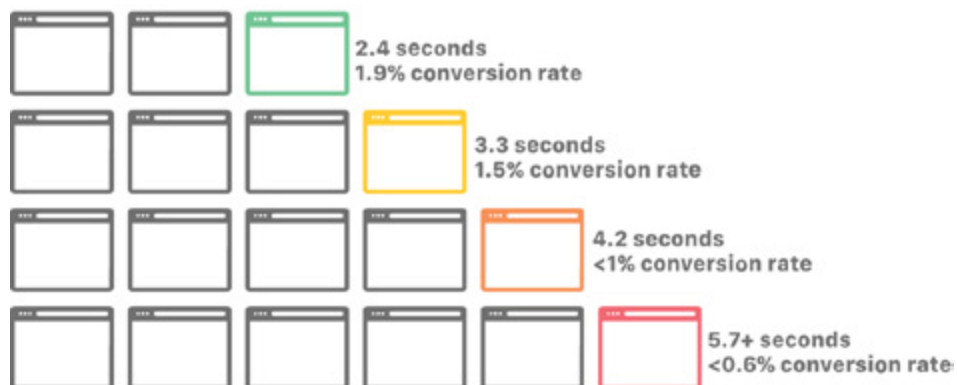
This should be as fast as possible, as simple as possible and offer as few hurdles as possible for the consumer to convert. If you're gating content, ask for the details you need, if your site needs payment options, offer the most convenient types – card scanning, Apple and Android payment, PayPal, options which cut down on the forms that need to be filled.

### SHIPPING AND OTHER COSTS

Nobody likes surprises – so be upfront with additional charges and shipping costs. While global eCommerce conversion has risen over the last 5 years, the number one reason for abandoned carts in the US is still shipping costs.

### SPEED

The impact of site speed on conversion rates is stark. The impact of site speed on the web itself is so pronounced that speed is one of the Core Web Vitals set to become part of Google's ranking algorithm in 2021. However, as [Cloudflare](#) discovered during a recent study, conversion rate differences by speed of site would horrify many.



## SECURITY

There should be absolutely no eCommerce site still operating on http – the ‘not secure’ tag added to these sites is a major red flag for consumers and can dramatically decrease your site’s conversion potential. However, with trusted business status due to be introduced by Google, there is likely to be a pitched battle in the SERPs to demonstrate the trustworthiness of a business.

For this reason, as well as the standard security checks (ensuring there are no backdoors caused by third party scripts, for example), there should be a concerted effort to demonstrate your trustworthiness – use your reviews, your testimonials and make sure the user can feel safe on your site and with your service.



## MEASUREMENT

This is a difficult one to measure – and not even something you’d really want to A/B test – these are optimisation tasks that will absolutely improve your conversion rate, so the main measurements will be comparisons to before and after.

However, there are speed audits you can and should conduct on your site which will give you an indication of your site’s CWV score – which you can access through Google Search Console. For the rest, unfortunately, good old fashioned market research would be the best way to gain insight.

## RETAIN

Depending on the study being referenced, the cost of acquiring new customers is between 5 and 25 times more expensive than retaining existing custom. On the other hand, the following from Fred Reichheld explains a little about the potential of retention:

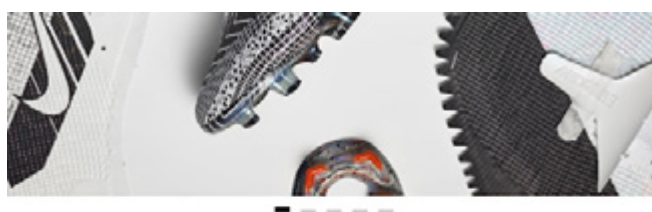
How do loyal relationships translate into cost savings? Consider the cost of serving a long-standing customer versus the cost of courting one. Across a wide range of businesses, customers generate increasing profits each year they stay with a company. In financial services, for example, a 5% increase in customer retention produces more than a 25% increase in profit.

Why? Return customers tend to buy more from a company over time. As they do, your operating costs to serve them decline. What's more, return customers refer others to your company. And they'll often pay a premium to continue to do business with you rather than switch to a competitor with whom they're neither familiar nor comfortable

This makes retention among the most important aspects of a sales pipeline – especially for B2B brands and doubly so during periods of extreme uncertainty such as those at the time of writing. You have already proved yourself, your brand, and your worth to your consumer – asking them to take another step with you is often far easier than asking someone to take a leap into a fresh purchase. You can aid that process with some of the techniques that follow.

## TARGETED CONTENT

Targeted content addresses a need you are aware might still exist despite your previous business with them. There will be a need for replacements if the item has an expected life-cycle, or it can be existing holes in a strategy or provision that you can address. Take the following from Nike:



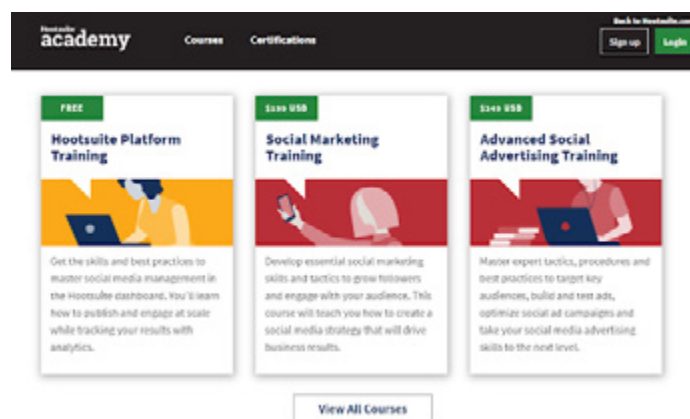
October 02, 2020 - Building off [Nike Mercurial Dream Speed](#) and [Nike Mercurial Dream Speed 2](#) designs, the latest iteration of the Nike Mercurial Dream Speed boot is inspired by the speed of the game.

"These boots are all about chasing your dreams and doing whatever you can to achieve them," says Cristiano Ronaldo. "One bit of advice I have for everyone to think about if you wear these boots: work hard and think big, and your dreams can come true."

This blog ticks the following from a targeting perspective:

- It positions the product as ‘new and improved’ for those looking for replacement boots
- It uses endorsement from one of the most respected athletes in world football
- It appeals to vanity and aspiration

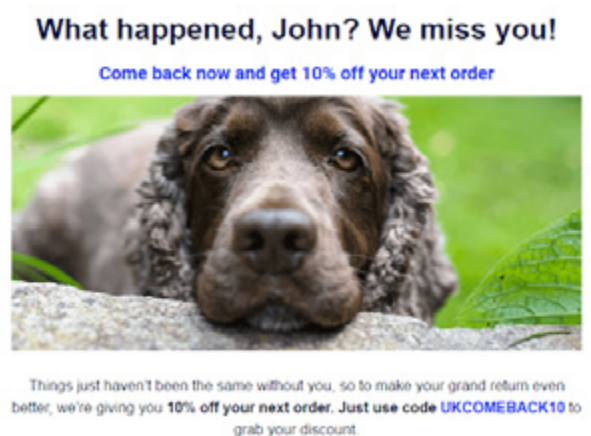
It seeks to offer the consumers the quality they’ve enjoyed and promises more. The same, or similar can be said of the following upselling technique from social media management SaaS brand Hootsuite who offer a series of training courses not just for their platform, but for the performance of social media marketing as a whole.



You will see this kind of activity at most successful brands – they use their past performance, the consumer loyalty that they’ve earned, to enhance their profitability.

## RE-ENGAGEMENT EMAILS

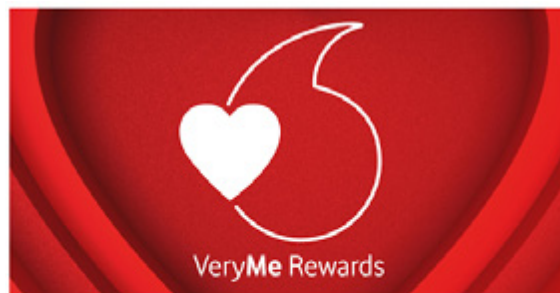
Whether this is in the form of a reminder email to review a product, an email that suggests complimentary products or simply an email to promote the content you are producing as part of your targeted content strategy, the idea of re-engagement email campaigns are nudges rather than shoves – they know you, have enjoyed your level of service, but may just need to be reminded of the range of your services so that you are front of mind when they next need to make a purchase. Take the Vision Direct email on the left. It’s been a couple of years since my last eye test (when a responsible adult would be looking for another) and while I bought those glasses following a child related spectacle destruction incident and have replaced them since, I was fairly pleased with my purchase and the email has reminded me for the next time one of my children destroys my glasses.



## DELIGHT THE CONSUMER

This goes for aftersales as well as with the product or service – remember the 5% to 25% statistic, you can afford to provide a little additional incentive to your existing customer base. Take the Vodafone VeryMe reward scheme – while I can't remember ever having used them, they offer a range of promotions, free coffees at a partner brand and a host of other things.

In this, they are unlikely to lose in the final balance – the majority of people, I would imagine, would be similar to me, having seldom or never used the incentives, but for those that do – it will prove a major plus for their brand experience.



Hi John,

Have you checked out the latest rewards from VeryMe Rewards? We've got lots on offer – including the return of two Yue tickets for £7 and prizes to keep the whole family entertained. Take a look at our latest rewards and remember to keep checking back each week to discover loads more.

## MEASUREMENT

This will depend on your record keeping, but you should have a method of checking for recurring revenue – whether that's through accounts if you're an eCommerce brand, or in contracts for B2B and service providers. What is often harder than implementing measurement in this respect is making the business case for measurement; sometimes revenue is revenue! However, by examining this particular stage of the pipeline, you can develop an understanding of how you're performing in many other areas. So in addition to tracking, you can implement a system of client or customer surveys to help you improve your retention.

## CONCLUSION

It's apparent from Click Consult's many years of experience, and tens of industry studies and surveys, that there are always pain points in the sales pipeline that can be improved. This isn't just a case of CRO, it's an approach to your website that uses data to enhance all areas – whether that's ensuring that you're targeting the right keywords, or improving functionality and usability.

The sales pipeline is an important, on-going process – it's important to build it and maintain it to avoid it springing leaks and to be able to patch them when they occur. Through developing as full a picture of the pipeline through which you are directing your users, and through development and maintenance, you can not only increase your conversion percentage, but also the number of users you have entering at the awareness stage as many of the considerations you will need to make will have a direct and positive impact on your rankings.



# GET IN TOUCH WITH US TODAY

## ABOUT US

Click Consult is a multi award-winning digital and search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC). Part of global consumer brand business Ceuta Group, we have a team of 70-plus specialists and a portfolio of more than 60 clients worldwide.

Our complementary services include content marketing, outreach, social media, conversion rate optimisation (CRO) and international/multilingual search marketing. We can also offer training and consultation to support your teams or existing strategy.

Click was named Organic Search (SEO) Team of the Year 2020, adding to our long list of other awards and accolades, and also ranks within Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'. We're also a Google Premier Partner, a Bing Select Partner and feature in The Drum Recommends.

## HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

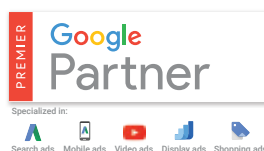
CONTACT US



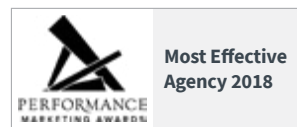
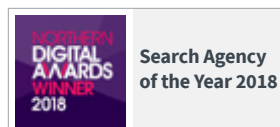
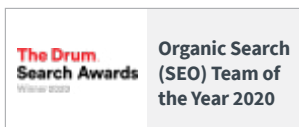
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## OUR AWARDS



## OUR TECHNOLOGIES

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