

Step-by-step  
Strategies

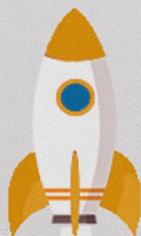
 Roberto Liccardo

# The Growth Secret

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GROWTH HACKING AND  
DIGITAL MARKETING AT ITS  
BEST

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THE GROWTH SECRET

# The Growth Secret

Growth hacking and digital  
Marketing at its best.

Roberto Liccardo

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# A LONG STORY SHORT



# Introduction

Anyone who, like me, has been doing digital marketing at all between 2002 and the present, has come to a certain point in their career where, regardless of what we have been taught, we have to face the fact that there is another, better way: apply tactics that no one would have described as "marketing." These have turned out to be the marketing "steroids" behind their business growth.

The traditional approaches, described in several digital marketing manuals and courses, integrating long runs of SEO campaigns together with short runs of paying advertising, look obsolete in front of new techniques that could bring higher results in less time and at almost no cost. This new way to deliver growth, a new approach not yet properly described, it appeared to everyone like a "shortcut" that utilizes a limited budget and minimizes the chances of being wrong, thus giving the much needed freedom to be innovative, to experiment and to try out new things.

Growth hacking is, for digital marketers, a slap in the face at a certain point of your career; something that is telling you that you are not good enough, a voice

somewhere inside you that is calling for change in your approaches. I got my slap as late as in 2012 (well, I'd say better late than never). It happened during one of those ordinary consultancy meetings with clients who normally have read on the Internet about this new platform or technology and they want to implement it without knowing much about it - and at times, without knowing it at all.

That meeting, initially apparently so ordinary, would have changed the course of my career.

I spilled coffee on the table, just after a long boring meeting where we brainstormed about creative ways to increase our conversion rate, and then I was running off to meet Scott.

Scott was the typical young entrepreneur you would expect to meet in Silicon Valley. He started his own business during his college days and once he graduated with a law degree from in Berkeley, he decided to forgo the career path his father had designed for him - instead, he focused on a new business idea. Now, about 20 years later, his business has become an established, company employing 2000 people and is now a leader in the online legal industry. Scott was now looking for a digital marketer with a particular approach - or, more appropriately, one with a very specific *mindset*.

He was running an established company, but he got to the point of realizing that there was an urgent

need for someone that was able to step-in into the traditional digital marketing activities that have brought the company success. What Scott needed to do was to *rethink* (which clearly doesn't mean 'replace') his company's current digital marketing strategies in his bid to bring innovation.

Scott was the type of guy that spends his morning reading about the latest trends in the market and attending seminars on new trends and approaches in the Valley. His afternoon, evening and night were spent working. His sleep was always postponed to an unspecified later date (whenever possible). Thus, he became perfectly knowledgeable about all the trends and new figures in the market, and he knew he had to upgrade and step up from his traditional marketing approaches and innovate his product.

We met 3 times; every time, he would invite me to the same Italian restaurant that, according to him (and I believe according to him only), is the best in the Valley. But as an Italian with high Italian taste for food, I would normally just focus and enjoy our conversations much more than the meals in front of me.

After a brief "*How are you?*" and "*How is business going?*," he would get straight to the point: "There are some areas, new areas of my business I would like to explore. Can you growth hack those areas?"

And my response would be: "Sure. We can promote brand awareness to specific niches you would like to address, or just run PPC campaigns focused on actions rather than brand for faster results."

Scott replied: "I don't do brand awareness in certain niches, because I don't even know what my product is yet. I mean, we know that audiences respond well to our product right now, but we would need to innovate and rebrand it based on customer feedback and as we go along from there, build our product off of what customers actually want."

For me, that was something unheard of; how could he innovate his product without having specified his target audience? The business model I had always worked with was: have a product ---→ target an audience for that product ----→ sell the product. Scott was now directly contradicting many years and pages of marketing literature by asking to go the other way around.

Scott added: "We have a product in mind to start with, an MVP, what's needed is to tweak different assumptions and version of it to see which one stick more."

I soon realized that I was unprepared to address Scott's request. The traditional tools of a digital

marketer wouldn't perfectly address what Scott had in mind; he was looking for answers that the normal digital marketing approach could not give or at least not in a very short timeframe as that he had in mind.

Until that point, my experiences with growth hacking always concluded with a: "that's exactly what I've been doing – that's just marketing." But that day, I was forced to face the real status of this matter: I could no longer hide from myself that growth hacking is, in itself, a part of the digital culture that comes with its own approach (or, more appropriately, *mindset*, as will be discussed further in the rest of this book), and that this is a complementary skill-set needed for truly building innovation, and driving growth into any kind of organization. The traditional tools used in digital marketing are unable to accommodate growth, as much as growth hacking is often unable to accommodate business stability.

This book seeks to help digital marketers - as well as business owners - to adopt a digital hacking mindset, with a particular focus on *how* to do so for the sake of bringing growth into any organization. The aim on here is to help digital marketers in combining the traditional digital marketing approach for the long run together with the accelerations provided by growth hacking.

The *The Growth Secret* approach applies to the entire business ecosystem, regardless of company size, sector, or stage of development: all companies (not only startups) are discovering how to innovate faster by applying a growth hacking mentality. This book is an actionable guide for entrepreneurs of all stripes: from mature digital marketers who want to innovate their approaches to small business owners that are looking for ways to scale up their company.

On here I'm not helping you to choose whether to become a growth hacker or a digital marketer, but my propose is to offer an actionable guide on *how* to implement growth hacking even into a traditional digital marketing structure.

The first part of this book is about digging into the vague concept of "growth hacking,"<sup>1</sup> teaching you how to adapt a growth hacking *mindset*. It is about you meeting the next Scott and being able to meet his needs to create growth *today*, while preserving the long-term goals that an established business has. Thus, being able to loom into micro-areas, to tweak things continuously, to run experiments through A/B

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<sup>1</sup> In a blog post by Kiki Schirr, six different industry experts provide different definitions of growth hacking. There are some similarities amongst the definitions, but there isn't one agreed-upon meaning. The official definition, in the words of Sean Ellis (perhaps the godfather of growth hacking) is not a great help in clarifying: "growth hacker's true north is growth."

testing. This can be achieved while using the traditional channels that digital marketing offers (and if you like adding new ones as well) in order to welcome growth into your marketing process. I also have analyzed the success (as well as the failures) of hundreds of startups in achieving breakthrough growth in order to present you patterns to serve as guidelines.

The second part of this book focuses on how to practically apply this *mindset* in the real world. We help you to connect the dots and avoid the potential confusion typical of theoretical explanations, presenting you 10 step-by-step growth hacking strategies and over 100 growth tips that any kind of business can apply alongside traditional digital marketing channels. The purpose of this section is to actually put into practice what we learned from section 1, and help you find the perfect hack that your business needs for continued and accelerated growth.

Whether you are a digital marketer looking for innovative techniques or a business owner looking for new way to bring clients at your doorstep, The Growth Secret will help you achieve growth. This book is not another AirBnB or Uber case study reviews, but an actionable guide on how to leverage growth into your digital marketing strategies.

Among all the noise and clutter surrounding growth hacking and growth hacks, this book presents selected, proven successful strategies you can put immediately in place. Rethink Digital also analyzes the success (and the failures) of hundreds of startups in achieving breakthrough growth, presenting you with patterns to serve as guidelines for your business and marketing strategies.

Discover:

- What is growth hacking and how to adopt a growth hacking mindset;
- How to integrate growth hacking into your current digital marketing strategies instead of choosing one approach or the other;
- Startup mistakes to avoid, by analyzing the stories of over one hundred startups;
- The patterns underlining the recent success of hundreds of startups divided by industry;
- How to achieve growth in your organization, integrating 10 step-by-step, actionable strategies and over 100 actionable tips;
- How to start generating growth by using the free tools I provide here and the valuable references of professionals you can contact to help you rethink your digital marketing strategies.



Roberto wears his 12 years of direct and managerial experience in intensive Digital Marketing and Analytics, which also includes consultancies on Growth Hacking for leading Silicon Valley companies. He was the founder of a Digital Marketing Agency (IRL Solutions), which was composed of over 130 employees and successfully sold. He is currently working as CEO for Best Offer Capital.