

# SKILLS FRAMEWORK

## Work package n°2 - Needs and gap analysis

WP2.3 - Analyzing needs assessment results and creating a skills framework



Led: IPT with HETEL, IML, ACEEU, and FBO



Participants: all partners



Analyzes the needs assessment results and develops a digital and sustainability skills framework for marketing, guiding training programs and curricula.



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New digital and sustainability skills framework

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## Introduction

This work package aims to identify the digital and sustainability skills required by European marketing professionals and assess their presence in current VET and higher education programs. The objectives of Work Package 2 include:

- Identifying affected stakeholders, including VET and higher education institutions, marketing/business teachers and students, marketing professionals, and European businesses.
- Performing a survey and focus groups with target groups to evaluate marketing sector needs, identify in-demand digital and sustainability skills, and assess their presence in current programs.
- Creating a framework based on the needs assessment to guide the development of new training material and ensure alignment with labour market needs.

After analyzing the surveys and Focus Group, it was possible to identify gaps and opportunities in the teaching of digital and sustainability skills and create the corresponding Framework.

This report will present detailed results of the activities carried out in the “WP2.3 - Analyzing needs assessment results and creating a skills framework”, providing a framework of the gaps and opportunities in the teaching of digital and sustainability skills within the context of European Higher Education.

## Context and Justification of the Framework

This Skills Framework for Digital and Sustainable Marketing is the result of the needs analysis conducted within the DIGISTAINABILITY project, which included surveys and focus groups with students, teachers, marketing professionals, and company representatives from different European countries.

The objective of the analysis was to identify the most in-demand digital and sustainability skills in the marketing sector and assess their presence in current vocational education and training (VET) and higher education programs. To achieve this, the following key actions were carried out:

- 256 survey responses from students, teachers, and marketing professionals.
- Focus groups in 5 countries (Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Germany, and Portugal) with representatives from businesses, universities, and training centers.
- Comparison of results with GreenComp and DigiComp, ensuring that the framework aligns with European standards.

The results revealed significant gaps in the teaching of digital and sustainability skills, as well as the need to adapt training programs to the new challenges of marketing.

## Key Findings from the Needs Analysis

Identified gaps in current training programs:

- Lack of integration of advanced digital skills into educational programs.
- Limited training in sustainable and ethical marketing strategies in curricula.
- A disconnect between academic training and the real needs of the labor market.

Key identified competencies:

- Digital competencies: Data protection and privacy, automation, SEO/SEM, digital content creation.
- Sustainability competencies: Ethical communication, circular economy, sustainability certifications, marketing's social impact.
- Strategic skills: Data analysis, leadership in digital and sustainable transformation.

Demand from the labor market:

- Companies and marketing professionals emphasize the need for practical training aligned with real industry tools.
- A stronger focus on project-based learning, gamification, and the use of advanced digital tools is required.
- High demand for skills to manage sustainability strategies in marketing, due to stricter regulations and consumer expectations.

## Objective of the Skills Framework

Based on these findings, this Skills Framework provides a clear structure aligned with market needs, facilitating the integration of digital and sustainability competencies into marketing education. Its design allows for:

- Establishing a roadmap for competency development at different learning levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced).
- Facilitating the incorporation of these competencies into VET and higher education programs.
- Serving as a reference for the implementation of innovative learning strategies and the validation of competencies in the professional sector.

## Methodology

The development of this Skills Framework for Digital and Sustainable Marketing followed a structured and research-driven approach to ensure its relevance and applicability to both education and the labor market. The methodology employed was designed to systematically identify, analyze, and validate the most critical digital and sustainability competencies required for marketing professionals in Europe.

The first phase of the process focused on data collection through surveys and focus groups. A comprehensive survey was conducted between January and February 2024, gathering insights from 256 respondents, including students, educators, and marketing professionals. The survey aimed to assess the importance of digital and sustainability competencies in marketing, evaluate their presence in current vocational education and higher education programs, and identify potential gaps.

In parallel, focus groups were conducted in five countries (Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Germany, and Portugal), allowing for a deeper qualitative analysis. Participants included representatives from academia, industry, and training institutions, ensuring a diverse and comprehensive perspective on the essential skills needed in marketing. These discussions provided valuable real-world insights into the challenges professionals face when applying digital and sustainable marketing strategies, as well as the current shortcomings in formal education programs.

Following data collection, the second phase focused on competency mapping and framework design. The survey and focus group findings were systematically analyzed and compared against two well-established European competency frameworks:

- GreenComp, which outlines key sustainability-related competencies.
- DigiComp, which defines digital skills essential for professional development.

By integrating these frameworks, the competency structure was categorized into core areas that align with marketing education and industry demands. The selection process emphasized competencies that would enable professionals to effectively integrate digital innovation and sustainability principles into marketing strategies.

To ensure a robust and validated framework, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify gaps between existing educational curricula and the competencies required in the job market. This led to the third phase: validation and refinement. During a transnational meeting in October 2024 in Tomar, Portugal, project partners reviewed and refined the framework, applying objective criteria to ensure the inclusion of the most relevant competencies. Specifically, competencies that were identified in two or more focus groups were prioritized for inclusion, while additional skills highlighted in the survey were incorporated to ensure a well-rounded and future-proof framework.

Once the competencies were finalized, the learning roadmap was developed. To facilitate effective training and skill acquisition, the framework was structured into three progressive learning levels:

- Beginner Level: Covering fundamental digital marketing tools, ethical considerations, and introductory sustainability concepts.
- Intermediate Level: Focusing on data analytics, automation, content marketing, and sustainability-driven marketing strategies.
- Advanced Level: Addressing AI-driven marketing, growth hacking, predictive analytics, and leadership in sustainable marketing initiatives.

Additionally, the framework integrates innovative teaching methodologies to enhance learning effectiveness. Approaches such as Project-Based Learning (PBL), Gamification, Simulated Market Scenarios, and Competency-Based Assessments were incorporated to ensure students and professionals not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also develop practical, real-world skills.

Lastly, this framework is designed to be adaptable and scalable for various educational settings, including VET and higher education institutions. The structure allows for seamless integration into existing curricula and can be utilized as a model for upskilling professionals in the workforce. As the digital and sustainability landscapes continue to evolve, future iterations of this framework will incorporate emerging trends, ensuring its long-term relevance and effectiveness in preparing marketing professionals for the challenges of tomorrow.

With a strong foundation in empirical research, industry insights, and educational best practices, this Skills Framework serves as a comprehensive guide to equipping marketing professionals with the competencies necessary to thrive in a digital and sustainable economy.

## Framework proposal

This framework outlines the key competencies required for Digital and Sustainable Marketing education in European Higher Education, integrating insights from the survey and focus group results. It categorizes competencies into technical skills, strategic and management skills, and transversal (soft) skills, ensuring a comprehensive learning structure aligned with the identified demands.

### *Core Competencies Identified*

The core competencies list was developed based on insights gathered from both the survey and focus group. These research methods identified the essential skills from GreenComp and DigiComp required for professionals in Digital Marketing, particularly in the areas of sustainability, ethics, and digital proficiency.

The survey provided quantitative data on which competencies professionals and students consider most relevant, while the focus group allowed for a deeper qualitative analysis, highlighting real-world applications and challenges. The results were mapped against the GreenComp framework, focusing on sustainability and ethical marketing, and the DigiComp framework, emphasizing digital skills, security, and content creation.

By integrating these two perspectives, the competency framework proposed ensures that digital marketers are equipped with the necessary strategic, technical, and ethical skills to navigate the evolving landscape, aligning education with industry demands and fostering a more responsible and future-proof approach to marketing.

## Sustainability and Ethical Marketing Competencies (GreenComp)

From GreenComp where identified:

### Valuing Sustainability Skills

- Strategic Communication, Analysis, and Evaluation – Integrating sustainability messages effectively within marketing campaigns.
- Sustainable Business Insight – Understanding the economic and social impacts of sustainable business models.

### Supporting Fairness Skills

- Diversity, Ethics, and Consumer Advocacy – Ensuring inclusive and ethical marketing practices.
- Integrated Ethical Communication and Engagement – Developing trust through responsible messaging.
- Sustainability Certification and Strategic Application – Understanding and leveraging certifications to reinforce credibility.

### Promoting Nature

- Circular Economy and Resource Stewardship – Incorporating sustainable consumption and production principles.
- Sustainable Marketing Integration – Aligning sustainability with core marketing strategies.
- Sustainability Communication and Public Education – Raising awareness through educational marketing campaigns.

### Critical Thinking and Consumer Insights

- Critical Market Insight – Evaluating trends, consumer behaviors, and sustainability metrics.
- Consumer Critical Engagement – Analyzing consumer perspectives and feedback to refine sustainable strategies.

### Futures Literacy and Adaptability

- Consumer Insight and Adaptive Strategy – Anticipating and responding to shifting market demands.
- Critical and Strategic Foresight – Identifying long-term opportunities and risks in digital marketing.
- Integrated Sustainable Practices – Applying flexible and responsible marketing methods.

- Material and Consumption Innovation – Developing new sustainable materials and marketing techniques.
- Consumer-Centric Design – Enhancing user experience through sustainability-focused design.
- Innovative Sustainability – Creating cutting-edge solutions for sustainable marketing challenges.

### **Leadership and Action-Oriented Competencies**

- Sustainability Advocacy – Promoting corporate and consumer responsibility.
- Leadership and External Synergy – Building partnerships for sustainable impact.
- Personal Growth and Action – Developing skills for continuous improvement in sustainability.
- Innovative Leadership – Driving change through proactive decision-making.

### **Digital Marketing Technical Competencies (DigiComp)**

From DigiComp where identified:

#### **Safety and Security**

- Protecting Personal Data and Privacy – Ensuring compliance with data regulations in digital marketing.
- Protecting Health and Well-being – Implementing ethical digital marketing strategies that prioritize consumer well-being.
- Protecting the Environment – Reducing the environmental impact of digital campaigns.
- Protecting Devices – Safeguarding marketing infrastructure from cyber threats.

#### **Communication and Collaboration**

- Interacting through Digital Technologies – Enhancing engagement across online platforms and social media.

#### **Digital Content Creation**

- Developing Digital Content – Crafting compelling, sustainable, and ethical marketing materials.
- Copyright and Licenses – Understanding legal frameworks to ensure compliance in digital content use.

#### **Teaching Strategies and Assessment Methods**



- To ensure the effective development of these competencies, the following educational approaches are recommended:

## Active Learning Strategies

Active learning strategies are essential in Digital Marketing education, ensuring students gain practical experience and problem-solving skills. By focusing on real-world applications, these strategies enhance engagement and improve long-term retention of knowledge. Below are key methodologies that drive effective learning in Digital Marketing.

- Project-Based Learning (PBL): Real-world campaign development.
- Use of Digital Tools: Training with Google Analytics, HubSpot, Power BI, and AI-driven marketing solutions.
- Gamification: Certifications and practical challenges.
- Simulated Market Scenarios: Case studies and decision-making exercises.
- Competency-Based Assessment: Evaluating practical application rather than theoretical knowledge.

### Project-Based Learning (PBL): Real-World Campaign Development

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a hands-on approach where students work on real or simulated marketing campaigns. Instead of passively absorbing information, learners actively engage in developing, implementing, and analyzing marketing strategies. This method helps them understand market trends, consumer behavior, and data-driven decision-making, preparing them for the dynamic challenges of the industry.

### Use of Digital Tools: Practical Training in Marketing Technologies

Proficiency in digital tools is crucial for modern marketers. Active learning integrates hands-on training with different marketing technologies (Google Analytics, Power BI, AI). These tools allow students to track consumer behavior, measure campaign effectiveness, automate processes, and derive data-driven insights. By working with real-world marketing platforms, students become adept at using technology to enhance marketing strategies.

### Gamification: Certifications and Practical Challenges

Gamification enhances engagement by introducing interactive elements such as challenges, competitions, and certifications. For instance, students can earn badges for completing Google Analytics or other certifications, reinforcing learning through achievements. Practical challenges, such as optimizing ad campaigns or increasing website traffic, encourage learners to apply their knowledge creatively and competitively, making the learning process more motivating and dynamic.

### **Simulated Market Scenarios: Case Studies and Decision-Making Exercises**

Marketing professionals must make data-driven decisions in dynamic environments. By incorporating simulated market scenarios and case studies, students practice analysing trends, predicting consumer behaviour, and optimizing strategies. These exercises mimic real business challenges, allowing learners to experiment, fail safely, and refine their approaches before entering the workforce.

### **Competency-Based Assessment: Measuring Practical Application**

Traditional assessments focus on memorization, but competency-based assessment evaluates students' ability to apply knowledge in practical situations. Instead of written exams, students demonstrate proficiency through portfolio projects, campaign execution, and marketing analytics reports. This method ensures that learners develop skills aligned with industry expectations, improving their employability and professional readiness.

By implementing these active learning strategies, Digital Marketing education becomes more engaging, relevant, and skills driven. Project-based learning, digital tools, gamification, simulations, and competency-based assessments help students transition from theoretical knowledge to real-world expertise, equipping them to excel in the fast-paced marketing industry.

## *Roadmap for Progression*

The Digital Marketing Learning Roadmap is designed to help learners develop their skills progressively, moving from foundational knowledge to expert-level competency. This structured approach ensures that students build a solid understanding of marketing principles before advancing to more complex strategies and technologies.

### **Beginner Level**

At this stage, learners are introduced to the fundamentals of digital marketing, including key concepts such as branding, online presence, and customer behaviour. They explore essential digital marketing tools like Google Analytics, social media platforms, and email marketing software, which are crucial for tracking marketing performance and engaging audiences effectively.

Additionally, beginners learn basic SEO principles and keyword research, which are essential for improving website visibility in search engines. They also gain awareness of ethical marketing considerations, including data privacy, transparency, and consumer trust. Sustainability is introduced at this level, ensuring students understand the importance of responsible marketing practices.

The main topics of this level will be:

- Understanding the fundamentals of digital marketing.
- Introduction to key digital marketing tools (Google Analytics, social media platforms, email marketing software).
- Basic SEO principles and keyword research.
- Ethical marketing considerations and sustainability awareness.

## Intermediate Level

At the intermediate level, learners move beyond the basics to explore advanced digital marketing strategies, including content marketing, automation, and targeted advertising. They gain expertise in data analytics and business intelligence (BI), enabling them to interpret consumer behaviour and optimize marketing campaigns based on data-driven insights.

Customer segmentation and engagement strategies become key focuses, helping students understand how to tailor marketing messages to different audience groups for higher conversion rates. This level also emphasizes the application of sustainability principles in digital campaigns, teaching learners how to create marketing strategies that align with ethical and environmental considerations.

The main topics of this level will be:

- Advanced digital marketing strategies, including content marketing and automation.
- Data analytics and business intelligence (BI) for marketing decision-making.
- Customer segmentation and engagement strategies.
- Application of sustainability principles in digital campaigns.

## Advanced Level

At the final stage, learners develop strategic leadership skills, preparing them for decision-making roles in digital marketing. They explore AI-driven marketing applications, including predictive analytics, automation, and machine learning, which help optimize campaigns and improve customer engagement.

This level also introduces growth hacking techniques, focusing on rapid experimentation and innovation to drive brand success. Learners engage in sustainability-driven marketing innovations, ensuring they can balance business growth with environmental responsibility.

Additionally, advanced learners gain expertise in cybersecurity and data protection, understanding how to safeguard consumer data and comply with legal regulations, ensuring trust and credibility in digital marketing practices.

The main topics of this level will be:

- Digital marketing leadership and strategy formulation.
- AI-driven marketing applications and predictive analytics.
- Growth hacking and innovative sustainability practices.
- Advanced cybersecurity and data protection in marketing operations.

By following this roadmap, learners will progressively develop their skills, transitioning from foundational knowledge to expert-level competency in digital and sustainable marketing.