



Indsights

A Window into the Indigenous Economy

Case Study

Saltmedia

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Saltmedia

Meet Angie



Meet Angie

Angie Saltman is the owner and founder of Saltmedia, located in District 13 Treaty 8 territory of Grand Prairie, Alberta. Angie is a proud Métis woman with an Anishinaabe, Cree, Scottish, English, and Scandinavian background. Saltmedia is a Certified Aboriginal Business (CAB) member of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) and is a full-fledged marketing firm offering creative and technical services such as web design, website hosting, graphic design, search engine optimization, brand development, and data hosting. They collaborate with clients from various industries, including Indigenous organizations, municipalities, industry, e-commerce, and not-for-profits.

In 2002, Angie completed a computer technician diploma and is currently in the process of finishing her Master of Business Administration, with a specialization in Indigenous leadership. Before starting Saltmedia, Angie worked at a London Drugs and with Geek Squad as a computer technician. She has a passion for the arts, the outdoors, and Indigenous economic development, as well as her family.

Saltmedia

Inspiration Behind Saltmedia

As she progressed in her career in the technology space, Angie's passion for art never wavered. Finding her path and purpose was a crucial step in her journey, and she needed to find a way to incorporate these passions — as a result, Saltmedia was born. Their vision is: "Marketing made easy."

"Saltmedia started in 2010 to marry technology and graphic design together."



Products and Services

Products and Services

Initially, Saltmedia started building websites. Their team builds websites from scratch, and they create all the graphics and designs in-house. Saltmedia also provides hosting services, domain names for client websites, and owns a data centre that houses virtual servers for their clients' websites. They also specialize in developing e-commerce solutions that are easily integrated into client websites for the sale of their products and services.

With the success of their website services, Saltmedia branched out to offer more digital marketing services. They develop marketing plans, search engine optimization (SEO) plans, search engine marketing (SEM), social media marketing, email campaigns, keyword optimization, and performance tracking metrics — all of which help organizations track how their clients are using and accessing their website while providing them with the tools and data to help grow their business.

Saltmedia also offers traditional marketing services such as graphic design work. Angie and her team help their clients stand out from the competition by developing logos, signs and advertisements, branding, and business cards to help them establish their visual identity. They also specialize in writing and storytelling and can assist organizations with their content writing, blogs, social media posts/ profiles, and marketing materials such as brochures or catalogues.

“We are your full-service digital marketing solution for succeeding in your online (and in-person) business! From website design to marketing plans to site hosting, we take care of everything so you can take care of business.”



Successes



Successes

Saltmedia's success is a direct result of Angie's leadership mindset. Rather than growing her business fast, Angie has found success by focusing on slower, more sustainable growth. This has allowed her to focus on relationship-building and fostering connections with those who align with her values. Businesses, like people, are about forming personal relationships and nurturing those relationships to ensure that clients are happy. Treating your clients with respect and reciprocity will help ensure repeat business and can often lead to referrals for additional work for new clients.

"Everything we have is built on relationships. Tell me what's not personal about a relationship. So, I think that's an important take-home. When you start treating other businesses as objects and not as living relationships, things will start going sideways. So be respectful in your relationships."

Another factor that has contributed to the success of Saltmedia is its intention. Angie has found that shifting her mindset to align with her purpose of ensuring that her business is having a positive



impact on the community it serves will take her business further than simply making as much money as possible.

"Make sure you're working with the gifts that you are given or the gifts that you've developed, and you love doing what you do."

Recently, Saltmedia partnered with Western Economic Diversification Canada (WEDC) (now PrairiesCan and PacificCan) to create data centres in Edmonton and Grand Prairie, Alberta. The project was a joint agreement in which 50% of the project was funded by WEDC. For Saltmedia, having stewardship of this data centre allows it to protect its clients' security needs in ways that big data centres could not. They also have direct authority over who uses and accesses the data centre, which adds a layer of protection for existing clients that simply does not exist with other providers.

"We own the hardware that the software is sitting on, and we control its traffic, and we have a lot of access and controls there, and that's important to us because we worked as a reseller before for larger organizations and I tell you, they do not care about people."

Growth Opportunities



Growth Opportunities

For Saltmedia, Angie envisions the company continuing to grow and work with clients that align with their values. After working with clients in the oil and gas industry and riding the waves of boom-and-bust cycles that come with natural resource extraction, Angie feels it is important for her company to work with organizations that are focusing on sustainability, environmentalism, truth and reconciliation, and Indigenous prosperity.

“We want to work with other Indigenous organizations or companies that are trying to do some good in the world. So that’s our ideal client and what we’re growing into ... When you work with other people who have the same values or goals, it makes everybody’s life easier because it’s easier to be on the same page and understand each other. It’s easy to have a relationship that has reciprocity, which you won’t find if you work with people that have extremely different values than you.”

Furthermore, Angie is diligently working on completing Saltmedia’s application to participate in federal procurement opportunities in Canada. In 2021, the federal government mandated that a

minimum of 5% of the total value of procurement contracts within federal departments and agencies are to be held by Indigenous-owned businesses. As a result, procurement is an increasingly important topic for Indigenous businesses and their substantive participation in the economy. This initiative aims to support the growth of Indigenous businesses and helps enhance the socio-economic conditions of Indigenous communities. For Angie, securing access to these contracts is vital because it ensures that the funds remain within Indigenous communities and businesses. She worries that, in some cases, these funding opportunities provided through procurement are being channelled through large corporations that collaborate with smaller Indigenous businesses to win them, but do not invest enough resources into the Indigenous partner or their community.

“As much as I like government procurement and navigating this journey, I think it’s critical that we get Indigenous businesses on that procurement train so we can establish joint ventures with each other and we can funnel those funds down to our communities. So, we can uplift our people.”

Challenges



Challenges

Like most entrepreneurs, running a business comes with its own unique set of challenges, particularly around finances. For Angie, initial challenges centred around past-due accounts and not being paid for work that Saltmedia had done. She learned the importance of collecting invoices and ensuring that she had a plan in place to do so — she hired a personal assistant to help her when needed.

“Don’t let your accounts get too overdue. If people are supposed to pay you in 30 days, follow up with them. We need to do that. Money, unfortunately, is the language of business. Although I never got into entrepreneurship for the money, it’s essential and a vital piece that we need to manage properly to be sustainable, to keep our doors open, and to grow our businesses so we can employ other amazing people and deliver awesome services or products to who we want to.”

Competitors

In the business world, competition is inevitable, and customers can be fickle. However, one can choose to embrace competition and use it for one’s benefit. This is precisely how Angie views



Saltmedia’s competition. Angie views other marketing firms, particularly Indigenous marketing firms, as allies or potential partners. Angie understands that Saltmedia will not be an expert at everything and recognizes the importance of aligning her company with those who can fill in those knowledge or skill gaps.

“I don’t necessarily think of other organizations as competitors, especially other Indigenous marketing, or technology firms. They’re not competitors, they’re allies, they’re referral partners. Other people we can joint venture with, they’re potential business partners. Who knows what we’re going to do together in the future? I feel that is where I’m at.”

“So not necessarily thinking about competing, but what is that organization over there good at? There’s one Indigenous organization that’s good at social media management. I’m like, ‘That’s awesome, we offer it, but we don’t like it very much,’ we’re going to cancel that service. We need to build an ecosystem of Indigenous businesses so we can support each other and refer to each other because we’re not experts in everything.”

Market Background

Digital Marketing

In the ever-changing landscape of business, marketing has evolved significantly in response to technological and consumer behaviour shifts. Businesses are compelled to adopt a more data-driven approach in their strategies and decision-making processes, and the digital marketing industry has a crucial role to play in this transition. The amount of data generated in the digital world influences key decisions. In Canada, for example, about 84% of internet users purchase goods or services from the web (Statistics Canada, 2018). Every day, consumers, whether they realize it or not, offer valuable information to shape corporate marketing strategies based on their behaviour.

The evolution of digital marketing is intricately tied to the progress of internet technology. As the internet and the World Wide Web have advanced, so has digital marketing with the introduction of new web tools and platforms aimed at enhancing user experience. Initially used by businesses through electronic mediums, the transition from manual promotional methods to internet-based communication marked a significant shift in the industry. The emergence of social media revolutionized communication by facilitating more effective two-way interaction. Social media, initially embraced by individuals, became a valuable commercial tool for businesses (Sharma, Chen, & Lai, 2020).

In a constantly evolving environment, digital marketing services include web design and development, managing websites, social media advertising, content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC) management, and more. Advertising

agencies mostly provide all these services. In Canada, the number of firms operating for this purpose is 7,909, with 3,497 businesses in Ontario, 2,645 in Quebec, 1,224 in British Columbia, and 595 in Alberta, comprising 44%, 33%, 15%, and 7.5% of the market respectively (IBIS World, 2023).

In today's digital era, effective online marketing offers a rapid means to become engaged with local and global customers or clients. Even companies with limited funds can benefit from digital marketing services. Firms are increasingly recognizing the limitations of traditional marketing concepts such as one-way communication, restricted target audience, and limited data-tracking, with studies indicating higher returns for those organizations that are heavily investing in digital marketing strategies. Consequently, many firms have embraced digital marketing, either through external service providers or in-house marketing teams (Sharma, Chen, & Lai, 2020).

Concerning the scope of the digital marketing industry, around US \$537 billion was spent in 2021 on these services and products. The future trajectory of online marketing is expected to be influenced by the continued shift from desktop to mobile, driven by the enduring trend toward mobile apps. The industry revenue is projected to increase and reach the US \$1 trillion mark by the year 2027 (Statista, 2023). When comparing the major markets (U.S., China, and Europe) the U.S. emerged as the largest market in 2022, reaching US \$261 billion, representing over one-third of the world's digital marketing spending. China and Europe held shares of 25% and 17%, respectively (Statista, 2023).

Market Background

In Canada, 93.8% of the population utilizes the internet (We Are Social, 2023) with over 25% of Canadians dedicating 20 hours or more to internet usage each week (Statistics Canada, 2020). The share of social media users between the ages of 16 and 64 who visit social platforms specifically to gather information about brands and explore their content is around 40% (We Are Social, 2023). For brands and businesses, these numbers represent a vast and highly engaged audience. Utilizing smart digital marketing approaches to connect with, and capture the attention of, this tech-savvy consumer is crucial for seizing the opportunities offered by the online marketplace.

In 2022, digital advertising revenue in Canada surged to nearly CAD \$14.2 billion, showcasing a resilient industry on the rebound post-pandemic. The sector experienced a 15% growth in 2022 compared to the impressive 28.1% recorded in 2021, signifying a steady recovery. Revenue is predominantly concentrated in performance channels, such as search and social media – over 70% of the total revenue – reflecting the strategic choices of marketers navigating through an uncertain economic perspective. The current landscape highlights the industry's adaptability and the diverse opportunities contributing to its strong performance (Interactive Advertising Bureau of Canada, 2023).





Hosting Services and Data Centres

Hosting services and data centres are protagonists in the modern digital landscape, serving as the foundational infrastructure for countless online activities. Hosting services encompass a range of solutions that enable businesses to make their websites and applications accessible on the internet, such as storing and managing data on servers and securing access for users worldwide. Data centres function as complex systems of computing and storage resources, creating the infrastructure necessary for the provision of shared software applications and data. They serve as centralized hubs capable of housing substantial amounts of data, playing a pivotal role in the day-to-day operations of companies.

The web hosting market exhibited a revenue of US \$97 billion in 2022, with forecasts indicating growth to around US \$125 billion in 2023. Expected to maintain a strong annual growth rate of 22.5% (CAGR 2023–2028), the market is on track for substantial

expansion, projecting to achieve a volume of US \$345 billion by 2028. In the global landscape, the U.S. led in revenue generation, with US \$35 billion in 2022, more than one-third of the total market. In turn, Canada contributed US \$2 billion to the industry's revenue (Statista, 2023).

The global spending on information technology (IT) for data centres reached an impressive US \$221 billion in 2022. This spending highlights the essential position that data centers play in supporting IT infrastructure worldwide. The United States leads the pack with 5,375 data centres, emphasizing its status as a technology leader. Germany follows with 522 data centres and the United Kingdom with 517. Canada, with 448 data centres, demonstrates its commitment to maintaining a robust IT ecosystem, securing its position as the fourth country in the global ranking (Statista, 2023).



Indigenous Values and Culture

Angie's Indigenous heritage plays a vital role in how she runs her business. She credits her heritage as a critical influence in launching her business, which is steeped in her passions, rather than the capitalist mindset of making as much money as possible. Ultimately, Angie sees her business as an avenue to share her gifts with the world and work with like-minded individuals. Angie also draws upon her Indigenous culture to form relationships based on respect and transparency.

"People who are authentic and honest, and not always just focusing on money ... right from the beginning, it's been incorporated, you know, having authentic and honest relationships has always been a core element to us. And transparency has also been essential to us."

Angie also credits her Indigenous heritage with influencing her to give back to her communities. She has sat on the board of the Canadian Mental Health Association and various economic development boards in her community.

"We always find ways to give back to our local land-based community or you know our nation's community or our family. I see that's so common in all Indigenous businesses."

Indigenous Data Sovereignty & Reconciliation

Indigenous Data Sovereignty & Reconciliation

Data Sovereignty

Angie recognizes the role that Saltmedia's data centre can play in ensuring that the rights of Indigenous Peoples and their data are protected. Historically, Indigenous Peoples have been subjected to assimilation and colonization and had their languages, traditional knowledge, and cultures stripped from their identity in the process. Governments and institutions have controlled the narrative surrounding Indigenous Peoples and have manipulated that data to make policy decisions that have disproportionately affected them across Canada. To combat this, Angie believes that for reconciliation to occur, Indigenous Peoples need full sovereignty over the data and information that is collected on them.

Indigenous data sovereignty is defined as the rights that Indigenous Peoples hold over the data that is collected regarding their communities, lands, and culture. These rights hold that Indigenous Peoples are entitled to the ownership, control, access, and possession of their data (The First Nations Principles of OCAP® - the First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2023). Indigenous data sovereignty is an important aspect of Indigenous rights, self determination, and the protection of cultural heritage. It helps ensure that Indigenous communities have control over their data, allowing them to benefit from it, while helping minimize the risks of exploitation and harm.

"First, we need to collect that data, but after that, we need to safehouse it on our land."

I think [First] Nations should have their own data centres or at least a co-location where a few nations work together to save resources so they can save their data and access it and leverage it the way they want to."

Reconciliation

Having control over their data is critical in helping Indigenous Peoples in Canada reach their goal of self-determination while helping reconcile past injustices and traumas. Data sovereignty can empower Indigenous Peoples and their communities to control and preserve their own historical records, documents, knowledge, and language (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). This control will allow Indigenous Peoples to tell their own stories, share their perspectives, and ensure that their history is accurately represented. It will allow full control of how other communities use, share, and access their data (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). This empowerment will lead to greater self-determination and participation in the reconciliation process as Indigenous communities will have total control over their narratives and decisions while ensuring that the truth is told and acknowledged.

"If we want our cultures, our stories, our languages, and our businesses to be done on the global scale, which they should be, the Eurocentric view needs to change — there are some challenges with that worldview. It needs to be decolonized. Adding that Indigenous worldview and safe housing in data centres or other accessible places or websites is going to play a huge role."

And I don't believe that nations will truly be self-determined or truly be self-governed until they do manage their data and technologies."

Advice for Future Entrepreneurs



When Angie first started her entrepreneurial journey, she often dealt with feelings of self-doubt, or imposter syndrome. It is important to recognize that these feelings are natural and will eventually subside as you build confidence. Angie offers practical advice that can be used for those who may feel the same:

“It’s not so much a fake it until you make it. It’s more show up. Show up. If you say you’re going to do something, do it. That’s the secret. And if you really can’t do it, make sure you communicate it and keep those relationships that make you feel good on the inside.”

She also turns to that adage many of us are familiar with that instructs us to “trust your gut.”

“Trust your intuition. 100% of your intuition will always lead you the right way. I feel my intuition in my stomach. I’ll sit on a question. I’ll meditate on it. It doesn’t have any words. It’s more of a feeling. Trust that intuition. It will guide you to the right point.”

And lastly, Angie offers sound advice that we can all take with us, and that is to not chase perfection.



“If I could tell entrepreneurs or anybody, is don’t chase perfection. It’s not real. It’s a fallacy.

It’s a big lie. We are human. We’re not meant to be perfect. We’re going to make a lot of mistakes along the way as entrepreneurs, and that is perfectly okay.”

For Angie, learning from her past mistakes was vital in helping her business grow. It also helped her find the people she needed to put her on the path to success.

“That to me is what entrepreneurship is all about. Doing your best, learning from all your mistakes, and you’re going to make them. So, have a good cry if you need to. Get up the next day, dust yourself off and get back to it. Don’t let anybody tell you what your dreams are. It doesn’t matter if your mom, your auntie, whoever it is if they don’t believe in you, then put them at arm’s distance for a little. You’ll always find people who believe in you and support you, so grab onto those people and they’ll help carry you through.”

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A Window into the Indigenous Economy