WITH New York City fast becoming a major hub for digital innovation, it's no wonder that some of the hottest degree programs in this burgeoning field are cropping up at area colleges and universities.

"Marketing is increasingly digital. There's a fundamental shift in how businesses talk to their customers and potential customers. The kind of information that is generated in the digital medium is a challenge to process, yet provides an opportunity in this space," says Vasant Dhar, professor and head of the Information Systems Group and director of the Center for Digital Economy Research at New York University's Stern School of Business, where the digital marketing specialization is rolling out this spring.

"We were getting signals from employers that they would like people trained in this area — those who can think strategically in the digital world and who have the skills to deal with the challenges that come from the kind of data that this world generates," says Dhar.

An initial batch of 70 students registered for the core course in digital marketing. The core class concentrates on how firms can add value to shareholders in the digital space.

An information systems class on data mining instructs students on the process of turning data into intelligence, while a digital strategy course focuses on how information technology transforms business and society. The networks, crowds and markets class addresses the emergence of social networks. In the brands strategy class, students study how to build a brand in the digital space.

Industry professionals from Google and Yahoo, among others, will be invited to talk with students.

As for employment opportunities, "We're training people to become chief marketing officers who are savvy in the digital space. Technology is no longer a back office thing. It's now an integral part of the business model for any company. There's room for a wide range of skills in this specialization," says Dhar.

At the School of Media Studies at The New School, the master's in media studies degree already comprises a digital media focus — it's one of eight different areas students in the graduate program may choose to concentrate in, according to Christiane Paul, director of graduate programs for the school. "We're constantly developing our curriculum," she says.

A sample of the course load includes Social Media Content Communication and Culture, which provides a broad overview of what social media means for culture, media and evolving social structures.

Business Strategy for Social Media zeroes in on the impact that social media has on promotion, marketing, branding and content creation. Another course in social media design and management covers design production, marketing practices and the implementation of online projects.

Guest speakers from within the industry, as well as industry-related adjunct professors, will serve as instructors within the specialization.