

Alexa, what are your predictions for 2019?

 By [Lisa Macleod](#)

23 Jan 2019

Unlike last year, and the year before, let me begin by saying that this year I am not making a prediction about Facebook in my trends. Despite having a great new country manager for publishers in South Africa (welcome Jocelyne Muhutu-Remy), Facebook as a global company has not been publisher-friendly in any way this year, so I will give it a skip in my mentions.



Lisa MacLeod, head of digital, Tiso Blackstar Group.

I'm also giving the following a miss: AI (because it has become a meaningless catch-all phrase for anything vaguely clever executed by a computer and an algorithm), programmatic (because it is still a hot mess), video (because the "pivot" for those publishers that pivoted has been a disaster, and because advertisers need to back up their demand for video with bookings, and collateral), and *Baby Shark* (because, doo doo, do do do do).

The rise and rise of voice-activated computing

My **first prediction** is going to be around voice: not only podcasting but the rise and rise of voice-activated computing – referred to by some as "ambient computing". (OK, it's sort of AI, but I'll let this one pass...)

Still nascent in SA, but known to most through Siri (iPhone) and Alexa for those with Kindles, the Amazon Echo, Echo Dot,

HomePod, Google Voice and others are ubiquitous in overseas markets and have become an integral part of the home.

amazon alexa

Amazon's Alexa upgraded as 'style assistant'

2 May 2017



Affordable home assistants, from helping kids with their homework to making travel bookings – or occasionally even [recording and sending conversations](#) on your behalf – they are becoming indispensable in a tech-laden world.

Amazon sold 24.5-million devices in 2017, up from 1.6-million in 2015. China has over 100 voice devices in R&D or in production because of the variety and complexity of Chinese dialects: with an expected market share of \$23bn by 2020.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about these devices – and maybe the scariest – is the amount of data they are collecting. They know when their handlers are home, what time they wake up in the morning, their travel plans, shopping lists, purchasing decisions, music preferences and the contents of emails, and more. Because we tell them!

Amazon is on the rise

On the topic of Amazon. My **second prediction** is that Amazon is going to enter our airspace in a big way. Already well entrenched in SA through the development and market penetration of Amazon Web Services, the cloud facility favoured by many SA companies, Amazon is expanding rapidly in SA and will certainly follow with expanded Kindle services, online shopping and advertising possibilities.



Amazon Web Services to open data centres in SA

25 Oct 2018



Globally, Amazon breached the divide in the advertising space this year and became the third biggest player in the digital ad space, with 4,5% of total revenue valued at \$4,61bn annually. While Amazon is on the rise, the other two digital advertising giants – Facebook and Google - are losing market share. Interesting times ahead and the only question is whether we publishers will get more joy from the new entrant than from the duopoly. Perhaps Jeff Bezos's experience in media ownership will bring us a more benevolent outlook. We can only hope.

Publishers are sitting on mountains of data

My **third prediction** is around publishers' data. Publishers in SA are sitting on mountains of valuable data – we have huge

online audiences, and detailed user tracking and contextual behaviour that is not available to advertisers or marketers. Yet, judging from the number of requests we are getting to tag up our sites, this is not lost on a lot of agencies.



The future of marketing is data-driven, creative, and people-based

Shaune Jordaan 8 Jun 2018



Most of us are just getting to the point where we are packaging and selling this information in useful ways to our own clients, but I predict we will see more sophisticated deals across publisher networks coming out of this valuable treasure trove, and the use of it to power better relationships and experiences with our own readers too. At the end of the day, part of our job is to connect readers and advertisers successfully, in a brand safe environment and to the benefit of both – and while we've been a bit slow thus far, the door is now open. Watch this space.

Paid content models for publishers

My **fourth and final prediction** is the rise of paid content models for publishers. Finally waking up to the reality that giving away content that costs lots of money to produce is at best a precarious business model, publishers big and small are asking their readers to pay. Donations are saving *The Guardian*, which has had over 1 million digital payments (one-offs and monthlies), and many other news sites have turned to variations of paywalls to survive. With digital advertising in decline, this is a good bet to future-proof journalism online. Maybe the only bet.

ABOUT LISA MACLEOD

- Lisa MacLeod is head of digital, Tiso Blackstar Group.
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