

The digital trends driving the future of marketing

By [Tom Manners](#)

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As we near the end of 2017, marketers are under increasing pressure to outperform their competitors. With growth and increased revenue taking centre stage as top priorities, generating demonstrable, bottom-line benefits for clients has never been more important. And with the break-neck pace of inbound marketing practices only speeding up, embracing evolving technologies will be central to the industry's continued growth in the coming years.



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Here are just three of the notable trends that are shaping the future of digital marketing.

Matching creative talent with technical expertise

The hallmark of a well-executed campaign used to lie in the production of exceptional creative work – original, out-of-the-box thinking that surprises and challenges audiences and rakes in trophies when award-season rolls around. And while this is still critical, the avalanche of consumer data available today means that no campaign that fails to make full use of it can rightly be called successful – no matter how cool the creative is. Driving this trend is the demand for real-time interaction, the new status quo in this age of instant gratification.



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As marketers, we're still adjusting to the speed at which this has become the new gold standard. Consumers expect personalised service on any channel they prefer, and within minutes of requesting it. The speed at which consumer decisions are made, and at which content becomes stagnant or irrelevant, means that the best creative in the world isn't going to lead to conversions if data isn't put into play simultaneously – getting your content to the right person, on the right channel, at the right time, to close the deal.

Forward-thinking agencies are all-too-aware how important this will be in the coming years, with many implementing their own research and data analytics departments in anticipation of ever-increasing demand for such services.

Deeper personalisation, minus the persons

Big data and the insights it brings with it may seem to be driven by the desire to segment the masses and to create almost stereotypical averages upon which to base consumer insights. But as the sheer amount of data out there is slowly being matched with the ability to better process it, technology has given us the ability to read consumers on an individual level just as speedily as we can analyse entire population segments.

Personalisation, in these highly competitive times, and with product differentiation making less and less of a difference, is one of the best ways to boost engagement, drive value, and ultimately create repeat customers. A recent study by PWC's Digital Services Group shows that businesses in every sector are beginning to realise this, with 94% of senior executives stating that personalising the customer experience is critical to reaching and retaining customers.

A couple of years ago, Gartner predicted that by 2018, organisations that have fully invested in all types of online personalisation will outsell companies that have not, by more than 30%. And by the looks of things, they're set to be proven right.

The brands that will continue to thrive in the coming years are those who successfully harness the power of consumer data and put it to work in their businesses. Many brands are actively staking their futures on it, with social media platforms, as well as services like Netflix and Amazon setting the standard for CX through their levels of individual user customisation.

The rise of the machines

Of course, the level of personalisation demanded by customers today takes considerable human resources... or does it? Alongside the need for a customised experience comes a new age in the application of artificial intelligence that can provide it, reliably and affordably. AI is already deeply entrenched in the healthcare manufacturing and financial services sectors, as well as humming away behind the scenes of some of the world's most widely used websites. The AI disruption was bound to shake up the marketing game eventually.

In the near future, AI is set to take over many baseline functions in the creation and distribution of content (remember that thing about matching creativity with technical and analytical skills? AI might be just the way to get there). A/B testing, banner design, and even generating convincing written content entirely through AI might not be entirely possible just yet, but it will be – sooner than you think.

AI is also going a long way toward realising the always-on customer service mentality that businesses are struggling so much to keep up with. Someone seeking information about your business is likely to look online first. If they can't find the information they're looking for, they would probably resort to social media, email, or a phone call. And if you're not there to answer, the lead is all but lost.

What is your niche?

Delaying a conversation by hours, even minutes, could mean the difference between success and failure. Enter the chatbot – ready and willing 24/7 and increasingly indistinguishable from a flesh-and-blood customer service agent.

The appropriate question for marketing agencies to ask themselves today is no longer “what is our niche?” but rather “how can we master every niche?” Despite the age-old warnings about being a Jack of all trades and master of none, there really is no alternative but to start working towards increasing value for clients and consumers alike through mastery of more diverse offerings.

As profit margins and marketing budgets continue to shrink, agencies must wear many hats – creative and technical, consultant, analyst, and executor. Marketers now understand that a data-and-technology-led strategy, and not creative alone, is what drives the bottom-line growth that clients expect.

ABOUT TOM MANNERS

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