Digital trends

The 2016 digital marketing and ecommerce trends that matter

ClickZ | Intelligence

Introduction

This is our first report for 2016, heralding a new era for ClickZ Intelligence reports and a fresh design we hope you like.

We are by no means the only company to pull together a round-up of trends for the year, but we do believe that the vast array of industry experts we have consulted makes our report stand out as a comprehensive guide to the digital-related trends you need to know about.

Aimed at marketers and digital professionals, the report is divided up by topic, with a selection of important themes such as personalisation, marketing automation and artificial intelligence featuring in other sections rather than as standalone chapters.

Before we get into the meat of the report, it is worth digesting the chart (right) which shows what more than 800 global ClickZ readers think are the most significant trends for the year ahead. Content marketing continues to be a hugely important area for many businesses, though marketers will be focusing on a whole range of digital channels and tactics as they seek to take advantage of new opportunities.

As well as our own in-house editorial team, I would also like to thank our 40-strong panel of contributors who have made this report possible. We have quoted these commentators throughout the report, and have

What do you see as the most significant digital marketing trend for your company in 2016?

Answer choices	Percentage (%)	
Content marketing	24.6	
Data & analytics	12.7	
Marketing automation	11.1	
Social media	11.1	
Personalisation	9.3	
Mobile	9.2	
Experiential marketing	5.7	
Programmatic	5.5	
Internet of things	4.8	
Video	4.4	
Native advertising	1.7	

Source: ClickZ   *n = 841*

also included a 'hall of fame' section at the end of the document where we provide more information on these subject matter experts.

L. C. Gregoriadis

Linus Gregoriadis
Global Head of Research and Intelligence
Contentive (ClickZ's parent company)

Contents

Executive summary

Content marketing grows up.
Content marketing has been gaining momentum in the last five years and will reach maturity as a discipline in 2016. ClickZ research shows that it is the stand-out trend for marketers for the coming year. Evidence of a more grown-up approach will include greater adoption of dull-but-necessary processes, organisational structures and measurement rigour as companies seek to scale their content activities. The reality of ad blocking will ensure that advertisers focus more on native formats. The growing challenge of getting content seen and heard will increasingly make paid-for distribution of content via publishers and social networks an essential part of the mix.

Digital advertising and CRM come together.
The more data-driven nature of marketing as part of a quest for greater efficiency is providing the impetus for a more joined-up approach to digital advertising and the more offline world of CRM, both in terms of marketing execution and attribution as the convergence of martech and adtech continues. Companies will need to further break down internal silos while the lines between advertising-focused media agencies and the major consultancies traditionally responsible for back-end customer relationship management will continue to be blurred.

Companies double down on mobile.
Even laggard brands will grasp that the slickness and utility of mobile interactions will largely define our perceptions of customer experience, with increased use of phones for payment further cementing these all-pervasive devices as the essential tool in our lives and the bridge between the digital and physical worlds. More companies will make smartphone-friendliness their primary focus as they attempt to target and serve customers at every stage of the customer lifecycle. A design-driven approach will be central to smart client-side thinking. Native apps will be a fulcrum of retailer attempts to optimise the customer experience. Google's indexing of native app content will further fuel this trend, while Facebook's Messenger platform will gain traction as a credible platform for commerce and customer service.

Faster and smarter data, not bigger data.
The need for faster and smarter data will be evidenced in everything from CMO dashboards to predictive information which enables the most appropriate real-time personalisation and dynamic content optimisation 'on-the-fly'. The 'people' challenge will intensify as commercially-focused data analysts and data scientists will be even more highly sought after. CMOs will understand that marketing automation, personalisation, and data-driven attribution can revolutionise their businesses, but the principle of 'garbage in, garbage out' has never been more applicable.

Machine learning enables personalisation at scale.
Artificial intelligence will begin to more obviously impact the digital experience and effectiveness of marketing campaigns. This will start to impact search marketing with relevant information pushed towards us based on effective audience targeting and an understanding of likely intent over and above keywords. Machine learning will also help to optimise email marketing content, with content, sending time and subject lines increasingly optimised for maximum success thanks to sophisticated algorithms. Personalisation at scale will start to become more of a reality with marketing platforms able to digest millions of permutations and intelligently serve up the most effective message at the right moment.

01

Advertising

If ever there was a time for advertisers to buckle in, it's 2016.

**Written by:
Melanie White**
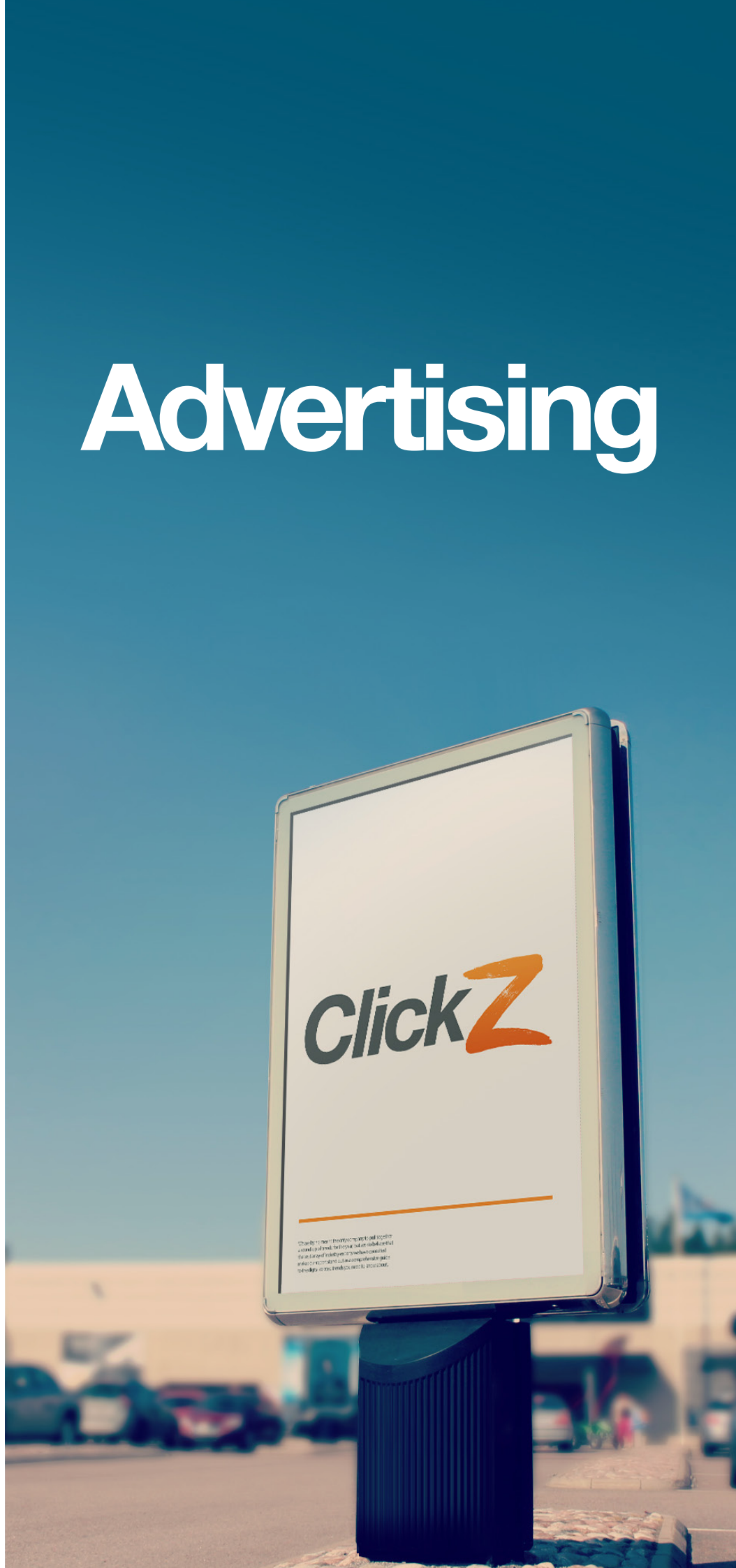
Unprecedented tracking opportunities

If there has ever been a time for advertisers to buckle themselves in, 2016 is the year. Marketing will evolve with the continued explosion of the digital economy. At its centre it will still be about building trust by providing value; some things will never change. What will transform is the ability for digital marketers to track their advertising campaigns across channels such as web, email, mobile and, more recently, social. If brands can't attribute their successes to the right areas, there will be other companies that can. Be warned: these competitors will also steal a bigger chunk of your consumer pie.

Birth of the CMTO

It's no secret that there has been a tug-of-war between the chief marketing officer (CMO) and the chief technology officer (CTO) in recent years — so much so that it has resulted in the birth of the so-called CMTO (chief marketing technology officer). The smart use of data and automation to inform not just what works, but what doesn't will see agency executives move from predicting consumer behaviours to creating them. In turn, CMOs will evolve beyond their past core focus of shaping the company's profile, to understanding analytics and infrastructure while surrounding themselves with the required talent to help them make this transition.

As Paul Rouke, founder and director of optimisation at PRWD, explains: "Data scientist will become one of the hottest and in-demand roles – although the vast majority of people relabelling themselves as one will be years away from having the experience and knowledge to warrant such a title."

Marketers will begin to obtain a deeper view of their customers' behaviours and journeys, leading to much more efficient decision making and spending. Expect to see CTOs further understand the creative process, too, and media agencies as a whole evolve to support production capabilities of both.

Embracing programmatic

As the walls between departments break down, marketers who are ahead of the curve will begin to truly **>>**

"One of the biggest trends is the emergence of 'programmatic direct' access to inventory. Marketers have come to the table with data management platforms, and are finally starting to catch up with publishers in terms of capturing and normalising their first-party data. The best part? More than 60% of working media can be saved. This is happening today — and quickly."

Chris O'Hara
Author and VP, Strategic Accounts, KRUX

Jonathan Beeston
Managing Director, Croud UK

"It could be a transformative year for brand advertising as YouTube and Facebook go up a gear with video. If Snapchat can find the right model, it could be explosive. However, doubts will remain whether digital can deliver the reach that brand advertisers are accustomed to with TV."

embrace the opportunities that programmatic brings. After all, it doesn't look like it's going anywhere soon so it's time to get savvy about it. By merging data analysis and creative throughout a campaign's lifecycle, programmatic will be able to follow the consumer's journey from intent, all the way through to the moment of purchase. It will take on a whole new level of relevance, precision targeting and personal-isation, ultimately ensuring greater quality leads for advertisers.

Media strategist and content developer Tessa Wegert explains: "Programmatic marketing allows for sequential storytelling that pairs data with custom-ised and perfectly-timed creative executions. I think that media buyers will really embrace the storytelling potential of automated advertising in the months to come. Already we're starting to see major brands go all-in."

The need to earn consumer attention

And while ads get smarter, marketers will need to be cleverer. Apple's controversial flipping of the ad blocking app switch in 2015 certainly got the industry talking. But it isn't all bad. Rather than simply speak-ing about the consumer experience, marketing folk will really need to implement it. It will be a lucrative opportunity to take your customers by the hand and turn every transactional behaviour into an enjoyable one that truly adds value.

One area where this is already happening is in native advertising quality. Wegert says: "Sponsored articles are evolving from the bland print advertorials of old to entertaining, value-packed stories. Not only are consumers showing us that they're open to this kind of advertising, but they're demonstrating affinity for the brands that pay to make such stories possi-ble."

Goodbye annoying pop-up ads, hello fun gaming experiences, or useful content that resonates. If you want to keep your consumers' attention, you need to earn it.

Melanie White

"In 2016 we'll see whether ad blocking becomes mainstream or remains a niche problem. My money is on the latter, but we won't see an end to the delivery challenges faced by display ads, such as viewability or bot fraud. However, none of these issues will stop programmatic becoming the default buying method for display."

Jonathan Beeston
Managing Director, Croud UK

02

Content marketing

It's the method on every marketer's mind. But will 2016 be the year that content marketing finally grows up?

Written by:
Lucinda Beeman

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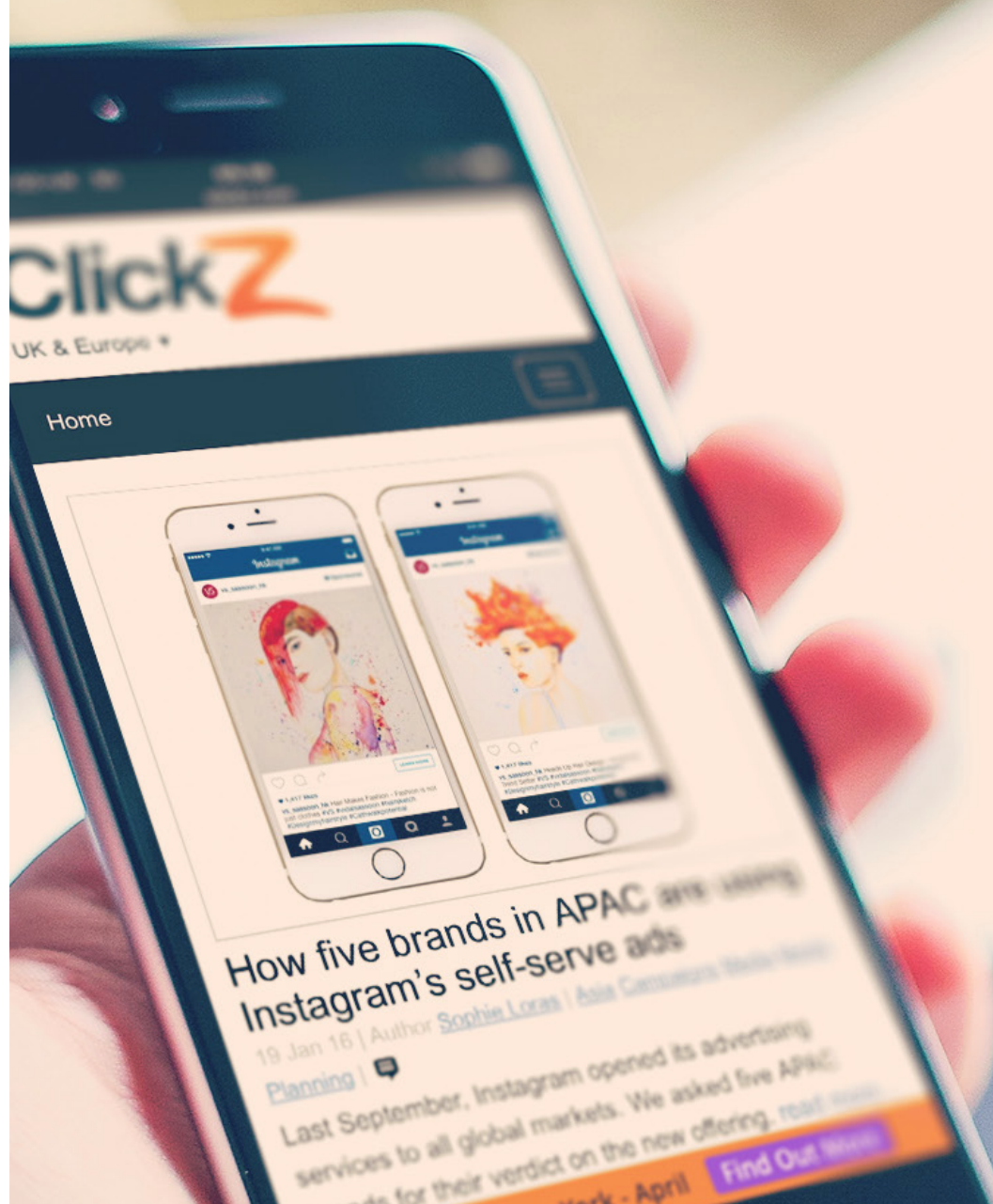
More sophisticated metrics

If 2015 was the year that content marketing became a core part of the digital marketing mix — it ranked top in ClickZ's survey of most important trends for this year — 2016 will be the year it grows up. Currently, the industry is at a crossroads. According to the Content Marketing Institute, 75 per cent of marketers will produce more content in 2016 than they did in 2015; however, just 30 per cent of those surveyed said that their organisations were more effective at content marketing.

Better metrics could change that. According to Sticky Content content director Dan Brotzel, 2015 saw content marketers develop a more sophisticated approach, looking beyond bounce rates and page views to take more notice of social shares and returning visitors.

Andy Betts, chief marketer and consultant, explains: "Producing content for content's sake is a 2015 tactic that will become more redundant in 2016. Last year's comfort metrics, such as shares and likes, will be replaced in 2016 with more meaningful measures such as engagement, reach and audience."

As investment in content marketing grows, new technology stacks will measure, attribute and align monetary value and content campaign execution. Attribution modelling, Betts says, will become more sophisticated, tracking types of content and the teams responsible for creating them.

Influence in 2016, Betts says, will be defined by >>

> **"2016 will see a further acceleration of all forms of product placement and integration of marketing messages into content used for entertainment and education. The rise of ad blockers combined with the 'banner blindness' caused by 20 years of mind-numbingly off-target banners are forcing a doubling down on true native advertising."**

Kevin Lee
Executive Chariman, Didit

Benjamin Spiegel
CEO, MMI Agency

"With the increased competition in the auctions and the increase in ad blocking, I believe 2016 could be — must be — the year when marketers finally stop talking about the creation of content and actually start applying pressure to their internal and external teams to make it so — and to do it better than the competition."

> ## "Expect to see certain elements of content marketing fall under the remit of Chief Revenue Officers — an indication that senior executives aren't willing to devote resources to content if it's not being tracked to some form of ROI."
>
> **Andy Betts**
> Chief Marketer and Consultant

an individual's success at a business level, including the brands they work with, the audiences they engage and the success and outcomes achieved.

In-app, responsive and cross-platform copy

This will be the year of mobile content, according to Kevin Lee, executive chairman of Didit. And, with 80 per cent of mobile time spent in-app, it's hard not to see why copy that works across platforms will be essential for a successful content marketing strategy.

As Lee explains: "Short-form and mobile-friendly video will take off, both within the site environment and on social feeds. In addition, 2016 will see a further acceleration of all forms of product placement and integration of marketing messages into content used for entertainment or educational purposes."

Better content, period

While more sophisticated metrics and responsive copy will play important roles in 2016, one trend will dominate the development of content marketing: a new emphasis on content quality.

As ad blockers become more common and Google deploys RankBrain — which according to Lee will make it harder to disguise bad content — producing quality content of all kinds will become the name of the game.

As Tessa Wegert explains: "Brands will start to shift more marketing dollars to content studios and freelancers, rivalling what consumers can find in top magazines. Many will transform their blogs into digital magazines that will keep consumers coming back."

This push towards high-quality content will begin with a more realistic attitude. Rather than "throw everything at the wall and see what sticks", Brotzel says, brands will narrow their focus to subjects where they can add real value.

Part of this, Betts says, will be the growth of new organisational structures — Marketing Revenue Centres — built on best practice, inter-departmental integration and reporting performance.

"Successful scaling of content," he adds, "will be dependent upon redefining content cultures based on producing content that is driven by audience demand, optimised and distributed accordingly and built to measure."

Wegert concludes: "This won't be a quick or inexpensive transition to make. But as consumers continue to turn a blind eye to traditional ads, brands in search of a loyal customer base in a competitive product world will have to differentiate or die. This is where content can really deliver."
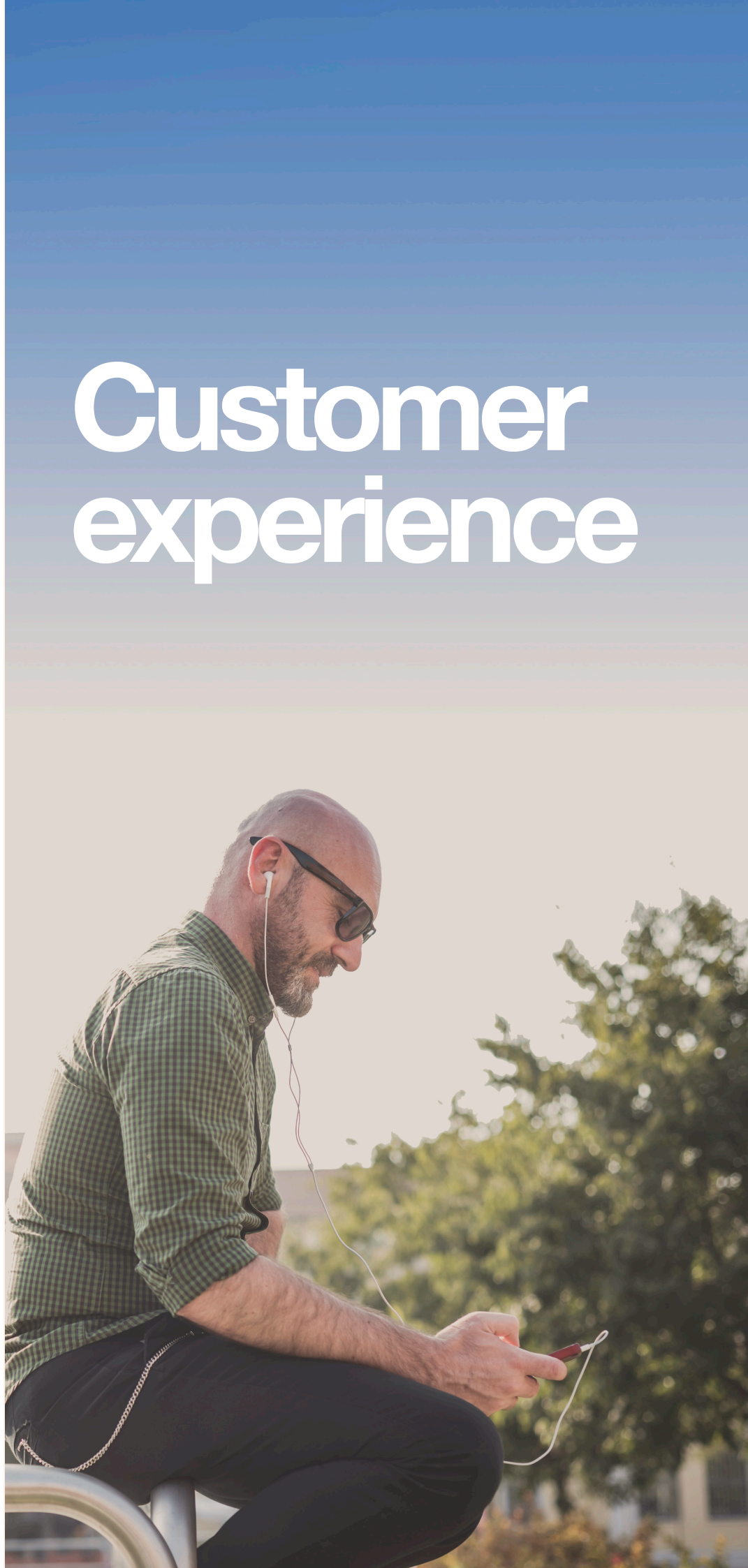
Lucinda Beeman

03

Customer experience

Success in 2016 will
depend upon brands
making a good impression.

Written by:
Leonie Mercedes

ClickZ | Intelligence

Brands focus on customer experience

In a more mature digital market, brands will seek to differentiate themselves through superior customer experiences. This can be done in a number of ways, from providing a great user experience on site to ensuring the customer journey is as smooth as possible. If providing choice and reliability around delivery is one way to improve CX, another is through great customer service.

This year, we expect to see brands working hard to join up customer experiences, especially around mobile and delivery. As River Island's ecommerce development manager Helen Colclough suggests, this will include going beyond responsive design to provide the best possible mobile experience through apps: "It doesn't have to be an 'either/or' situation. The mobile website has its purpose, but apps can help retailers to provide a great experience for the most engaged customers."

Brands start to walk the walk

Virtual reality, augmented reality and wearable technology are all well-documented trends which will have a huge impact on the customer experience over the next decade. But in the short term we believe that a more impactful ecommerce trend will be the concerted effort by more brands to tap into behavioural data as they take a more data-driven approach to improving the online customer experience.

As Paul Rouke of PRWD explains: "[A key trend will be] the slow, quite painful move of brands starting to 'walk the walk' when it comes to truly understanding their visitors and customers, and harnessing these insights to improve their customer experience through data-driven optimisation."

Personalising the user interface

Ensuring website visitors are engaged is a particularly important consideration for ecommerce brands, for whom high bounce rates and cart abandonment are enduring problems. One way of combating the fatigue of searching through hundreds of unsuitable items is to personalise the user experience, so that the customer only sees what they're most interested in, and when it suits them most.

Lee Duddell, founder and chief conversion officer at WhatUsersDo, explains that personalisation can now apply to the actual user interface rather than just recommendation of particular products based on explicit and implicit data: "Leading firms will experiment with personalising digital experiences for users, serving a different UI based on previous behaviour and segmentation. This stretches personalisation technology beyond its mainstay of recommending >>

"The slow, quite painful move of brands starting to 'walk the walk' when it comes to truly understanding their visitors and customers, and harnessing these insights to improve their customer experience through data-driven optimisation."

Paul Rouke
Founder and Director
of Optimisation, PRWD

Paul Rouke
Founder and Director of Optimisation, PRWD

"UX designers will be seeking out career opportunities within businesses or agencies delivering online experiences through continuous optimisation, making the transition to being held more accountable and validating their design ideas by focusing on quantitative data through A/B testing, not just qualitative insights or UX best practice. This needs to happen if businesses don't want to get left behind by their more ambitious, in-tune competitors."

> **"[We'll see] the continued increase of brands investing in resources and skills to better understand both the conscious and subconscious actions of their prospects and customers."**
>
> **Paul Rouke**
> Founder and Director of Optimisation, PRWD

products or different content to delivering a tailored, more efficient interface.

"A returning retail customer who mostly uses search and home delivery will experience a site that leads with search, has a pre-selected delivery option and — because she is a Millennial — opens a new tab for each product. This experience is different to that of a senior, first-time visitor on the same site who gets prominent product categories and promotional offers."

Online retailers are reaping the benefits of a more personalised online experience. Last March, Very. co.uk unveiled its personalised online shopping experience, where visitors to the site are greeted by a homepage designed specifically for them, and so don't have to look too far to find their favourite lines and brands. Other brands are likely to follow suit, given the initiative's success. Last October, Shop Direct announced record profits in the year to June 2015, naming personalisation as a key factor in its strong performance.

Learning from online behaviour

More brands are starting to take an empirical approach to discovering their customers' online behaviour, a trend likely to continue throughout 2016.

To find out whether its site is reaching user expectations, or making customers' lives easier, a brand could run an A/B test, where it launches two versions of its site simultaneously and compares their performance, but one company in 2015 took a more intimate approach.

White goods retailer AO.com observed first-hand how customers interact with its website, how the online store is performing compared with others, and discovered points of friction on the site with the help of UX testing platform WhatUsersDo. Half of the consumers had bought white goods online, while half had not.

The videos helped the company identify the pain points and make tweaks to the site. After improvements to the site were made, AO.com reported a 9.5 per cent increase in sales and better customer engagement.

Paul Rouke says: "Being customer centric is much easier said than done, but brands like AO.com are really leading the way and demonstrating what impact and growth being 'customer-centric and data-driven' can have on a business. Just think if they were selling desirable products rather than washing machines and dishwashers!"

Taking a psychological approach

UXers may find themselves learning a new art of persuasion in 2016, working to a psychologically-based set of principles to influence website visitors' decisions online.

Understanding how site visitors' minds work and applying those principles in the online experience allows brands to better capture and hold a visitor's attention, and influence an action.

Tried and tested examples of this approach in ecommerce include placing customer reviews and ratings near an item on the product page, which are more trusted than product descriptions. This is an example of social proof, a concept that suggests that if one person sees enough people doing something, they will think of it as correct behaviour.

Another approach is to give website visitors something useful, such as information or a special offer, so they feel more inclined to repay the favour to the brand.

In December 2015, taxi service Uber delivered a 5ft Christmas tree to anyone who downloaded the app and requested one for a £10 service charge. A significant investment, to be sure. But every tree delivered is likely to convert some into Uber customers in the New Year.

Leonie Mercedes

04

Data & analytics

The quest for fast, actionable data — and the right talent to interpret it — continues in 2016.

Written by:
Linus Gregoriadis

ClickZ | Intelligence

The quest for actionable and fast data

Anyone with even a passing interest in the growing role played by analytics in improving business effectiveness and decision-making will be aware that 'big data' has been an omnipresent and well documented theme in recent years.

This nebulous term has become useful shorthand for describing the way technology is enabling the collection and analysis of colossal amounts of information contained within complex and unstructured datasets.

While the ability to process large amounts of data has clear benefits, there are equally prominent pitfalls for companies and their data analysts, who may become bogged down in patterns and correlations which might not actually help them to make better decisions which have an impact on their business, for example adjusting their marketing budgets or prioritising their efforts.

So rather than splashing out liberally and aimlessly on big data technology, a key trend this year will be more concerted attempts made by companies to narrow down their efforts to find the data and insights which can really move the needle for their organisations.

Companies will be laser-focused on data which gives them actionable insights. According to Lynchpin managing director Andrew Hood, the focus will shift from big data to 'fast data'. He says: "People will become increasingly philosophical about 'big data' as technologies mature, the hype starts to subside, and it becomes more a case of 'cheaper and faster data'. Faster will quickly become the most important factor as demand for data feeds for (up-to-date) personalisation become the critical norm."

Streaming data analytics

According to MMI Agency CEO Benjamin Spiegel, streaming data analytics is set to be a major trend in 2016: "The ingestion of streaming data will become a key requirement for digital leaders. With rising competition in the digital advertising space the ability to ingest, analyse and act on data within a minimal time window is a crucial requirement for digital leadership. I expect to see a lot of disruptive technology solutions emerge in the next months in both the open source as well as the VC space."

He continues: "Brands, agencies and marketers have become experts at collecting data, but the ability to actually leverage that data in real time will generate the biggest changes of 2016."

Finding and retaining the right talent

A corollary of the 'actionability' trend is the growing importance of top-notch analysts to help companies see the wood from the trees when they are overwhelmed with data. Those controlling the company purse strings will be disappointed if they think that developments in analytics technology such as machine learning **>>**

> "This challenge has been around forever. People who can do analytics well are rare and unfortunately I do not see it being addressed in the near future. If you find a good analyst, keep them and nurture them. I would say that the most important part of an analyst's job is working in an environment of continuous learning — not their salary."

Brian Clifton
Google Analytics Author and Data Practitioner
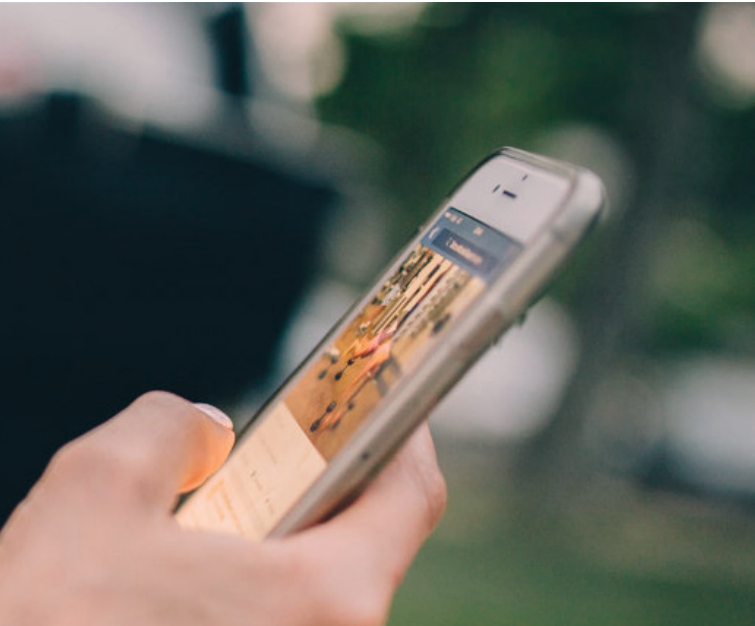
mean that investment in analysts can be reduced.

This year will see the most successful companies attach even more importance to finding and recruiting the best talent to help them make sense of data.

Data and analytics-related skills are increasingly coveted across a range of roles within businesses, rather than being the sole preserve of analysts. According to Michael Barber, head of product at Sale-Cycle, many traditional multichannel brands need to catch up with pureplay ecommerce companies whose employees are more likely "to have data and analytics ingrained in their roles".

According to Brian Clifton, Google Analytics author and data practitioner: "The challenge in our industry remains people. That is, finding suitably qualified and experienced people who can keep on top of their data quality so that it can be trusted by the organisation and used in a scientific way, i.e., going beyond basic visitor numbers by building and testing a hypothesis of what is actually happening on your site."

Predictive analytics and content optimisation

The ability to gain insights and take action has long been the mantra of internal and external consultants with a healthy scepticism of data for the sake of data. It is therefore logical that this year will see the continued growth in the importance of predictive analytics which can model the likelihood of future outcomes.

This field of data and analytics is attractive because of the obvious link to financial performance, for example the increased ability to attract, retain and grow the most profitable customers.

A related trend is the rise of real-time or dynamic content optimisation, another theme which Brian Clifton sees as being centre stage in the months ahead as more brands catch on to innovations in this area by the likes of Amazon. "For example", he explains. "A visitor to your site views a specific product page and special_offer_Y. Your analytics system may happen to know that special_offer_Z is relevant to 80 per cent of people who viewed that specific product page. With this knowledge your content is adjusted on the fly to get special_offer_Z in front of your visitor as soon as possible. Amazon does this now and it's incredibly powerful stuff."

John Watton, head of EMEA marketing at Adobe Marketing Cloud, adds: "We are reaching a point where most organisations have moved out of diagnostic analytics and into the predictive realm. We're past the point of not collecting enough data – it's now

> "Brands, agencies and marketers have become experts at collecting data, but the ability to actually leverage that data in real time will generate the biggest changes of 2016."

Benjamin Spiegel
CEO, MMI Agency

Andrew Hood
Managing Director, Lynchpin

"The ongoing skills shortage, particularly in digital analytics, will not go away. But as analytics teams grow, the data ecosystem gets more complicated and stakeholders from across organisations are increasingly invested in insight. The bridging skills between technology, statistics and commercial reality will be sought after."

now about gaining insights and taking action." **>>**

Joining up data and data-driven attribution modelling

This year will be a time for joining up data from different parts of the business to extract value, for example concerted efforts within large organisations to join up 'offline' CRM databases with customer-related data held in the realms of digital departments in order to give a fuller view of customer activity at an aggregated and individual level.

Data from a wider array of marketing channels will be used for more ambitious attribution modelling, but many will flounder because they lack sufficiently skilled analysts to develop the right models.

According to Clifton: "It is folly to think that DDAM [data-driven attribution modelling] is a panacea for marketers. Smart people (i.e. analysts) are still required in order to point the DDAM ship in the right direction, i.e. provide setup and adjustment. For example, a global brand versus a niche brand will produce almost identical data points for attribution. However, the correct models are very different for each business. A global brand's digital marketing is hugely influenced by their massive spend in non-digital channels e.g. TV. The 'direct' channel will therefore be overstated by DDAM because it cannot take into account what is happening for the brand via TV, print, billboard etc. Only a human with a strong understanding of the business can do this."

Linus Gregoriadis

"Data-driven attribution modelling has the potential to be very insightful. That is, instead of you having to choose a model for your attribution — 'all models are wrong, it's just that some models are less wrong than others!' — algorithmic modelling techniques are used to automatically apply weights to your different marketing channels for you."
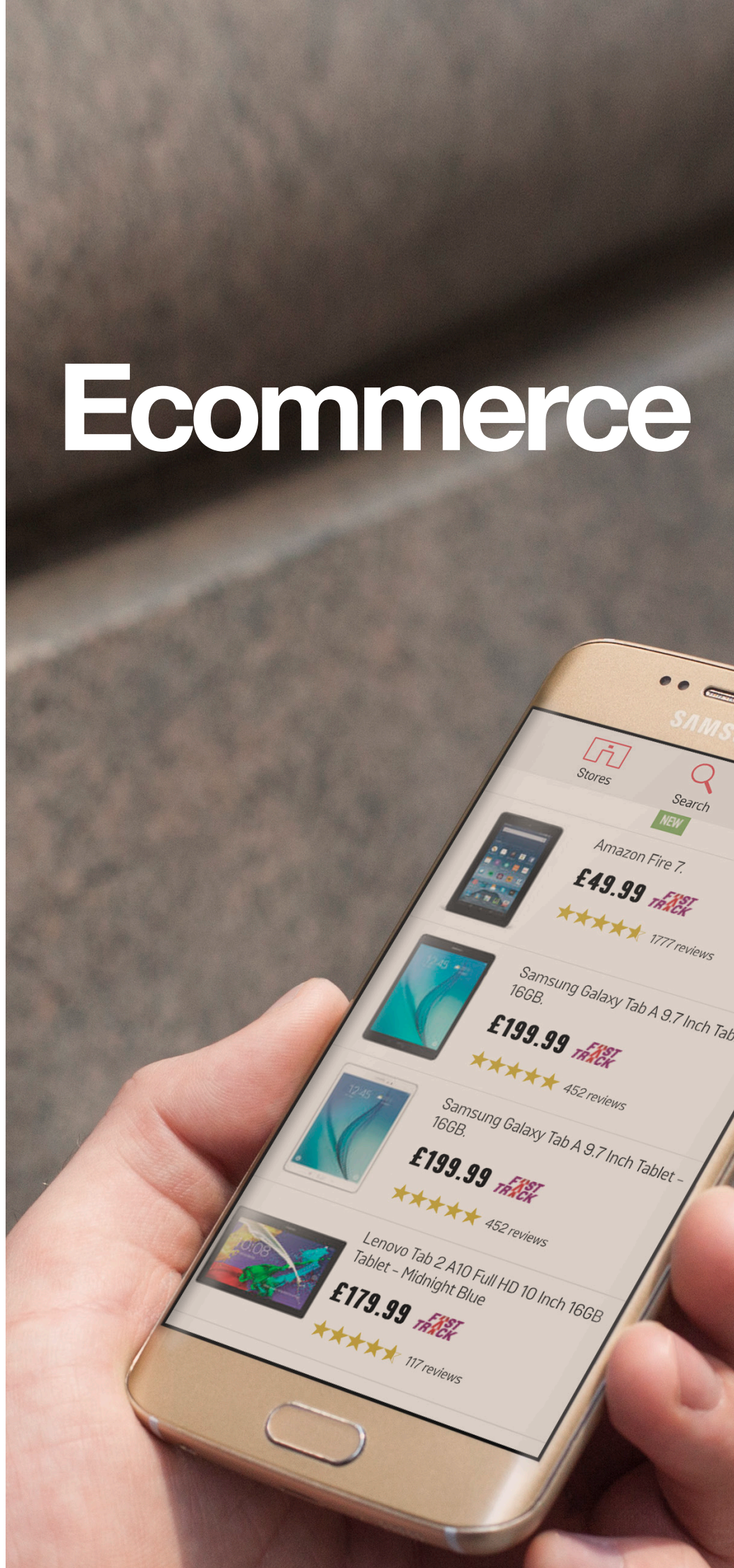
Brian Clifton
Google Analytics Author and Data Practitioner

05

Ecommerce

Delivery, personalisation, social commerce and optimisation will be the key ecommerce battlegrounds of 2016.

Written by:
Graham Charlton

Delivery service improvements

Delivery will be a key battleground for online retailers in 2016. It is a capability in which ecommerce businesses are investing heavily, to be both competitive and innovative. Free delivery is now expected, not a premium service – 47 per cent of all online orders include free shipping according to Monetate, and shoppers spend up to 30 per cent more when free shipping is included.

Research by Wharton found that 61 per cent of customers are 'somewhat likely' to cancel a purchase if free shipping is not offered, and over half of checkout abandonment is due to delivery costs. At the other end of the scale, some customers also expect the convenience and immediacy of next day and same day delivery options. Retailers need to offer a choice to cover all bases.

Customer expectations around delivery have changed and they are now more demanding. Indeed, a recent survey by Shutl found that 68 per cent of shoppers have been deterred from buying due to 'sub-standard' delivery options.

According to James Gurd of Digital Juggler: "Speed and flexibility are both important. The time to consumer is constantly reducing with the introduction of services like Amazon Prime Now. Multichannel retailers like House of Fraser and Argos have ramped up their Buy & Collect offer with later cut off times for next day delivery, and local collection services like Collect+, Amazon Lockers and Doddle have given consumers more choice."

He adds: "I'm expecting further announcements around the commercialisation of drone delivery. For this I may be lampooned in 12 months!"

Greater use of personalisation

The tools exist now to do proper personalisation, not just adding someone's name to an email. Recommendation engines support segmentation and the targeting of product and content to users based on user profile, rather than one-size-fits-all.

Ecommerce teams are putting more data science behind targeting, using a wider set of data points including online and offline. This is helping build a more accurate picture of the user's shopping behaviour, allowing for smarter targeting.

Personalisation is spilling over into site navigation, using user preferences and browsing history to customise on-site content, including remembering favourite brands and clothing sizes. There will be more investment in personalisation technology in 2016 to help automate targeted communication across **>>**

> **"2015 was the experimentation stage, and a time for gathering insight into consumer preferences and behaviour. Now, social sites will get to the business of tweaking their tools, and brands will be better equipped to know what social commerce strategy is most likely to pay off."**
>
> **Tessa Wegert**
> Media Strategist and Content Developer

Paul Rouke
Founder and Director of Optimisation, PRWD

"Senior decision makers are recognising the opportunities to grow their business through testing and data-driven strategies. This is a significant market shift, as while the technology has been available for some time, senior decisions makers have failed to implement or grow businesses in this way."

> **"We expect this kind of behaviour of millennials, but it isn't limited to young consumers at all. On Black Friday 2015, smartphone-based sales transactions increase 70% over the previous year."**

Tessa Wegert
Media Strategist and Content Developer

channels, whether that's custom recommendations within email or tailored content experience on the website.

As Paul Rouke, Founder and Director of Optimisation at PRWD, says: "Understanding the multi-device and multi-channel customer experience, and delivering relevant, context-specific messaging and experiences, will really start to gather momentum and traction across retail sectors."

Social commerce
The first era of social was engagement and audience building; the new era is acquisition and conversion, demonstrated by the flush of 'buy' buttons hitting key social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram.

Two things are driving the social web
1. Mobile. People accessing the internet via mobile increased by 60.3 per cent to 818.4m between 2012 and 2014, according to GlobalWebIndex.

2. Adoption across age ranges. GlobalWebIndex also found that on Twitter the 55-64 year age bracket is the fastest-growing demographic with 79 per cent growth rate since 2012; the fastest growing demographic on Facebook and Google+ is the 45-54 year age bracket.

Research from Crowdtap revealed 64 per cent of 3,000 people surveyed use social to find inspiration for shopping (up 51 per cent compared to the year prior). Some 40 per cent of users are actively deciding what to buy based on what they have seen on social media platforms, including reviews and recommendations, and this is only set to grow.

As Tessa Wegert explains: "Visits to social sites of all kinds are generating orders, but Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter seem to be out in front."

Retailers are responding by increasing investment in social and content teams and allocating a large part of the paid media budget to social marketing. 2016 will see this trend continue, with a sharper focus on customer insight and data-driven planning to improve targeting and measurement of social commerce. Insight and optimisation teams are already getting switched on to the data potential of integrating web and social analytics.

Testing and optimisation
A culture of testing and optimisation can pay huge dividends for businesses that get it right, and pure play and multichannel retailers will continue to invest in the technology and strategy for delivering intelligent A/B testing and personalisation.

There are a number of possible approaches. Some retailers will start building out their internal optimisation team, bringing in a senior, influential champion to drive cultural change within their organisation.

Rouke says: "This is a significant market shift, as while the technology has been available for some time, senior decisions makers have failed to implement or grow businesses in this way."

Graham Charlton

Email marketing

These trends will keep email
quietly outperforming in 2016.

Written by:
Linus Gregoriadis

Automation

Automation of emails based on behavioural triggers is now being widely adopted by many companies who have reaped the benefits of well-timed messages which arrive in consumers' inboxes with the most appropriate content and call-to-action at the right moment in their customer journey. More advanced email marketers will spend this year refining their automated email campaigns, while many of those behind the curve will start to use triggered emails as a matter of course.

Phrasee CEO Parry Malm says: "Email in 2016 is going to be much like email was in 2015, and 2014, and 2013 – insofar as it's still going to be the highest performing online channel out there. 2015 was the year of 'email automation' and most brands either have programmes in place, or are planning them."

Integrating broadcast and triggered emails

Zettasphere founder Tim Watson agrees that email marketers will continue to refine their automated email marketing campaigns in 2016, but need to apply a similar level of science to their broadcast emails to make sure they are creating brand awareness and desire as effectively as possible at the upper reaches of the funnel.

"The idea in some circles that triggered emails replace broadcast is wrong," he says. "The future is integrating broadcast and triggered emails. We can expect to see the best email marketing programmes in 2016 use the same type of intelligence for sending triggered email in broadcast email marketing.

"Not to determine when to send an email but rather what content, products and offers to be included in broadcast emails. The broadcast emails then elicit behaviours to which classic triggered emails can follow up and nurture the area of interest."

He continues: "Personalising broadcast campaigns at scale with potentially every email in a broadcast being unique needs automation. It goes way beyond dynamic content rules that have existed in some ESP platforms for many years. This automation is much harder to achieve then simply sending a pre-defined email to someone based on pre-defined event. In 2016 we can expect to see a re-purposing of the behaviour data so far mainly used for automation starting to creep into large-scale personalisation of broadcast email."

Dynamic optimisation and personalisation

2016 will see more marketers using dynamic email content to improve the effectiveness of their email campaigns by making their messaging and creative as relevant as possible. The promise of personalisation at scale will this year become more of a reality.

Targeting content 'on-the-fly' based on factors such as time, location, device and weather can improve performance by making it more relevant to consumers in the moment. Another example used by some retailers is a countdown clock with the exact time left on a particular offer in order to instil a sense of urgency.

According to Parry Malm: "Contextual open-time marketing isn't a new technology. Companies **>>**

> **"In 2016, lots of 'experts' and 'gurus' will regurgitate the same old advice and tech they've been plugging for the last 10 years, but shine it up real, real nice to make it seem new. And anyone with an ounce of sense will ignore this (very meta) spam about spam."**
>
> **Parry Malm**
> CEO, PHRASEE

Dominic Edmunds
Founder & CEO, SaleCycle

"Remarketing, much like personalisation, is becoming less 'creepy' and more sophisticated. Not only that, but consumer attitudes are changing. The future of remarketing is brands working with providers in partnership to understand that there is much more to what can be done collectively when we analyse all of the data collected about website visitors."

like Movable Ink, KickDynamic and Wylei have been doing this for a while. But I think it's going to reach a tipping point of widespread adoption in 2016. It's really a no-brainer. It optimises to the click."

Email marketers will benefit from developments in machine learning with content, sending time and subject lines increasingly optimised in an automated fashion based on the on-going assimilation of campaign data.

As the opportunity to personalise email campaigns increases, marketers will of course need to strike the right note by ensuring that their messages are seen as timely, relevant and serendipitous rather than irritating, too frequent and intrusive.

SaleCycle founder and CEO Dominic Edmunds stresses that companies need to take particular care with their remarketing campaigns, although the stigma attached to retargeting may be unjustified. "People criticising it don't realise that modern remarketing works the same as most analytics technology. If all of the data is collected about a website visit and content is served in a timely and relevant manner, then how could that be deemed creepy when we don't hold the annual 'junk mail' car insurance renewal to the same standard?

"The future of remarketing is brands working with providers in partnership to understand that there is much more to what can be done collectively when we analyse all of the data collected about website visitors."

Bridging the CRM and digital advertising gap

Late last year saw Google's launch of Customer Match, which enables advertisers to upload email addresses to Google, providing them with the opportunity to target named customers across search, YouTube, Gmail and the Google Display Network. This development follows the launch of two similar products by Facebook and Twitter.

J-Labs managing director Derek Harding sees this as a watershed moment because it heralds the coming together of brand advertising and direct marketing.

He says: "This is going to be hugely disruptive as the brand, awareness and demand generation of mass market advertising merges with the consideration, purchase and loyalty funnel of direct marketing. Two distinct and separate departments, mindsets, skillsets, teams and budgets are starting to come together. There will be winners and losers, amazing campaigns and enormous flops."

Linus Gregoriadis

"In 2016 we can expect to see a re-purposing of the behaviour data so far mainly used for automation starting to creep into large-scale personalisation of broadcast email."

Tim Watson,
Founder, Zettasphere

07

Mobile

2016 sees several challenges come to fruition for mobile. Which trends will make the most impact?

Written by:
Graham Charlton

ClickZ | Intelligence

"Useful in-store usage of tech and digital is long overdue. iPads rolled out like expensive paperweights that make you 'look cool' have no place in 2016."

Helen Colclough
Ecommerce Development Manager, River Island

Mobile SEO becomes more challenging

There were several significant developments for mobile SEO in 2015. Google's mobile-friendly update introduced in April didn't quite produce the 'mobile-geddon' that some had feared, but it did enshrine the importance of optimising for mobile users.

Further implications for mobile SEO came with the 'three-pack update' whereby Google decided to highlight fewer Google business results. As these business results dominate mobile searches, this means businesses will have to work harder this year to achieve organic visibility.

According to James Gurd at Digital Juggler: "Getting the essentials of mobile SEO right is now more important than ever – page speed, mobile-friendly pages, on page, local etc. Additionally, an integrated search marketing strategy is now even more important, so that paid mobile search supports SEO to help increase visibility in SERPs [search engine results pages] for key brand and generic keyword searches.

"Marketers also need to pay close attention to mobile SERPs, click-through rate and conversion – if the organic listing has a high CTR and it suddenly drops, then track when and work out what has happened, and look to blend improved SEO with targeted paid ads to address the issue."

Don't forget the value of native apps

With the widespread adoption of responsive design in particular, it has been argued that native apps — those developed for a specific device or platform — are less important than they used to be.

However, while mobile sites have clear advantages — such as easier discovery and indexing — the benefits of native apps should not be overlooked. Indeed, as Helen Colclough explains, native apps are where the 'most valuable customers hang out'. They also help retailers to join up high street and online channels.

It doesn't have to be an 'either/or' situation. The mobile website has its purpose, but apps can help retailers to provide a great experience for the most engaged customers.

She says: "Customers perceive native apps to be a cleaner shopping experience, more trustworthy when they consider signal speed or security and an easy way of quickly accessing their favourite retailer's digital channels in comparison to the mobile web. Apps are the new browser bookmarks, email newsletter, credit card and shopping list. Habitual usage of your app both in-store and online is the Holy Grail of the engaged returning customer and absolutely worth pursuing." **>>**

Helen Colclough

Ecommerce Development Manager, River Island

"Whether it's travel (Uber), food delivery (Just Eat), payment (Paypal), music (Spotify), or internet banking it's clear people see apps as a critical part of their lifestyles, and for these industries it's the natural place to browse and transact ('I use the Uber website everyday' said no one ever). It's time to stop seeing apps as a mini website and see them in their own right. This is the year of the native app."

While responsive design is a great catch-all solution for mobile optimisation, it can fail to take account of device limitations. Native apps allow retailers to adapt more effectively for each device and improve usability.

Let's make in-store tech useful

Retailers have been experimenting with in-store tech for a few years now, with everything from tweet mirrors to kiosks and staff with iPads. 2016 should be about providing value and utility for customers.

As Helen Colclough explains: "iPads rolled out like expensive paperweights that make you 'look cool' have no place in 2016. In-store digital experiences need to be seamless, simple, and usable … and in your customer's pocket. Notification that your click and collect parcel is ready, that an item in your wishlist is available in the store you're passing or tracking the fact you came in last week and looked at jeans three times without buying are all possibilities for improving customer engagement and/or enriching data."

For store staff, wearables such as Apple watches offer benefits for customer engagement, enabling them to avoid the juggling act of radios, handhelds and tablets and keep their hands free for tasks and interact in real time with store and digital systems.

In addition, self-payment and checkout is made widely possible by the advent of Apple Pay and Android Pay as the payment industry finally starts to move the needle on new experiences that blur the line between customer not present and POS (point-of sale) transactions.

As Colclough observes, Walmart is already making innovative strides here with their Walmart Pay feature. Retailers that differentiate with ease and choice of checkout methods will win the customers' time and attention. POS coming out from behind the historically imposing and unwieldy cash desk and onto the device will surely be a more common sight in 2016.

The challenge of adapting to mobile buying behaviour

Mobile traffic is still growing. For example, 42% of transactions on Christmas Day 2015 came via mobile. However, not every KPI is heading in the right direction. Mobile behaviour is different to desktop, with many orders placed in a hurry and on the move.

This, added to ordering on impulse has led to a shift in behaviour towards single-item purchases, often multiple items in one day. For retailers, this presents a problem, as the smaller screen provides less opportunity for cross sells and upsells on pages to increase basket values.

As Colclough points out: "The more frictionless the checkout the more likely it is customers won't stop and think if they need that matching item/bag/card/ giftwrap before they convert.

"Retailers with complex warehouse management and order management systems can cope with consolidation and may have the ability to make savings which allow them to offer free delivery to enable this behaviour. Others will have challenges around how they ensure those extra inspirational and impulse purchases are still added to the bag."

Mobile and corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Mobile technology has the potential to impact health, education, humanitarian aid, emergency response, financial inclusion and digital inclusion – in both the **>>**

> **"Increasingly companies will appreciate the business, marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) benefits from developing mobile services that actually change people's lives for the better."**
>
> **Andy Favell**
> Digital / Mobile Consultant

developed and developing world.

In 2016, we should see more companies appreciating the business, marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) benefits from developing mobile services that actually change people's lives for the better.

As Andy Favell explains: "The majority of mobile development today is still focused on consumer applications and services that are at best nice-to-have and at worst pointless. This is changing because such initiatives often don't deliver return on investment for businesses – measured either in terms of financial rewards, customer loyalty or brand perception."

Indeed, some of the 2015 Cannes Lions winners show that the key to success in mobile isn't just utility, it is social impact.

Favell adds: "Expect plenty of flops as companies jump on the bandwagon. But those companies that do it right will benefit in terms of business and brand recognition as well as making a difference to people's lives."

Mobile ad trends

Mobile has already eclipsed desktop as the main screen for most people and most traditional media companies. However, there is room for improvement in terms of mobile advertising. Brands need to move beyond traditional banner ad formats and look to be more innovative.

According to Mobile Marketing Association CEO Greg Stuart, richer formats like audio and video will be key drivers of mobile ad spend growth.

He says: "Brands will drastically shift to mobile video, realising that it is hugely underpriced by more than 50 per cent compared to its effectiveness. Mobile audio and 'sound' as a strategy is a huge opportunity and mobile brings this to life."

Location data is very important, he says. Stuart continues: "Using location GPS data, and other location data, such as weather data, to define and target audiences will continue to explode in 2016. Retailers will become more sophisticated in this area as they increasingly experiment with mixing ad formats and data to truly boost performance."

"We've already seen studies that can drive store traffic by +40 per cent, just by getting that right. Also, this next year, beacons are poised to potentially unlock a whole new world of place-based experiences."

Graham Charlton

"Mobile has already eclipsed desktop as the main screen for most people and most traditional media companies. It is truly the Age of Mobile."
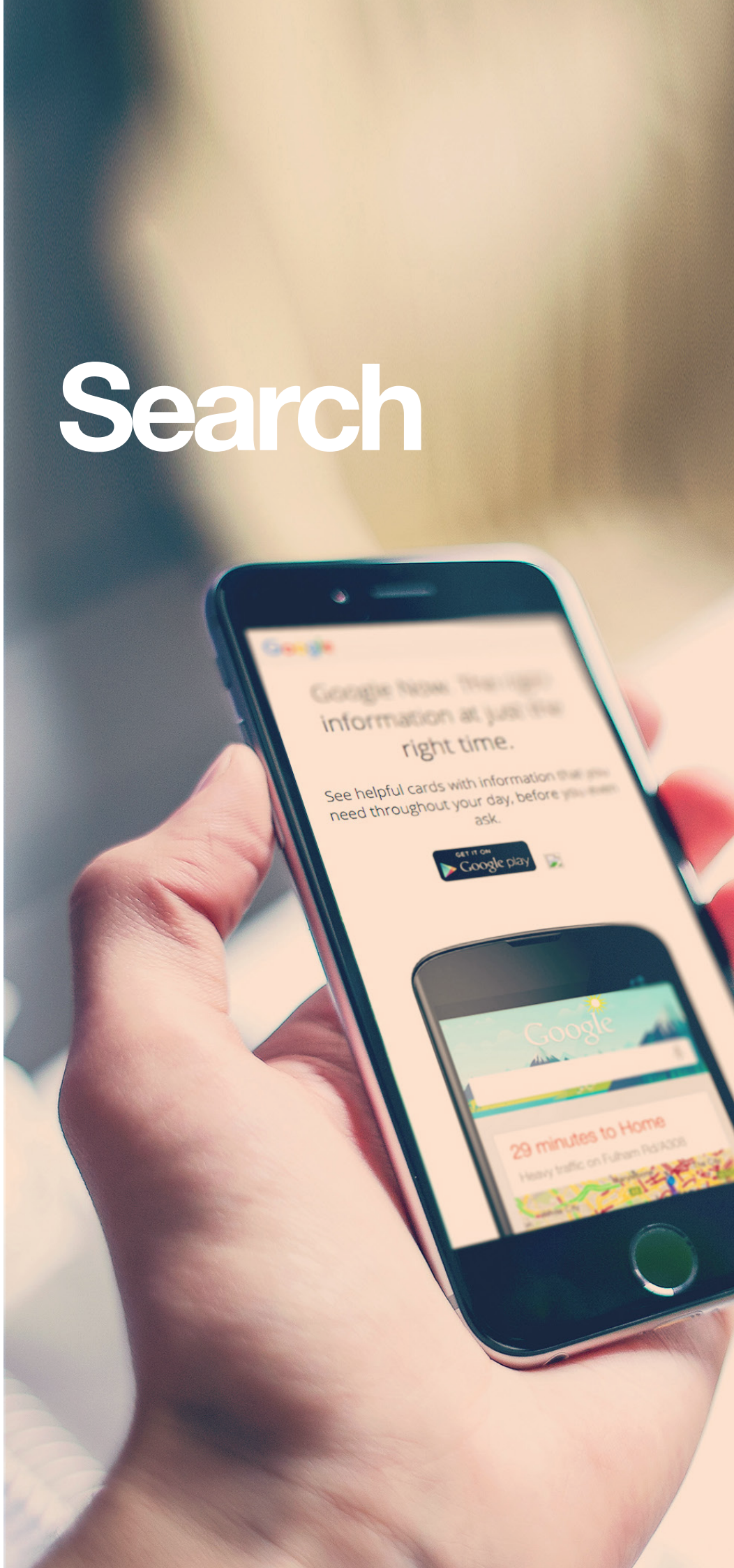
Greg Stuart,
CEO, Mobile Marketing Association

08

Search

Say goodbye to the keyword game and accept the ascendancy of mobile for 2016.

Written by:
Christopher Ratcliff

> **"Search Marketing continues to mature as a discipline, and with that growing maturity comes more sophistication in how people go about it. One place I'm seeing this change most explicitly is in the relationship between in-house teams, agencies and software vendors."**
>
> **Kelvin Newman**
> Founder & Managing Director, Rough Agenda

Time to abandon the keyword game

Keywords were once the very bread and butter of what SEOs did, but now that the search landscape is a very different place, will keywords matter in the near future?

Jon Earnshaw, CTO of Pi Datametrics, believes that we will finally feel confident enough to forego our reliance of keywords, because thanks to the changing face of organic search, "we might actually be presented with what we're looking for."

Earnshaw continues: "The kids out there are leading the way - asking questions and refining further questions based on the answers they receive as they engage in something best described as a dialogue that in the not too distant future will see Google exhibiting behaviour capable of passing the Turing test."

Jonathan Beeston, MD of Croud UK, has a slightly less 'Ex Machina' vision of the future. He says: "Audience targeting will become as important as keywords as the primary targeting mechanism for search. For SEOs, the focus shifts to intent and location over rudimentary keyword mapping. On the paid side, bringing CRM and audience data into search campaigns will be essential."

Keywords perhaps won't be abandoned any time soon, but certainly relevance, tracking and user experience will become just as important.

The ascendancy of mobile

As every New Year arrives, so too does a further promise of the dominance of mobile. But in 2015 there was a definite tipping point, where mobile finally overtook desktop for search. So you'll probably hear a lot about 'mobile first' or even 'mobile only' endeavours in 2016.

Teddie Cowell, Director of SEO UK and International at MediaCom, believes that the key trend for the coming year is going to be in "specific mobile initiatives such as Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP), which we believe will have an impact on mobile SERPS".

Will Google be specifically looking at AMP as a ranking factor in 2016? It has announced it will be trialling this in February and may even be marking up faster web pages in the same way that 'mobile friendly' pages are tagged.

Gerald Murphy, Senior SEO Account Manager at 7thingsmedia and a guest lecturer on information retrieval, says that the technology within a mobile itself will alter search.

"We have seen this with Google Now," he says. "Let's say you are searching for things to do in London, will your results take into account the weather conditions in your area using weather.com, your GPS and location signals? Will this determine whether **>>**

Mags Sikora
Co-Founder, PeriodBox

"Can your customer service affect SEO? Absolutely! A large number of negative complaints may lead to negative reviews and non-flattering mentions across blogs! We really have to delight the customer across the entire brand experience and that doesn't finish with the moment of purchase. That delight should be the driver behind all our actives."

or not there are more indoor activities if it is raining? What if transit signals are combined with your personalised profile, and Google Now patterns, to predict where you are likely to go? Will this be rolled out on Google Pigeon?"

At the very least we now have an early bet on the next Google algorithm name.

The future of search agencies

Search marketing continues to become a more integral discipline in marketing teams, and therefore the knowledge available in an organisation's in-house team is growing. Kelvin Newman, founder and managing director of Rough Agenda, sees this change most explicitly is the relationship between in-house teams, agencies and software vendors.

He says: "Whereas in the past all parties tended to keep their cards closer to their chest, everybody is trying to be more open and honest. Conversations like 'we really want to work with an agency at the moment because we're struggling to recruit a great in-house team, as soon as we find the right in-house team, we'd want to scale back or change the nature of the work we do with an agency' are becoming more common."

Putting customer service first - the future role of an SEO

Ultimately, SEO's future lies in customer experience. Mags Sikora, co-founder of PeriodBox, believes that every single interaction with your customers or potential buyers may influence your off-page SEO and thus your organic rankings.

"Can your customer service affect SEO? Absolutely! A large number of negative complaints may lead to negative reviews and non-flattering mentions across blogs. We really have to delight the customer across the entire brand experience and that doesn't finish with the moment of purchase. That delight should be the driver behind all our actives."

Christopher Ratcliff

"The technology within mobile devices has always been the same but organic search will become smarter in 2016 by using more of a mobile's technology within a search. We have seen this with Google Now."

Gerald Murphy
Senior SEO Account Manager, 7thingsmedia, and Guest Lecturer on Information Retrieval

Social media

From Twitter's demise to increasing 'appification', these trends will drive social media in 2016.

Written by:
Matt Owen

Click Z | *Intelligence*

> **"Scheduling a series of messages, posts and updates on a regular basis may put you in the game, but the only way to win is to show that you're alive and kicking, not some robot. Real time is big time on social media."**

Bob Cargill
Director Of Social Media,
Overdrive Interactive

The demise of Twitter?

Twitter's demise may well be greatly exaggerated, but there's no denying that the channel had some painful experiences in 2015. Don't expect this to improve in 2016, with negativity publicity already being generated by a reported plan to substantially increase the 140-character limit. Twitter is determined to attract mass audiences, focusing on TV, film, music and sports in order to bring its 'town hall' to the masses. The trouble is, actual town hall meetings involve small, moderated discussions around single topics.

Twitter's strength lies in its niche communities, but this is being ignored in an attempt to engage wider, shallower audiences and court ad agency dollars. While it remains popular, brands may be better served by using Twitter as a source of content generation and audience insight rather than advertising success.

Increasing 'appification'

Audiences are spending more time within the walled gardens of various messaging apps, and Google's announcement that it intends to surface search results directly from apps could be the 2016's major market disruptor. Truly massive audiences within apps dwarf those of many traditional media outlets and place

them in a unique position to drive viral content.

As Michelle Goodall, an independent social media, digital transformation and communications consultant, explains: "Facebook is testing consumer appetite and usage of apps within Messenger through developer partnerships. Early integrated Apps include Gif and video tools such as Giphy and Dubsmash.

"Uber's features are now available in Facebook Messenger - payment, maps, and alerts when the driver is nearby. Facebook is developing a similar partnership with rival Lyft."

She continues: "Facebook Messenger will become a credible platform for commerce and customer service in 2016, so expect to see retailers test Facebook's Businesses on Messenger. Messenger, when integrated with customer service, can blend the best of service agent live chat and email for consumers."

Monetisation remains a mystery in many cases, but we'll see fewer new platforms rising in the messaging space as users become frustrated with having to download a dozen different services to communicate with all their contacts, and begin to settle into a few distinct groups. Consolidation is on the horizon, and given the current tech bubble, speculators should keep a close eye on this market. Functionality will **>>**

Maggie Malek

Head Of Social And PR, MMI Agency

"Brands will only matter if consumers' needs and desires are central to everything they do. Listening to the consumer— with our data brains as well as our hearts — can help us discover the stories worth telling. Search, social and content teams must work together seamlessly to tell stories successfully across channels."

> **"What you put in front of followers, fans and friends doesn't always have to be business-oriented. Personal or professional, there's something to be said for sharing content on the fly. In 2016 that will be heard loud and clear."**
>
> **Bob Cargill**
> Director Of Social Media, Overdrive Interactive

continue to increase in order to maintain in-app engagement.

More advertising will lead to… less advertising
Visual 'Search n' Shop' functions will become standard, driving direct commerce from Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat (Pinterest already has it). Facebook will be the interesting arena here. It hasn't been cool since 2006, but it's still the default social platform for most western users. Expect a bonanza of promoted content as businesses finally see direct conversion and throw their ad budgets behind it, before Facebook's algorithm trips them up and forces them to create better content again. A convergence of 'social' and 'media' if you will.

In many ways Facebook exemplifies the worst aspects of social media, but by focusing on both quality content and a solid paid media strategy, brands have an opportunity to showcase their very best.

Live video set to grow
With more than 10m active users, Periscope grabbed the lion's share of attention this year, but it would be wrong to discount Meerkat just yet. With its new straight-to-platform feature, Meerkat seems to be playing the long game by aligning itself directly with Facebook.

In the past only broadcasters could accomplish truly live video feeds, but this trend has removed the cost and technical issues, allowing more brands to experiment – a boon for event marketers in particular.

As Tessa Wegert says: "Live streaming checks a lot of modern marketing boxes: it's mobile-friendly, video-based and intimate. To some degree it still feels novel and exclusive to consumers, so marketers that embrace it early on can earn some cachet."

Brands FINALLY begin to understand what the hell an 'influencer' actually is
Brands may finally have the data to enable them to connect with true, in-community influencers. Gurus and leaders tend only to speak to each other, so finding the niche experts will become more visibly valuable.

Goodall explains: "All but the deep-pocketed and first movers in brokering affiliate social partnerships will be priced out of working with the top-tier social media celebrities and influencers, so smart brands will recognise that small rewards for hundreds of loyal customers for their social media advocacy — while harder to manage — could bring greater visibility, trust and rewards over a longer timeframe. They will also look at ways to better capitalise upon and reward employee advocacy through social media."

Returning to our point about apps, they may also produce a new set of powerful influencers which brands will be keen to work with despite their lack of mainstream recognition. Influencers will begin to be seen as platform-specific, and sponsors will not feel the need to push them on traditional media platforms.

Matt Owen

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Gerald, a self-confessed search geek, lecutres on information retrieval.

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