

DIGITAL MARKETING 2017 OUTLOOK



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Tips to Avoid a Game of Whack a Mole with Your Strategy

by Kyle Stichtenoth

Predicting which trends will become mainstream isn't easy. The pool of countless brilliant ideas can make it hard to detect the difference between a trend that will change the world and another that will die at a tech startup. Rather than focusing on these hot trends, let's discuss how you can apply conventional wisdom to your digital marketing strategy. Following are some reactions to last year's trends and recommendations on how to apply some tried-and-true strategies to your digital marketing plan.

There will always be something shiny, new and revolutionary.

Il get it, the cool factor is often through the roof on these innovations. But does it make sense for your company and its marketing objectives? Take augmented and virtual reality for example; these new tech breakthroughs are super cool. There are hundreds of ways you could implement experiential marketing with them. For some of our large travel and tourism clients, they present novel opportunity. But experimenting with the newest trends is not a fit for most companies and can feel very similar to playing a game of Whack a Mole – random and chaotic.

Will the mainstream adoption rate of these platforms warrant enough audience for your investment? In a lot of cases, the answer is, no. Technology seems often to move faster than people do. This causes a small group of excited users, but the majority of the population is left out. Before long, that excited small group has moved on to the next cool technology. Think about Google

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Glasses. Why did that fail? So, before you dive into a new investment, consider how deep the pool you're jumping into will be and how much the jump will cost.

A trend I have noticed with several major clients this year is a focus back on quality audience and big exposure.

We have seen the rise and popularity of programmatic ad buying over the last few years. It has been a tremendous way to easily buy audience, but it comes with a sacrifice of quality and exposure. More and more clients are interested in custom strategies that help them stand out to key audiences. Brands are now choosing to align themselves with engaging content as an additional layer to a programmatic approach. This often takes the shape of sponsoring programs or initiatives. It is a little old school, but think about Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom. If you are not familiar, you can watch some episodes on YouTube.

The other way I see brands taking a bigger spotlight with key audiences is by leveraging high visibility ad units.

The latest trends are

not always effective

Identify an audience and make a big splash with well-designed high impact ads. Do not limit yourself to the standard ads you get with your programmatic ad buys, instead try using IAB Rising Star ads or page takeover type units. The easiest and most effective way to do this is with a direct buy through a publisher.

I can confidently predict that 2017 will give us many exciting new tools, tactics and technology. What you choose to do with those things is up to you. As Doc Emmet Brown said in Back to the Future, "Your future is what you make it, so make it a good one." **So, choose wisely.**

Kyle Stichtenoth Director, Digital Strategy kstichtenoth@al.com

Focus on quality audience and big exposure

Leverage high visibility ad units

The State of Content Marketing in 2017

by Phyllis Neil

What will be the "next big thing" in Content Marketing in 2017? We've compiled a list of what our content marketing team sees as growing trends that will continue in 2017.

Old-school eNewsletters.

B2B marketers have always traditionally used eNewsletters to reach prospects, and to keep their current customers updated with relevant updated product/ service information. In 2017, we see the business to consumer (B2C) clients headed in the same direction, expecting the same successes – only this time, they're doing super email blasts where re-messaging techniques target customers that open the eNewsletter and follow them around for a specific frequency for added bang.

Mobile-ready content.

Up until now, many advertisers have been making sure they optimize the format of their content for mobile devices. In 2017, the mobile consumption of content must be mobile-first, not simply the optimization for the possibility of mobile. Research tells us that by 2018, the majority of web traffic will be consumed FIRST on mobile devices and SECOND on desktop devices, so we are all beginning to prepare for that majority shift now in 2017.



Native content is king.

Advertisers, growing weary of traditional ads, are embracing the well-written native content article, also known as Sponsored Content. This is an article delivered on online news sites through paid distribution, and if done well, you can't tell the difference between a well-written, hard-hitting piece of journalism, and a piece of Sponsored Content. We like to say "you have to really care what people think of your writing" with Sponsored Content, as opposed to just having an ad that you pay to have served up to people with an increased frequency. With Sponsored Content, readers don't HAVE to click in to read it: therefore. quality of the article, relevance of the topic. entertainment value, and a striking headline (while not click bait) are all carefully weighed to produce the most compelling articles.

Old-school eNewsletters
Mobile-ready Content
Native Content
Facebook Boosting

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Facebook boosting.

It's one thing to place an ad on Facebook and Instagram. It's another thing entirely to put money toward "boosting" one of your own posts. Focusing on getting your own personal thought leadership in front of prospective customers instead of just placing yet another Facebook ad is a unique way to secure YOUR corner of the branding market.

You owe it to yourself to choose even one of these four trends, and test the impact for yourself for your business. Hopefully, what you'll find is a missing piece of the puzzle in your quest for better, more connected and impactful marketing efforts for your business.

Phyllis Neil

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What's Next For 💋 Mobile and Video

by Caywood Yamnik

"Information doesn't travel at the word of mouth anymore. It travels a the speed of light," says Andy Russell, founder of Trigger Media and InsideHook. As information travels at the speed of light, digital advertising has to change at the speed of light in order to keep up. What are the two main mediums expected to grow and change in 2017? VIDEO AND MOBILE.

Double down on video.

- 69%¹ of marketers say their budget on video content is "increasing" or "significantly increasing." Don't increase your video budget because everyone else is increasing; do it because that's where your audience is.
- More than 7 billion videos are watched every day on Facebook and YouTube alone²

- Four in five consumers say a video showing how a product or service works is important ²
- One third of all online activity is spent watching video, and this is something we'll see increase in 2017³
- As of 2016, online video campaigns had the highest click through rates of all digital ad formats⁴
- Four times as many people now prefer their content in video format rather than text.

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Consumers are hungry for video. This makes it more imperative than ever that marketers are creating custom video, and explaining who their brand is in video format to their target audiences.

Mobile is a moving target.

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Year over year, we are continuing to see significant growth in mobile usage as well as mobile advertising. Four in five Americans and three in five globally carry at least one smartphone with them every day. Not only are they carrying them, but they're using them while shopping in retail stores. They're researching other vehicles when they're at a car dealership, and they're killing time on their phones while waiting at the doctor's office.

But how is this space changing?

The assumption used to be that every person had an average of 2.3 devices. The average American is now connected through 5 devices. By the end of this year, the prediction is that over 25% of people in the United States will have a wearable device as a sixth device. This will create a moving target for marketers, causing them to start producing and distributing content to fit this specific format and channel.

What does all of this mean?

Branding through digital advertising in 2017 is going to be full of even more online video, and new ventures in the mobile space. Will you be an early adopter, reaching your audience where they spend the most time or will you be late to the game, only catching the people staying for the credits?

Caywood Yamnik

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<u>Data and Marketing Association, May 2016.</u>
<u>Animoto, June 2016.</u>
<u>Hubspot, June 2016.</u>
<u>SEM Pandit, August 2016.</u>

More people are using smartphones while shopping

More people have wearable devices

More people prefer their content in video format



3 Questions to Ask Your Paid Search Vendor

by Todd Stone

Paid Search. Search Engine Marketing. Pay Per Click. Google Ad Words. WHATEVER the heck you call it, getting customers to your site can be a nightmare.

Perhaps you and your team have tried it yourselves. Spent hours pouring over YouTube videos, studying Google AdWords instructions and staying tuned in to the latest algorithm changes. NOTHING.

Maybe you've even outsourced it – had someone else who promises you a ton of clicks – and been heavily disappointed at the lack of new client activity.

So, you and your staff – you're no digital experts and don't even have time to be. But it's sincerely hard to know who to trust to manage this for you, because everyone promises results. What you need to do is choose several vendors who do paid search, and interview them. And, in that spirit, I'm going to give you my recommendation for the top three things you should ask every search vendor you meet with:

Do you create custom content for my ads?

Unfortunately, many vendors just reuse content they've created for other clients in your vertical. It is critical that your ads be customized to reflect your brand's differentiator. Typical campaigns should include at minimum of three different sets of ads, and then A/B test them over time to see which performs the best. At periodic intervals, throw out the ad that performed the least, and create a new ad to run alongside the other two.

Does your company OWN your own ad optimization tool, or are you using Google AdWords' tools?

Google AdWords is very limited in what it will allow you to do. Utilizing an ad optimization tool allows much more customization, and the ability to really drill down into the exact types of clicks you want. For example, using negative keywords is an absolute must for narrowing down the type of click you want. If your business is selling small beach balls, then we would add "giant beach balls" as a negative keyword phrase to avoid attracting a customer who isn't interested in your specific product.

What is your optimization strategy for my company?

Too many times, vendors will answer "to drive more traffic to your site". However, more traffic by itself doesn't result in sales activity. Any good vendor will work with you to determine actions you want that traffic to take – we call this "conversions". Many people want the phone to ring as a result of their campaign. Others want people to sign up for more information. Still others want people to download a compelling eBook they've written. When we begin with a client, we help educate the client on all of the many different types of conversion points that exist, and help them develop a strategy to find multiple ways a client can engage with their website to move them along the sales funnel.

I am certain that if you drill down into these three questions with the vendors you interview, you will get an excellent result the next time you decide to dip your toe into the paid search waters again!

One final note: as an advertising/marketing purist, I would be remiss if I didn't remind you of this fact: you can drive people to your site all day long, BUT if you don't have a branding campaign alongside it and good content there for people to read, they'll bounce right off. You've wasted your search marketing money at that point.

Say there are multiple advertisers selling the same products with the same keywords, but YOURS is the business folks have never heard of. You've got to make sure you are running a parallel campaign to get your name recognized.

Likewise, if a potential customer lands on your site, but there's no content there that's frequently updated to educate them on your products and services, they will hop off fast. You want a new site with frequently updated content (like, maybe in the form of a blog) that entices them to spend more time on your site, developing that important relationship.

I am very hopeful that this advice about what to ask your prospective paid search vendors arms you with the knowledge you need to confidently find the very best partner for you. At the end of the day, you don't want just traffic – you want leads, you want relationships, you want sales. And that is precisely what search engine marketing is great at doing!

Todd Stone

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Do you create custom content for ads?
Do you own the ad optimization tool?

What is your optimization strategy?

We hope these topics allow you to cut through the noise and stay focused on supporting your business goals with an integrated marketing approach in 2017.

Interested in learning more? We'd love to collaborate with you to develop a successful marketing plan.

Contact your Alabama Media Group marketing specialist at advertise@al.com

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About Alabama Media Group

Alabama Media Group is a digital media company that operates AL.com, one of the country's largest local websites, produces television and video programming, and publishes Alabama's three most prominent newspapers: The Birmingham News, The Huntsville Times and Mobile's Press-Register, as well as Birmingham magazine and The Mississippi Press. The company also offers digital marketing solutions — including audience targeting, search engine marketing and social media optimization; plus creative services, data analytics and event sponsorships.

Alabama Media Group is part of Advance Local, a leading media company comprised of 12 local affiliated news and information websites that rank #1 among local media in their respective markets and more than 30 affiliated newspapers known for their award-winning journalism. Advance Local is part of Advance Publications, along with Condé Nast and American City Business Journals.