

The Digital trends you need to be on top of in 2017

Jason Popplewell, T2, examines the Top Five Key Digital Trends To Look Out For in 2017.



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We're already well into the New Year but as we all know the autonomous "intelligence" of technology takes no heed of our arbitrary timelines. However, for those of us without our heads in the cloud, 12 months is as good a measure as any to take stock, peer into the distance and see what major digital and social innovations are looming most prominently on the horizon.

The goal of companies everywhere is to harness these new waves to drive their marketing and communication forward. These new trends are set to take off and adapting to them will lead to, at the very least, an up-to-date 2017.

1. Creative brand linking

You might have noticed some changes in content in the past few years. Gone seemingly are single focus articles written at a standard length and in their place the now ubiquitous "listicle", you know "10 things that have no right to be delicious" or "19 pictures of grown up puppies that will make you cry". While they may on the surface often seem shallow and vacuous the fact is, people love lists. In a few short years it has completely changed the dynamic of content consumption, even this article is a listicle!

It's been a theme for a while and smarter brands have already adapted to how this can be used to subtly integrate product placement into a pre-established format that consumers are proven to engage with. They're short, they're light and the reason they're so loved is that people like to know exactly how long an article will take to read.

While having a short break to relax the mind after finishing a task it's soothing to know that you will be reading something brief and not very taxing that will hopefully be entertaining. Most importantly for content providers they have great potential for that holy grail of online marketers: "social media shareability".

2. The Internet of Things

The Internet of Things or IoT has been a phrase and concept which has been floating around for a few years. Of course the idea of your fridge ordering your milk and eggs or putting on the kettle from the couch sounds great but noted teething problems have hampered widespread adaptation. This is reasonably logical as it's not really worth the change if you spend 11 hours to set something up that would save you maybe two minutes a day. Humans are creatures of habit and despite some defining themselves as technological "early adapters" most people are quite conservative about making major changes to their lives.

In the past couple of years however this has begun to change with the growth of wearable technology focused on improving consumer's lives. The huge growth of Fitbit and Apple Watch has demonstrated that with the right kind of product and functionality they can be quite happy to incorporate technology into ever more facets of their lives. The key for organizations and marketing departments is how to ensure they can gain visibility in the new areas of consumer's lives that are being opened up.

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3. Brand Values

To take one thing from trends in America in 2016 (and we could take many!) it has been the politicization of pretty much everything. From Skittles to Uber, brands are increasingly being drawn into the maelstrom of often divisive political discourse. As pretty much every brand worth their salt has a social media presence this public face is quite commonly solicited for their take on the latest hot topic.

This seems like a positive sign as it means people are accepting their favourite brand into their social circle and want to get their opinions. Social media has given companies what they've always wanted, a transformation from physical product or concept into an anthropomorphized member of the household.

Despite that good news, it represents both a pitfall and an opportunity for the brands and social media strategists concerned. Say the right thing and consumer's trust is reaffirmed and Promoter possibilities increased, say the wrong thing and you could be splashed across global newsfeeds by content aggregators hungry for sensationalist clicks.

It's vital then that companies and marketers in charge of their social media have contingencies and well-defined brand values in place when it comes to potential reactions to the latest major event. In pre-Twitter days companies could just go about their business never having to have an opinion on anything, those days are gone!

4. Live streaming of everything

With Wi-Fi and mobile data speeds getting better and better, along with massive improvements in mobile camera resolutions, the potential for broadcasting events live to your social circle and the world is growing immensely. The first major player was Twitter's Periscope, but now that both Facebook and Instagram have introduced their own Live options the reach and adoption of live streaming is set to become stratospheric.



This development both gives and takes away control. For example, rights owners of sporting events are in danger as entire matches can be streamed live to the world by fans in the stadium. On the other hand, it invites a range of interesting opportunities to manage the media which is put out about your company or organization. From product launches to live Q&As or behind-the-scenes walk throughs it adds a whole new layer of engagement for any brand or company.

With cheap or free production tools, anyone can plan and execute a media event without the need to engage a professional media company. The camera has been placed in our hands and it's time to embrace it!

5. Augmented Reality will take over your world

Augmented Reality, or the overlaying of virtual visuals over your real-life surroundings, became massively popular in 2016 with the explosion onto the scene of Pokemon GO and some hugely popular Snapchat filters (who would have thought

so many people wanted dogs' ears and noses!). People seem to enjoy the novelty of using their devices to alter and add depth to surroundings which are already familiar.

The template has been set and the popularity and potential of AR proven. The next step, now that people are used to furry little creatures jumping around their kitchens and workplaces, is to use the technology for creative product placement or displaying a product in live action. The possibilities are huge, not only for mobile but also with wearable tech like Snapchat's AR functional glasses, World Lenses and it will be very exciting to see what other developments occur in 2017.

Like every New Year the promise is always bright but often fails to deliver on the hype. For 2017 though, whatever else may happen in the world, digital trends and technological innovation look set to continue at a great pace and provide a welcome source of optimism for us all.