



MARKETING TRENDS 2018

the futurist's field guide

HOWDY!

AND WELCOME TO TRENDS 2018

Welcome to thunder::tech's ninth annual trends book. So, why in the world is there a giant sea turtle on the cover? We wondered the same thing, especially after having fast moving objects on previous covers. Then, a wise team member explained that sea turtles have been around for at least 110 million years, and most live an average of 80 years with some living as long as 200 years. So, these facts don't make them fast movers (they're turtles after all!), but it does make them awesomely resilient. Most middle-market and enterprise level marketers who are reading this, work on a brand that is at least a couple decades old. In fact, we have a few clients who trace their beginnings back into the 1800s! You show us every day that companies can choose to be resilient, to adapt and survive for long periods of time.

As in past books, it is true that this year's trends are not of the "shiny object" variety. Maturing analytics, legitimate influencer marketing practices, planning for digital transformation, managing web accessibility and transforming your content to more visual formats are trends that will keep you on the cusp of what your customers expect without wasting time on things they don't need.

Remember, you don't have to be an attention-grabbing shark to be worthy of following and adopting new marketing trends. After all, we know how the race with the tortoise went...

ENJOY YOUR COPY OF TRENDS!

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INFLUENCER MARKETING

HOW BRANDS CAN INSPIRE, ENGAGE AND CONVERT

Not to alarm you, but marketers have lost some control of the buying process. You can blame that on social media. In fact, most consumers will have completed 79-90% of their personal customer journey by the time they engage with the brand, according to a Forrester Research study.

Instead of being able to control every step of the customer journey, brands are forced to be more strategic and intentional about how to reach consumers and meet them where they are. Enter influencer marketing.

It's undeniable that influencer marketing is having a moment because it's a proven tactic that works. While certainly not new, each year, influencer marketing continues to evolve into

a sophisticated marketing solution. Marketers are just now appreciating that if done correctly, influencer marketing is a cost-effective way to reach audiences that fall outside of traditional advertising. Influencer marketing is a trend worth noting because according to the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), it is projected to be one of the fastest growing brand activation channels through 2020.

Getting Back into the Driver's Seat

Even though there's no longer a linear customer journey, influencer marketing is putting brands back behind the wheel. Most marketers use influencer marketing at the awareness stage only, but that's where engagement stops. Trust is the new

social currency and in 2018, more brands will leverage influencer marketing to integrate relevant content at every touch point throughout the decision journey.

- **Awareness::** At this stage, influencers can help increase brand recognition and engagement through entertaining and inspirational content.
- **Consideration::** Influencers can help answer questions about a brand's product or service and educate consumers about the benefits to nudge them along through the funnel.
- **Decision::** At this point, the customer is ready to make a choice and influencers can provide content that makes that decision easier through exclusive discounts, incentives and promotions.

Collaborating with influencers to develop and share content for each stage of the journey shifts the power back to marketers.

Influencer Marketing is a Marathon, not a Sprint

When brands treat influencer marketing like a one-off tactic, the program will likely fail. You may see results from a one-time influencer marketing campaign, but that momentum is unsustainable without a long-term strategy to keep influencers engaged.

We are seeing the trend of more progressive brands transitioning from a campaign-driven to an always-on influencer-marketing model, in which influencer engagement is integrated into the overall content strategy—similar to the days of an always-on media relations strategy. Marketers are identifying ongoing opportunities for collaboration that deliver value for both the brand and the influencer.

But building and nurturing a long-term partnership takes time and patience. Brands should plan to maintain interactions with influencers beyond the conclusion of a campaign to develop mutually beneficial relationships that can yield a greater return on investment (ROI) over time.

Results > Reach

There's no doubt that influencer marketing can effectively capture the attention of a sought after online audience and earn their trust, but attention alone doesn't cut it anymore. The brands that are winning at influencer marketing are moving beyond vanity metrics and looking at how influencers can impact sales. The evolution of measurement is not just about reach anymore, it's about driving results.

Audience-level data and analytics are developing to provide marketers with more accurate insight into the demographic makeup of an influencer's audience. Additionally, social media platforms are evolving content analytics so that brands and influencers have greater insight into how well a piece of content



is performing in real-time. This data enables marketers to quickly adjust budgets and content types to maximize reach and impact. This flexibility is critical in middle-market segments that must be mindful of resources.

For influencer marketing to add value, it is critical for brands to define success from the very beginning by building KPIs into its influencer marketing programs. An increased number of marketers are using a cost-per-engagement or cost-per-click model, using conversion tracking technology and leveraging campaign-specific promotional codes to track influencer activities back to sales.

B2B Adoption of Influencer Marketing

While influencer marketing isn't a new concept for B2C companies, many B2B brands have long believed that influencer marketing just wasn't for them. However, now we're seeing that slowly change as more B2B companies explore how influencer marketing fits within larger business strategies.

The same general influencer marketing rules apply for both B2B and B2C brands. Setting specific and achievable goals, establishing KPIs and identifying the right influencers who naturally align with your brand is necessary. But for B2B influencer marketing initiatives to be successful, the brand must address buyer needs and challenges, which requires a more sophisticated approach.

The B2B sales cycle is typically long, sometimes a year or longer, which gives brands more opportunity to serve up content that helps a buyer make a decision. B2B buyers are first individuals and businesses second; therefore, their opinions and perspectives are often shaped by their interactions with influencers they respect and trust. In 2018, more B2B brands will be collaborating with expert micro-influencers to co-create and amplify rich content to reach elusive buyers.

Influencer marketing may be changing, but it's a growing trend that's not going anywhere anytime soon. Learning how to harness the power of influencer marketing—no matter your size or industry—to engage with potential customers will make the difference between winning and losing the digital game in 2018. ::



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EMBRACING ANALYTICS CONQUERING THE GROWING MOUNTAIN OF DATA

As businesses grow and develop and as we become more digital, analytics and data are becoming increasingly important. We, as marketers, know that the data is important and our ears perk up when we hear about a new tool, but we don't know what to do with that tool once we have it. In 2018, an emerging trend that will be crucial to a business's success in the digital marketplace, is pulling data from multiple channels, tools and places into one centralized location. Further than that, making sense of this data and driving decision-making with it.

Analytics Continue to Mature

We all, as consumers, have experienced it. We view thousands of products and services each year, looking for just what we want. We leave sites, come back, leave again, are followed by ads on other sites (and on social media), get emails about the carts we abandoned, visit brick and mortar stores (they do still exist!) and eventually, we convert. Then we do it all over again.

According to an article by Big Commerce, 51% of Americans prefer to shop online and that number is only growing. As marketers, analysts, content developers and, in general, people-of-business,

22% of marketing departments' budgets will go to analytics over the next three years.

we are continually looking for ways to stand out, to beat out competitors and to make our products or services number one in our space.

According to an article by Ad Age, 22% of marketing departments' budgets will go to analytics over the next three years. Are you one of these marketing departments? As an integrated marketing agency, we push our clients to make decisions driven by data. We understand that your money is valuable and budgets impact everything. That's why we use tools to pull all the data together and drive decisions based on real, hard facts and figures.

Data from all Angles

The data is coming from all angles, at varying speeds, but it should be pointing to one place. In an increasingly digital world, there is no way to use one platform for all of your tracking needs. You may be using a marketing automation platform for email, landing page development and tracking. Additionally, you may be using the Google Suite (Analytics, Tag Manager, AdWords, Attribution, Optimize, Data Studio, etc.) for a variety of reasons to track your users' journeys. Throw in Facebook pixels and a CRM, and you've got data coming at you from all angles like swords in a Game of Thrones scene.

To top all of that off, data is no longer simple. It's grown up from the simple, five column table telling you how many hits you had on a product page, to sophisticated algorithms with information on a user's entire purchase or selection process. Let's take Amazon as an example. Amazon takes information on your past purchase decisions, what's in your cart, what you search for, what's recommended for you, how often you shop, what you have in your house (Alexa anyone?), and so much more to



ASK YOURSELF...

What do I **need** to know about my customers?

What do I **want** to know about my customers?

What **decisions** will I make with this information?

...THEN TRACK, TRACK AND TRACK SOME MORE

create a unique, personalized experience for you every time you log in.

You might be saying, “Well, that’s Amazon, they’re so big they can do whatever they want.” But we say, “Who says?”

Bringing it all Together

As with most things in life, the hardest part is starting. The first step is getting all the proper tracking in place. Tracking tools, such as Google Tag Manager (GTM), are great proof-point tools that are rising in popularity with middle-market marketing departments because they offer the ability to show everyone that your marketing efforts are working and the old, tired tactics are no longer going to do it for your business.

Ask yourself, “What do I need to know about my customers,” “What do I want to know about my customers,” and “What decisions will I make with this information?” Armed with this information: track, track and track some more!

GTM has been around for a while, but it’s just beginning to

show its power. The worst thing that you can do with a tool, especially a free tool, is not use it to its fullest potential. There is essentially a way to deploy almost every piece of tracking, with a variety of tools, through GTM. The value in this platform and the ability to side-step your application developers to implement these solutions not only makes it more efficient, but more expansive in possibility.

But that’s not the magic. The magic, the I-can-be-just-as-good-as-Amazon part of this, is what we can do with all of this data by pulling it together, showing its purpose, cultivating solutions, and deploying them to see that hey, this actually works.

In the next year, you’re going to begin to see the data visualizer emerge. This is the marketer who’s ahead of the curve. These are the people picking up platforms like Tableau, Domo, Sisense and many others, and are tying together data from all of your marketing efforts to drive investments into what will give you the biggest return on your marketing investment.

Maybe your business hasn’t quite grown to the level of some of these business intelligence platforms. Don’t worry, you too can

have a similar level of sophistication, if you put the work in. Google is now offering platforms like Google Data Studio (still in BETA, but still very powerful) that can pull your data from all sources into one place, rather seamlessly. Wondering if that email that you sent out about a new product drove people to that product page? Put it in an easy, simple-to-use dashboard in Data Studio. See real-time data as it changes each day. Know if your efforts are working, without having to jump back and forth from platform to platform.

Data is King

If you're not beginning to get the holistic and detailed picture of what marketing efforts are effective for your business, you're behind. The back-and-forth reporting style from each department, team or even different team members takes too much time. It's too slow. And before you know it, the result or solution that all of these separate reports lead you to is already being capitalized on by your competitors.



Now is the time to investigate the analytical and data collection options within the tools and platforms you're currently using (or should be using) to decide if you're getting anything from your marketing tactics. If nothing else, the rate at which data is maturing and allowing us to take the blinders off to see a clear user journey to our products/services, should intrigue you enough to say, "What don't I know?" and go out there and find it. ::



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MARKETING SHATTERS SILOS

INTEGRATING MARKETING INTO EVERY DEPARTMENT

First, the sales team swung by and started hanging out with their friends from marketing. Now that relationship has gotten a lot more serious and customer service has started coming over more and we just got a text from human resources (HR) about wanting to catch up over coffee. Interesting collaborations and integration with marketing are happening behind the curtain with much more regularity lately.

We are seeing a spike in the number of middle-market and large organizations where departmental silos are starting to finally crumble. Sales and customer service are two important customer-facing teams that are seeing some of the fastest integration with marketing. The same is happening with HR and their internal audience responsibilities.

Why is marketing integrating with more departments? We typically see a few common reasons for this growing trend:

- Increased understanding about the need of a unified brand voice throughout the organization
- Higher customer expectations
- Internal integrations help decrease costs
- Every department is being affected by digital transformation trends

Sales and Marketing

It is no wonder that sales and marketing are becoming more integrated. When sales and marketing teams work together, companies see 36% higher customer retention and 38% higher sales win rates.

The largest trend pushing the integration of these two groups that historically had kept them at arm's length is from changes happening from customer research, buying and communication habits. These include:

- Lead generation through content marketing, SEO, PPC and targeted advertising.
- Marketing automation aiding in lead nurturing and post-sale marketing.
- Self-service trends such as e-commerce and customer portals to cross-sell and allow easier reordering.

We predict these trends will only speed up because when sales and marketing alignment delivers, a 36% improvement in customer retention and a 38% higher sales win rate, on average, it is tough to ignore the effectiveness of the practice.

Customer Service and Marketing

Customer service has deepened their relationship with marketing, especially with the increased digital demands of customers. Some of the growing areas we see being used by both groups are:

- Increased video content for DIY users' needs
- Chatbots for automated assistance
- Content libraries that improve customer service and decrease time with call centers
- Improved data collection techniques and usage
- Customer service through social media channels

The trend with customer service departments has typically been around cost reductions. Resolving customer issues on social media cost a sixth of the price of resolving them over the phone. However, we see more upsell and positive word-of-mouth practices being harnessed by this group as they continue to build a relationship with their marketing department.

HR and Marketing

HR carries the brand with them every day both internally to existing employees and externally to those with whom they are trying to attract to the organization.

In many organizations, HR leads community involvement and outreach, as well as managing internal employee communications. HR departments can also impact media habits and contribute creative marketing ideas as far as where potential and existing employees learn and hear from employer brands. In this aspect alone, HR departments and marketing teams continue to grow closer for many reasons. This collaboration between departments is trending in several ways:

- Cooperation on social media for a mix of marketing, recruitment, policy and internal communications.
- Expansion of content types used to attract new employees to now include video and other forms of multimedia.
- Assistance with employee tools such as intranets and other systems so the brand is represented correctly both visually and contextually.

- Creation of cultural manuals to assist in onboarding and reinforcement of brand culture.

Look for an increased number of internal marketers to be brought in to support HR's communication needs, and a continued growth in integration with marketing to creatively find and keep the best talent.

All of this collaboration is making departments more effective

over time. As larger trends emerge, such as Gartner's prediction that by 2020, customers will manage 85% of their interaction with the enterprise without interacting with a human, it will be necessary that the whole enterprise follow the same playbook. Marketing is uniquely positioned to become the center of more organizations to enable this. ::



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SALES

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CUSTOMER SERVICE

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HUMAN RESOURCES

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A close-up photograph of several high-voltage electrical insulators. The insulators consist of multiple brown, ribbed ceramic or glass discs stacked vertically. They are connected to metal hardware, including white porcelain or ceramic joints and red-painted metal caps. The background is a clear blue sky, suggesting an outdoor power substation environment.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
POSITION YOUR BUSINESS TO
ADAPT, SURVIVE AND THRIVE

Digital transformation is something that most organizations have been plodding through. Some know that they are on this journey while others are falling into it, but digital transformation doesn't have to be by accident or happenstance. The trend that is worth paying attention to, especially for middle-market organizations, is the growth-enabling transformation that can be a planned and coordinated undertaking.

Digital transformation is the act of evolving existing communications, promotion, systems and processes to be ready to deliver on the expectations and possibilities of a modern organization.

There is an enormous difference that we have seen between organizations that “do digital” versus ones that “are digital.” This transformative process isn't just updating your website, turning on e-commerce or evolving your CRM. These are one-off efforts that will help an organization, but if left as projects, don't truly help to transform organizations to compete more effectively in today's marketplace. In fact, even working on how the whole marketing tech connects (CMS, CRM, e-commerce, automation, email, etc.) is not enough to really transform anymore. We have observed that the key to truly rising above your competition is the planning and integration of efforts throughout a multiyear journey of transformation.

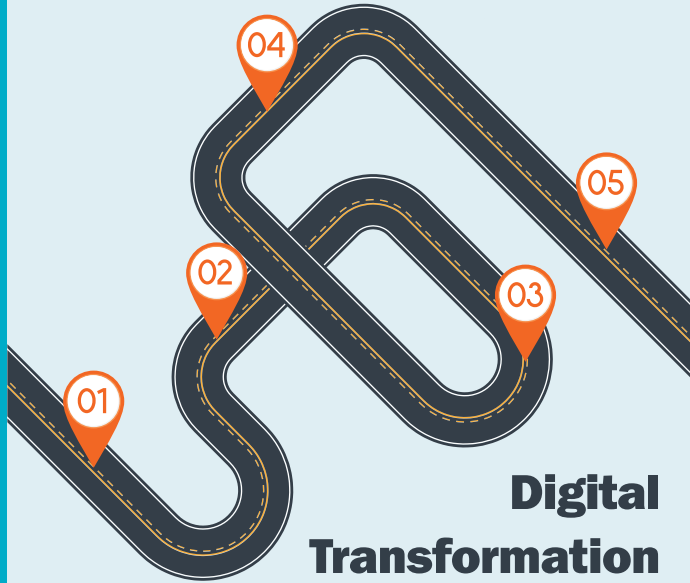
Why do we Need to Digitally Transform?

According to the McKinsey Global Institute, the U.S. economy operates at only 18% of its digital potential and the sort of productivity gains that digital technologies should be enabling are not showing up in the broader economy. This means that transformation for most companies is still at an early stage, but the potential is enormous. The need to bridge this gap and digitally transform comes down to one word, change. Can you change

fast enough to stay competitive with those who are evolving to keep and gain market share, keep new competition at bay, cut costs, find efficiencies and most importantly meet customer expectations?

To help clients plan their digital transformation, we ask questions based on the following factors:

- 1 Some level of self-service is just expected today. Are you enabling customers, channel partners and employees to take care of repetitive and mundane tasks themselves without involving more of your resources?
- 2 Mobile has enabled so much, including real-time interactions in the field at the point of activity. How does your organization take advantage of being there at the point-of-sale, the point-of-research or the point-of-data collection?
- 3 The ability to collect and now integrate data across the enterprise has opened many new possibilities including real-time review, alerts of activity, deeper customer knowledge and transparency in your processes and interactions. How are you supplying this data to both internal and external audiences for a better and intelligent experience?
- 4 We are a research culture now based on ease of asking questions to Google, Bing, Siri and Alexa. Most customers would not label themselves as researchers, but that's what we're all doing by asking questions, reading articles and watching videos on something that we're considering doing or buying. Only 29% of people want to talk to a salesperson to learn more about a product, while 62% will consult a search engine, so how does this play into your lead generation efforts?



Digital Transformation Planning Guide

- 01 Develop your transformation strategy.** Where are your organization and customers heading?
- 02 Gather data.** Bring together an internal, cross-functional team to think about what is needed and what is possible.
- 03 Develop a roadmap.** Develop your plan, breaking it into stages to follow through your transformation journey.
- 04 Watch the trends.** Keep an eye on both industry and consumer trends and apply them to your needs.
- 05 Make a budget.** Planning based on a strong strategy will allow for better insight on the necessary investments.

When these questions are answered, digital transformation can enable several important factors for business:

- The collection and dissemination of more and better data to lead to faster decision-making and better insights.
- The enablement of cost-cutting measures such as customer self-service and lower customer acquisition costs.
- Better coordination within the organization through the integration of data, systems and processes across departments that is beneficial internally and to the customer.
- Sales growth opportunities through new channels and models, as well as new market possibilities.

How do we Digitally Transform?

Transformation starts with strategy as it is not a project that you can approve. It is also not about a specific technology right out of the gate. When an organization does that, then you are letting yourself be bound by the technology's limits rather than your vision and your organizational goals. A transformation strategy will address where the organization and your customers are heading and how you can serve them more effectively as the digital landscape continues to evolve.

As the strategy is formulated and the tactical end of building a transformation roadmap starts, you can begin to gather data and bring together an internal, cross-functional team to think about what is needed and what is possible. This conscious planning allows for roadmaps to be developed, which have many positive aspects including:

- Breaking up the known and unknown transformation

journey into manageable stages.

- Allowing for executive buy-in to plans.
- Smoothing out expenditures over time and allowing for better long-range budgeting of resources.
- Distributing and assigning ownership within the organization for specific change of management activities.
- Allowing time for the human element to evolve into this new reality.

Many customers cannot tell you exactly what they expect until they see it somewhere else. Therefore, it is useful to watch trends evolve in other industries, especially consumer trends which allow you to be better equipped to apply them to your needs. For example, Amazon introduced many consumers to suggestive selling and now want to see it in their professional lives too.

Finally, a digital transformation plan needs a budget in order to happen. According to a 2017 article in the Harvard Business Review, despite this shift in recognition of the importance of digital, the average investment in emerging technologies (as a percent of total technology spending) grew just 1% over the last decade. Planning based on a strong strategy will allow for better insight into the required investments your organization will need to make over the course of the journey.

Digital Transformation is Business Transformation

In the big picture, the only thing that matters with a transformation are the outcomes. The name of the software, the types of systems and amount of custom mobile apps does

not really mean much without the business outcomes that they provide. Articulating these outcomes in your planning is critical to guide your overall strategy.

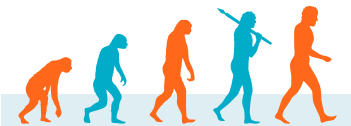
This is a period of time where many organizations are trying to evaluate how they can evolve how they do business. For instance, many organizations that never went direct to consumer, are now recognizing the need to work through this conundrum. Many middle-market manufacturers have never had to go direct to the end consumer because of their distribution channels. That's changing as search, e-commerce, Amazon, eBay, Alibaba and many others are eating into these decades-old models.

A digital transformation may be a business transformation for many organizations since the tools and channels they evolve into also typically mean that they are conducting business differently.

Laggards Beware

As transformation planning becomes more of a trend, and then an accepted practice, plans will be executed faster and with

better outcomes than the ad hoc nature up to this point. Digital Darwinism will now be in effect. This will have more competitive consequences the longer your organization takes to get started. The good news is that as soon as planning starts, you are positioning your organization to do whatever it takes to keep up with your consumer. As society changes media, education, research and buying habits, you will be there ready to adapt. ::



Digital Darwinism will now be in effect.



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VISUALIZING CONTENT

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND TWEETS

You may have seen one of the dozens of reports published over the last couple of years outlining the sharp downward trend of consumer attention spans. A popular and oft-shared report claims that most people today have an attention span of about eight seconds, less than a goldfish.

The veracity of this report has been called into question, but what's indisputable is that the competition for your audience's attention increases every day. Even if your audience has a greater attention span than your favorite flushable pet, how do you compete with the proliferation of attention seekers and fragmented communication channels to capture and maintain the interest of your customers?

The answer has less to do with what you're presenting and more to do with how you present it.

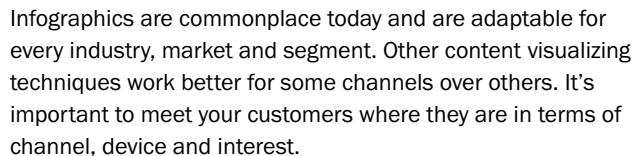
Smart middle-market brands have adopted the strategy of visualizing content to make the information easy to scan and simple to understand. This type of communication is proven to:

- Increase customer engagement
- Boost comprehension
- Make content more actionable

The Informative Infographic

One of the most common types of content visualization is the infographic. This common technique uses photography, illustration, statistics and engaging graphic design to help the reader understand complex data by presenting visual equivalencies in an intuitive, easy-to-scan manner. Furthermore, infographics are liked

Infographics have been around for a very long time, as demonstrated by the infographic below created by Florence Nightingale as part of a report delivered to Queen Victoria in 1858.



Digital plays a critical role in nearly every business active today. To reach the harried, connected customer you need to serve up bite-sized, easy-to-parse nuggets of information that entice and draw the viewer in to learn more. The final destination may be rich with content, but the visitor must be free to consume this

information at their own pace, deciding for themselves when and to what extent they interact with your messaging.

Video

This demand for video is only growing and 82% of all internet traffic will be made up of video by 2021. That's only four years

away! If you're wondering where all this spare time comes from, consider 80% of audiences would rather watch live video from a brand than read a blog.

Social Media

The various social media platforms are an excellent way for brands to connect with their customers. Each platform has its own quirks, and you should strive to create content tailored for the strengths of each.

Facebook:: Facebook severely limits the amount of text that can exist on graphical brand advertising. This means concepts should be visualized with bold, engaging visuals and minimal text to make that quick connection and encourage clicking on the image to learn more.

Twitter:: The platform that made its name 140 characters (now 280) at a time has fully embraced images and video, allowing brands more flexibility in how they connect with customers. A tweet's lifespan is less than 20 minutes in some cases, and on top of that, users are only retaining 10% of text-based information after three days. However, to speak to the power of visualization, if that same copy is paired with an image, users retain 65% of the information after three days.

Instagram:: This platform has always been about the visuals, and smart brands continue to connect with beautiful, compelling visuals and photography.

Additional channels to consider are LinkedIn, Snapchat and Pinterest. Make sure to align these platforms with your messaging and audiences when adding visual content to the mix.

Meme

An unexpected contender for content visualization is the meme. It may seem juvenile or unprofessional, but there's no disputing the meme's power to convey a concept virally across the internet. Clearly not appropriate for all brands or all occasions, the meme nevertheless can provide a fun way to visualize a concept for the right brand and the right audience.



Traditional/Mass Media

Much of the discussion around the content visualization trend centers around so-called “new media” channels. But it doesn't start and end there—the same easy to understand executions help boost engagement and understanding in traditional marketing tactics such as print, out-of-home, broadcast and direct mail.

Moreover, these approaches are often thought of as “shotgun marketing,” but the reality is that all of these tactics have become more tightly targeted in the last decade. This allows you to create

content that is not only visualized in a fashion that is easy to understand, but it can also be tailored to specific audiences.

Visualize Consistency

When visualizing your various messages, it's important to apply the same high standards as you would any other aspect of your brand. This attention to detail ensures brand consistency for your audience.

For example, if your social media team is pushing out shareable images on Facebook, those graphics should work with the infographics your sales team is putting into their presentations, and so on. Brand consistency is critical, regardless of the reach or impact any individual touch point may have. Developing a brand standards guideline and sharing it with all internal stakeholders will help this effort.

Visualize Greater Customer Engagement

Your audience is bombarded with an overwhelming amount of information on a daily basis, all competing for their shortening attention span. This trend is only going to accelerate in the near future.

To make the most of each messaging opportunity, you need to develop strategies to lengthen each engagement and connect with your customers in meaningful ways. One of the most impactful methods is to convert your information and content into dynamic and captivating visual representations that capture your customers' attention and keeps them coming back for more. ::



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Busting the Goldfish Myth



Have our attention spans really diminished to the point where a goldfish has more ability to focus than we do? Probably not.

First, it's foolish to paint all of humanity with the same broad brush. Certainly some are more detail-oriented and focused than others, but for most individuals their attention span is directly task-dependent. If you're deeply invested in a task you will easily focus on it, compared to a low priority assignment that you're addressing while multitasking.

Most serious researchers dismiss the oft-cited Microsoft-commissioned report that first claimed eight seconds as the new max to our attention spans. The report suffers from poor methodology and vague citation of sources, calling into question its conclusions.

Perhaps the greatest irony is that the attention span yardstick, the humble goldfish, doesn't have an eight second attention span either. Hundreds of scientific studies have shown that goldfish can learn and have relatively robust memories.



ACCESSIBILITY

MEETING YOUR CUSTOMERS
WHERE THEY LIVE



Just last year the goal for many marketers was to create mobile-first digital content, now the challenge will be to create accessible websites, and quickly.

In June 2017, in what is believed to be the first lawsuit of its kind to go to trial, a Florida federal judge ruled in favor of a visually impaired man who filed nearly 70 lawsuits alleging that various companies' websites violate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

In one case, Judge Robert Scola, of the Southern District of Florida, decided that due to the supermarket chain Winn-Dixie's website being so heavily integrated with its physical stores and operations that it was subject to the ADA.

"The factual findings demonstrate that Winn-Dixie's website is inaccessible to visually impaired individuals who must use

screen reader software," Scola wrote.

The court decision required Winn-Dixie to invest \$250,000 to update its website to make it compliant, not including court or attorney fees.

This court case and others like it guarantee this trend is not going away. While it may seem unrelated to marketing at first, taking a step back and tallying all the digital touch points customers have with brands daily can put in perspective the gravity of this issue. Just last year the goal for many marketers was to create mobile-first digital content, now the challenge will be to create accessible websites, and quickly.

What is Section 508?

A federal law mandating that all electronic and information technology developed, procured, maintained, or used by the federal government be accessible to people with disabilities.



Steps toward accessibility in your own organization::

- 1. Audit your digital touch points.** Use both accessibility scanning services, but also audit the human navigation element of a user as well.
- 2. Take action and remediate issues.** Get your leaders together to understand the scenarios related to accessibility and how to mitigate issues.
- 3. Integrate into the culture.** Do this as part of your organization's routine. Working from the proactive position instead of a reactive one will always produce better outcomes.

Where to Start?

To have this issue qualify as a trend, let's think about how wide these challenges spread. The visually impaired are not

the only segment of the population who have accessibility needs. There are various other disabilities that require accessibility as well. It was once easy to think that this was solely government agency focused, but as the Winn-Dixie case illustrates, the private sector and its customers rely upon business applications and SaaS solutions in their daily lives to use these digital tools.

So, as an organization, what should be provided in terms of digital accessibility features versus what must be provided? Typically, for the U.S., laws are often times influenced by the United States Access Board.

In the coming year, compliance with the section 508-based standards will be required by federal agencies. The new Section 508 rule is a response to market trends and innovations, such as the convergence of technologies and harmonizes with worldwide standards such as the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

Who Else can you Look to for Guidance and Direction on Accessibility Efforts?

Google has been known to spearhead worldwide initiatives related to the web, and accessibility is one such effort. You can find a plethora of information from guidelines, product details and best practices to how they are funding disability research and programs to help shape your own.

In terms of owning or leading the charge towards accessibility within your own organization, we have put together three steps to assist in the process.

1 Audit Your Digital Touch Points

There are a lot of accessibility scanning services where you supply a URL and a computer generates a detailed report of gaps. While these reports are great starting points, they miss out on the human navigation element of a user trying to navigate a website with an assistive technology like a screen reader or magnifier.

2 Take Action and Remediate Issues

Once a to-do list of compliance issues is established, it may require more than simple edits to image tags or hyperlinks via a content management system (CMS). It may require navigation recalibrations, adjustments of creative elements like graphics, text and backgrounds along with semantic changes to templates and pages.

Creative, user experience (UX), front-end development and application development teams are often times required to address issues in 508, ADA and WCAG deficiencies. These teams ultimately provide that single source for remediation that leads to less confusion, faster turnaround, effectiveness and cost control. But before you do anything, get your leaders together to understand the scenarios going forward related to accessibility and how to mitigate issues.

3 Integrate into the Culture

Online experiences rarely sit still. Organizations are constantly editing, publishing, iterating designs, and giving a lot of control to marketing, sales and customer service teams to deliver content and information digitally. With all of that in mind, companies need to routinely audit the state of their

accessibility. Working from the proactive position instead of a reactive one will always produce better outcomes.

These audits can be done at a cadence that is decided upon by your leadership and/or general counsel. It can be done monthly, quarterly or biannually and it doesn't need to be costly. The more teams work at this, the more the muscle memory develops and the more accessibility becomes a cultural element of your organization that takes care of itself over time. For example, content publishers will understand how to modify not just images and tags, but also how to generate PDF documents to be read by assistive technology and even how to caption videos accurately.

Not Just Websites

Websites are typically top of mind when discussing accessibility and that is certainly a high priority, but if you look at the state of the consumer recently, you will understand that websites are only an element of the successful digital business today.

While accessibility seems like a chore instead of a trend, it can be a marketing strength, cultural value and commercial advantage for your organization. Or it can be a missed opportunity, a potential risk and ultimately a major detour off your desired course.

With education, awareness and planned effort to address it in 2018, organizations can take the opportunity to meet all users online, provide a better brand experience for everyone and mitigate any reasons to call your attorneys. ::



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THANKS FOR READING THE 2018 TRENDS BOOK!

I hope you found the topics applicable to your marketing efforts and will be able to deploy some of these initiatives for your brand in the coming year.

After publishing these trends for nine years, it has taught me that the steady, resilient marketer can adapt to what seems like the never-ending barrage of changes in the marketing field. Remember that our current, connected world took some time to get this way. Facebook will

become a 14-year-old cranky teenager in 2018 and the iPhone just celebrated its first double digit birthday this past year.

None of these trends happened completely overnight, so if you are paying attention, it is a lot easier to connect the dots to choose how best to evolve and stay out in front. ::



::Jason Therrien

President & CEO

jason.therrien@thundertechnology.com

@JasonTherrien

HAPPY MARKETING IN 2018



CLEVELAND, OHIO

3635 Perkins Ave.
Studio 5SW
Cleveland, OH 44114
216-391-2255

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

225 W. Washington St.
Suite 2200
Chicago, IL 60606
312-924-0270

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

400 Renaissance Center
Suite 2600
Detroit, MI 48243
313-309-7190



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