

Digital marketing trends for 2017 (part 2)

By  Stephen Sandmann

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In part two of my exploration of digital marketing, I decided to find out where other marketers see digital marketing fit into brands' marketing mixes in 2017. I caught up with: Mzamo Masito, Managing Executive: Brand Marketing & Communications at [Vodacom South Africa](#); Fran Luckin, Chief Creative Officer of [Grey Africa](#); Justin Spratt, Head of Business, Sub-Saharan Africa at [Uber](#); and Tanya Hibbert, Marketing Manager at Vodacom South Africa.



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How will digital marketing fit into the 2017 marketing mix?

Digital marketing's influence on consumers is more prominent than ever, of which all marketers need to take advantage.

Mzamo Masito had this to say: "Digital marketing continues to be relevant for brands that want to build 'brand love' while increasing shareholder value. Great benefits of digital marketing are that the consumer has power, and our role is to connect people to live a better today and build a better tomorrow."

Fran Luckin is another expert who believes in the growing importance of digital marketing: "Is it not time to drop the word 'digital' from 'digital marketing'? Digital connectivity is so pervasive that marketing can't happen without it anymore. 'Digital' isn't a 'medium' in the sense of it being a 'channel'. It's a medium like water or air. It's everywhere and most – if not all – of our lives take place in it."

Tanya Hibbert thinks that marketers need to embrace innovation in the form of digital marketing: “Twitter changed the world with just 140 characters. Embrace innovation – what you pilot could be the next big thing.”

Clearly we must forget our old notions of what a marketing mix should look like. Digital marketers and traditional marketers need to work more closely together for overall success in 2017.

Justin Spratt shares some interesting thoughts: “2017 is the year in which enlightened marketers will stop having conversations that include ‘digital marketing’. The marketing war has already been won. Take a bow, Internet.

He continues: “I’ve used the word ‘Internet’, instead of ‘digital’ because it’s more informative. While the word ‘digital’ is commonly used, it is amorphous enough to have little specific meaning. The Internet talks to the disruptive technology that’s driving changes – not only in marketing, but in the very way in which we live and interact. It is the mechanism that needs to be understood to win. I haven’t used ‘the web’ because this is just one execution of digital and the Internet.”

Will digital marketing replace traditional marketing?

I don’t think so, but I believe there will be an infusion of digital marketing and traditional marketing elements like never before, such as more widespread execution of digital-lead marketing campaigns.

Spratt expands on this in vivid detail: “This doesn’t mean it replaced above the line, below the line, brand marketing or direct marketing. No, it has been suffused into all marketing through subliminal cultural osmosis. So called ‘television commercials’ are now born digital and flighted with higher frequency on the Internet than through broadcast mediums.

“Below the line isn’t really effective these days without a digital activation funnelling customer data into databases in The Cloud for future marketing. Perhaps out-of-home is the last vestige of traditional advertising where big, beautiful print-designed banners can be both visceral and effective – and while digital is coming through tracking and timed-displays, it doesn’t come close yet.

“So, where does this leave digital this year and into the future? I believe the demarcation between digital will fade with more rapidity this year. And it must, for marketers to be successful. Siloed marketing is dysfunctional and costly, and mostly renders ‘tick-the-box’ campaigns. Digital is not a channel, it is part of every channel, so to separate it is to fail at marketing.”

Where will creative ideas come from in 2017?

The Internet is a powerful tool that impacts today’s creative process, which I touched on in my previous article.

Spratt makes a few strong statements on the matter: “Whether people like it or not, every creative idea now has its genesis fuelled by the Internet. It has been a foregone conclusion to many people, for many years. Google and Facebook have built their businesses, now accounting for up to 95% of all digital media money and potentially supplanting over 10% of all advertising budgets this year.

“Naysayers will argue that these are only ‘digital media companies’. Wrong. Google harvests intent to buy, and Facebook fosters and promotes intent through social signalling. The goal of marketers is to promote intent, either indirectly through brand or through direct messaging and placements designed to ignite that ‘first moment of truth’. And furthermore, above-the-line agencies continue to suck up the social media budgets, thereby protecting egos. All of this is not to say other forms of marketing do not work – they do – it’s just that Google and Facebook have shone a light on a much more expeditious path to marketing-led revenue by using the Internet.”

Is 2017 is a watershed moment for the whole industry?

I’ve experienced the dynamic agency life for a few years and it may be in for a shakeup this year.

According to Justin Spratt: "I believe that digital elements will continue to give life to a barely-breathing industry whose procurement wounds are close to mortal. But of course, this puts pressure on everyone, and digital needs to shoulder its responsibility for toils of its new empire.

In many ways, 2017 will be a watershed moment for the entire industry. There is likely no more runway for many embattled small- and medium-sized agencies, so I expect to see consolidation driving talent back into the bigger agencies or driving the talent to contract themselves back to agencies.

I think contracted talent phenomenon has a lot of runway; it solves the need for agencies to manage capacity – often a margin killer – while still using the very best talent. It gives power back to the talent who've taken the brunt of the pain with longer hours, no-increases, no-bonuses and increasingly risk-averse, pedestrian work. The only downside is for the brand, ensuring lock-in and exclusivity that was promised to said brand in previous years. The building internal agencies – except for the most very talented brand marketers – is a fad and will die (again) as the pendulum loses momentum."

So, it's clear that we are in for quite a year. I believe that the marketers who best adapt to these trends will come out on top. I think that if something doesn't offer challenges then it isn't worth pursuing. So, with that logic in mind, clearly digital marketing's dynamic nature will guarantee quite a winding ride in 2017.

Look out for part three in which I delve into more digital marketing trends, such as more digital platform and B2B developments.

Read more: [Digital marketing trends for 2017 \(part 1\)](#)

Read more: [Digital marketing trends for 2017 \(part 3\)](#)

ABOUT STEPHEN SANDMANN

I have a keen interest in innovative, digital marketing-lead advertising and search marketing (SEO and paid search), which I've developed through my award-winning agency and corporate career at Ogilvy, Quirk (now Mrum), Vodacom and now a specialist digital marketing consultant at Sandmann Digital.

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