



2018

DIGITAL MARKETING

TRENDS



Another year has passed, and great strides continue to be made in the world of digital marketing. Emerging trends and technologies continue to open doors of opportunity for strategically and programmatically targeting our audiences in 2018. With this in mind, we are focusing our 2018 trends and suggestions on where we feel our clients will see the best return on investment.

Before we look at our 2018 trends, let's take a look back at our trends for 2017, which were centered around SEO, and see how our predictions stacked up.

NATIONAL POSITIONS 2017

SEO TRENDS PREDICTIONS

Prediction 1: Optimizing for Mobile Continues to Grow in Importance

Verdict: Correct!

We saw a massive growth in mobile across purchasing, content consumption, user habits, search, and automation. In virtually every way we saw the need from mobile optimization come to fruition.

Prediction 2: Content Development Strategies Will Change

Verdict: Correct!

Users consumed content in a variety of different formats with a shift away from text to images and video. The continued development of AI and machine learning accelerated the need to change content creation based on industry.

Prediction 3: Voice Search

Verdict: Correct!

Voice search really took off in 2017 with all the big players – Amazon, Google, Apple, and Microsoft – working to capture market share.

Prediction 4: Schema and Micro Formatting

Verdict: Correct!

Schema is formatting that allows the search engines to return helpful and informative information for users in the search results. In 2017, we saw a significant growth in the number of rich snippets such as the knowledge graph that Google returned in their search results.

Prediction 5: Artificial Intelligence

Verdict: Correct!

Artificial intelligence took hold in 2017 in a big way in personal assistance, search, personalization, and beyond.



Moving Into 2018

While we are excited by our accuracy of last year we are equally excited to look forward into 2018. It is no secret that mobile continues to be a focus for our digital marketing strategies and knowing where to focus can help give you the edge over your competition. Some of the most important trends covered in this 2018 Digital Marketing Trends report include:

- 1 Mobile Domination
- 2 Reallocation of Budgets to Paid Facebook
- 3 The Power of Influencer Marketing Continues to Grow
- 4 Video Reigns Supreme
- 5 2018 Is the Year for AMP
- 6 Google My Business to Own Local Business Listings
- 7 Voice Search Continues to Gain Popularity
- 8 AI and Machine Learning
- 9 The Importance of Personalization
- 10 An Increased Emphasis on Client Engagement

How We Predict the Future

Keeping up with new trends is no mean feat – in this guide we analyze existing data on current trends; we've included our own internal tests as well as the insights we have gained from managing hundreds of digital marketing campaigns each month. This continuous collection and analysis of data provides us the insight needed to offer our clients the most relevant digital marketing strategies year after year.

The intent of this guide is to brief you on the 10 most important digital marketing trends or 'mega trends,' offering practical action steps to allow you to gain the edge over your competition in 2018!



MOBILE DOMINATION

ONE



The shift to mobile dominance has happened. Mobile devices now make up nearly 60% of all web traffic, up from just under 50% in Q4 of 2016.¹ What this mean is that we are moving towards a mobile first world. Unlike in previous years where we began design on a desktop, all of our decisions regarding content, websites, and UX (user experience) need to be designed for mobile first in 2018.

Prediction: Web design will begin with the mobile experience as first priority.

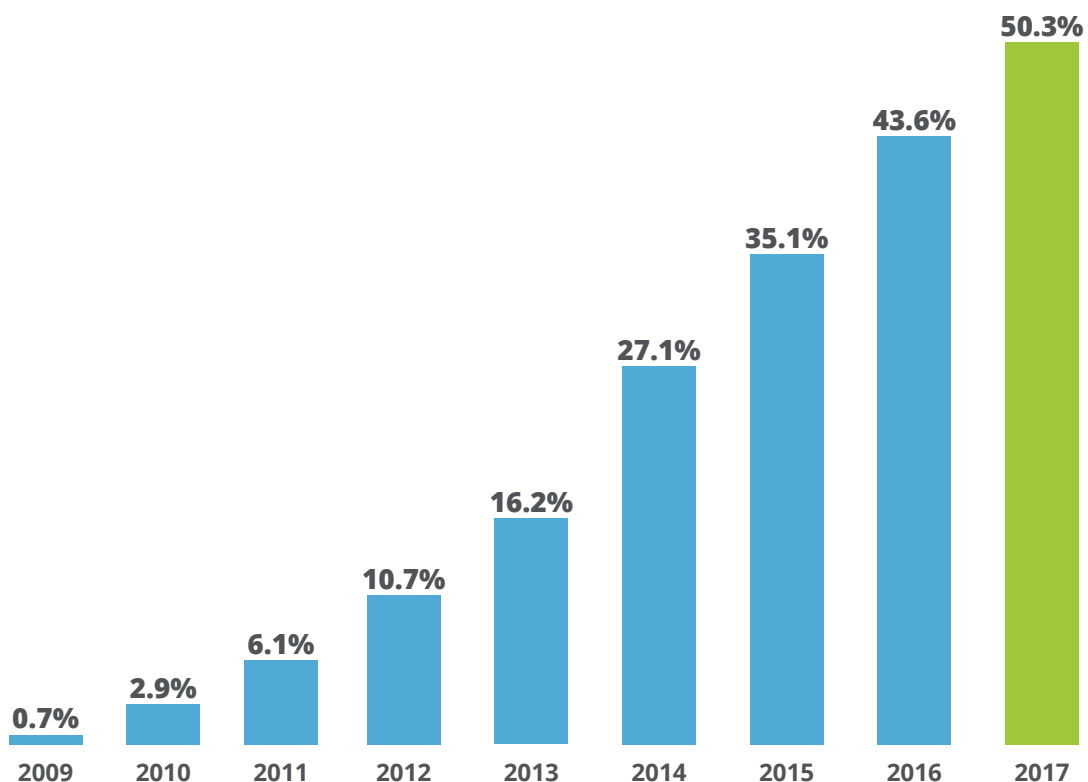
Responsive design is nice but doesn't always give the mobile user the experience they need. We interact with desktops differently than we do with mobile. If you are redesigning your website, consider a dedicated mobile user experience.

Prediction: Marketers will build dedicated mobile environments - a move away from responsive designs.

Studies show that a poor user experience on mobile has far-reaching implications. In fact, 57% of internet users will not recommend a company that has a poorly designed mobile website to friends and colleagues.²

Action: Start with mobile first design and keep mobile experience your primary consideration.

Mobile Web Traffic Growth (2009-2017)





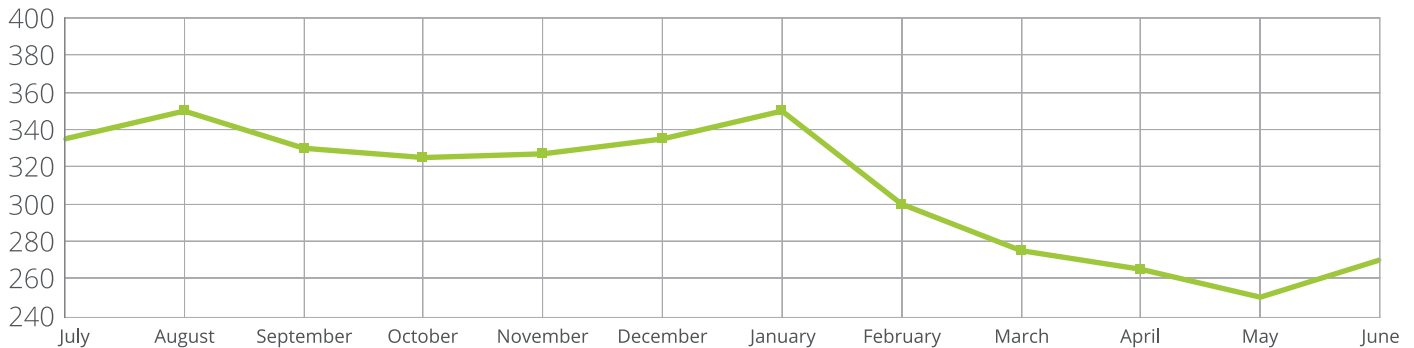
REALLOCATION OF BUDGETS TO PAID FACEBOOK

TWO



Social media will dominate paid search in 2018. In 2017, we saw a number of important trends occur, including a drop in organic Facebook reach,³ a rise in mobile video, and we saw users attending live video broadcasts on social media. Facebook continues to build out their AI messenger bots on Facebook messenger, and we saw our clients move a much larger portion of their budget over to paid Facebook ads during the year.

ORGANIC FACEBOOK ENGAGEMENT 2016/17



Prediction: Marketers will shift their emphasis away from Facebook organic placement in favor of Facebook’s paid placement.

Facebook and Instagram Stories continue to fuel high engagement numbers and the trend will continue into 2018. Stories allows users to record moments from their day, or a simple series of images. These story feeds are typically deleted within 24 hours of posting. The rise in popularity of this medium offers advertisers a great opportunity to place ads in the story feed.

Action: Use Facebook and Instagram Stories to take advantage of the “fresh” content factor.

Prediction: Images will still be valuable, but video advertising will dominate Facebook and Instagram.

Facebook video ads receive 10-30% more views, and populate up to 11 times longer in news feeds.⁴ Video advertising on Facebook is typically short (15-30 seconds) and requires messaging to be clear both with and without audio. Why no sound? Because 85% of video viewed on Facebook is watched without sound.⁵ Visual and animated text content with clear calls to action are going to provide you better results.

Action: Test various video lengths in your advertising, but start with shorter “more digestible” video advertising with clear text.



THE POWER OF INFLUENCER MARKETING CONTINUES TO GROW

THREE



The fact is that entire businesses have sprung up almost overnight on the backs of influencers, having more and more companies take notice. Companies are investing heavily to pair or “collaborate” with influencers with thousands if not millions of followers to either launch or grow their businesses. The value here come from pairing with the right kind of influencer who is already reaching an audience that matches your target demographic.⁶

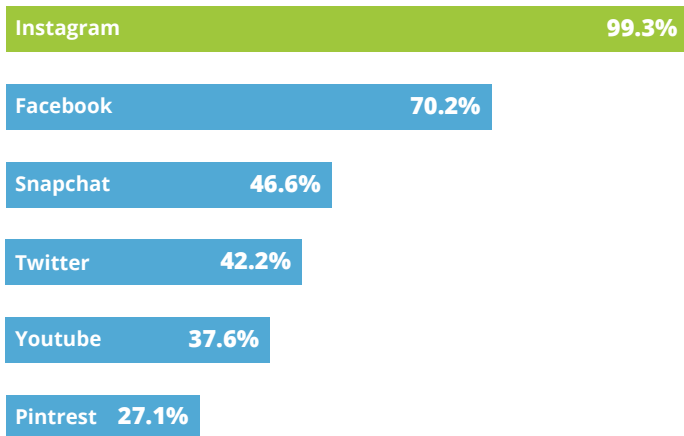
Prediction: Investment in social media influencers to grow exponentially in 2018 as businesses try to capitalize off influencers’ built-in audiences and extended reach.

Studies have shown that nearly 20% of consumer purchase decisions are influenced by Facebook posts or YouTube videos. Moreover, while buying at a physical location, 60% of consumers have been influenced by a social media post or a blog review.⁷ Another study indicated that, on average, businesses generate \$6.50 in revenue for every dollar invested in influencer marketing. This spread comes from 70% of advertisers making \$2 or more, and 13% make \$20 or more per dollar invested.⁸

Action: Work with influencers in your industry niche for the greatest ROI.

Prediction: Businesses will focus most of their influencer marketing investment on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, as opposed to other platforms like Twitter.

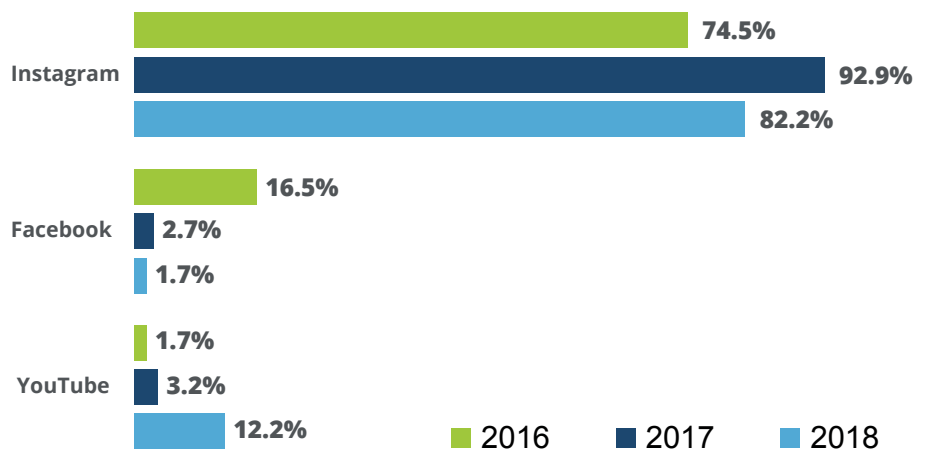
Platforms Influencers Use in 2017 (%)



A study conducted by Hashoff shows the distribution of influencers across platforms in 2017.⁹

While some influencers focus on a single platform, others choose to distribute content across multiple platforms.

Preferred Platform Last Year, This Year, and Next Year



In the associated graph, we see the projected shift in influencer platform preference, with the main focus in 2018 on Instagram and YouTube.

Action: Focus your influencer efforts on the highest value platforms.



**VIDEO REIGNS
SUPREME**

FOUR



The rise of video for both content and advertising is staggering. On mobile, people are not prepared to read paragraphs of content. With the shift to mobile we need to move away from heavy text content and apply more video content. Video accounts for 88% higher time on-site, video has 1200% more shares than images and text combined, and video drives 157% more search traffic.¹⁰

Video allows you to provide more information faster, it can improve on- and off-site SEO, and video will continue to be the highest type of content consumed in 2018.

As an advertising tool, video is powerful and affordable on both Facebook and YouTube. This clear preference for video should be worked into your marketing budget in 2018. As Google PPC advertising grows more competitive and expensive, video advertising on Facebook and YouTube can cost a fraction of a single paid click on Google.

Prediction: Video will produce better returns for marketers, while static image ads become less effective.

A study from Wordstream showed that 59% of executives, if given the choice between reading content or watching a video of the same content, prefer video.¹¹

It's been suggested that video is 52 times more likely to show up on page one of Google than a text article. Video can be leveraged as a tool of transparency to show your audience what sets you apart from your competition. Additionally, using video on landing pages has been shown to increase conversion rates up to 80% and combining that with your mobile landing pages makes these pages more valuable.¹²

Action: Build video content to replace long-form text content.

Prediction: Marketers will replace existing text content with video on mobile pages.

Facebook video has greatly increased reach. Interaction and shares on Facebook video has outpaced YouTube.

A recent study of 167,000 Facebook users' posts showed that native Facebook videos performed better, averaging 110% more interactions and 478% more shares than posting a YouTube link of a video. In December 2016, this number skyrocketed with Facebook videos receiving a 1055% higher average share rate than YouTube videos. Interaction and engagement beat out YouTube over 300%.¹¹

Actions: Upload your video content directly to Facebook for higher engagement and reach.

Prediction: Live video will help expand your Facebook organic reach and engagement.

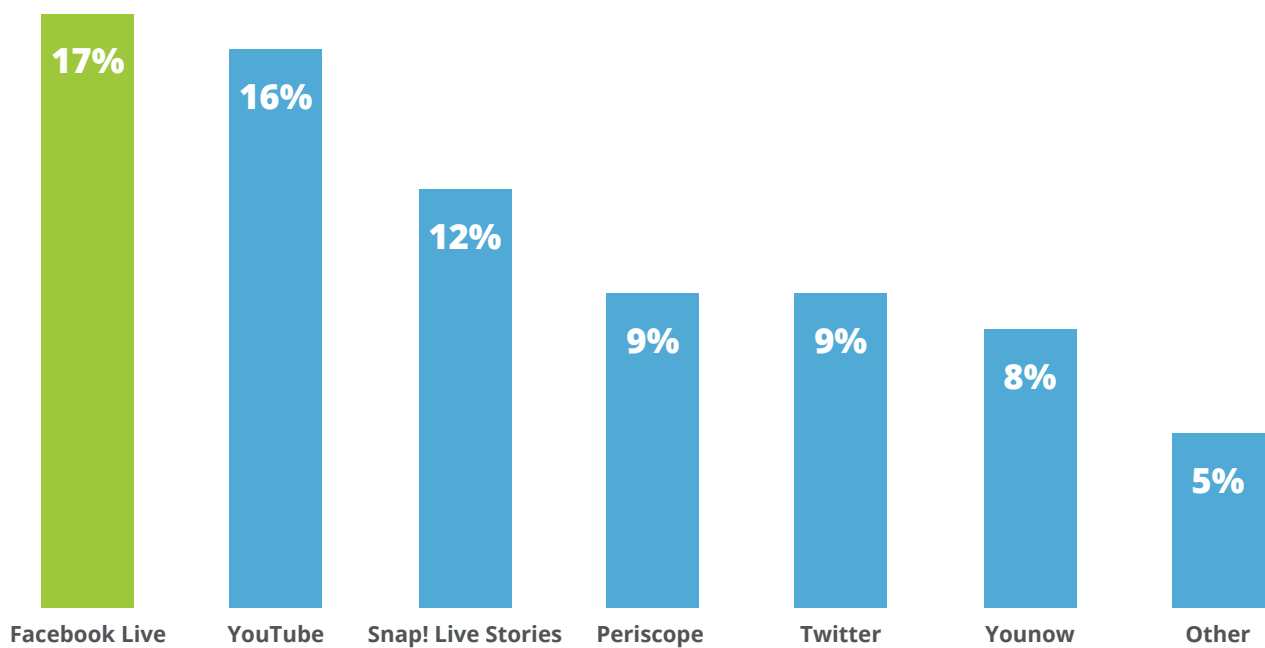


Studies have shown that 80% of customers would prefer to watch live video than read a blog, and 82% prefer live video from a brand on social posts. Facebook also prioritizes Facebook Live video content above other video content on its platform.

With Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube all providing a means to produce live video, the demand for live video will continue to grow, and so will its reach.

Action: Invest time in producing live video directly from a mobile device.

Percentage of respondents who streamed live video on the following platforms





**2018 IS THE
YEAR FOR AMP**

FIVE



Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) has generated a lot of buzz in 2017, but the adoption rates across non-media sites has been slow, mainly due to the effort required to convert a regular lead generation or eCommerce website into AMP.

Prediction: Accelerated Mobile Pages will be embraced by traditional lead and eCommerce websites in 2018.

More tools and plugins will come to market in 2018, making the conversion easier and less painful. Although Google doesn't directly link improved rankings to AMP, it does score sites on usability and load speed, both byproducts of AMP. Additionally, Google studies have shown that a one-second load delay results in a 7% reduction in conversion.¹⁶ More recently Google has released new data showing that 53% of users will abandon a site if it takes longer than 3 seconds to load.¹⁷

Beyond this we expect our mobile viewing experience to remain fluid, any load lag, scroll lag, or unprompted page refresh will exponentially increase the chances of a user bouncing from your site and not returning. Using tools like Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) help reduce this friction and improve conversion rates.

Action: Invest in AMP development for your key pages.

Prediction: There will continue to be direct correlation between load speeds and improved conversion rates in 2018.

One recent Google study showed that eCommerce sites that implemented AMP pages had an average 20% higher conversion rate than those that did not. An additional poll showed that over 51% of users prefer to click an AMP link site over a regular mobile site because they prefer "a stripped-down version of a site when they were reading something" on their mobile device.¹⁸

Removing navigation obstacles and improving mobile load speeds with AMP can help users get the information they want and make their conversion decisions faster.

Action: Prioritize improving load speed to improve conversion rates.



**GOOGLE MY BUSINESS
TO OWN LOCAL
BUSINESS LISTINGS**

SIX



After losing out on eCommerce to Amazon, Google is doing everything it can to make sure it dominates the Local Search Environment. In 2017, we saw a frenzy of changes on Google Local. Some of the noted enhancements to GMB includes Google Websites, Google Posts, Google Messaging, Google Q&A, Google Bookings, improved Google API, and of course Google AdWords Express.

Predictions

- GMB will replace your website as the most important source for local results.
- Google will continue to crack down on local spam with the introduction of Verified Businesses. This began with locksmiths and plumbers and is expected to extend to other verticals in 2018.
- Google will continue to focus on mobile enhancements to make their local mobile experience the best in the industry.
- Google is expected to continue to take direct aim at HomeAdvisor and Yelp to further solidify their position as the number one lead source for local.
- Active GMB profiles utilizing reviews, posts, and engagement features will have a greater ROI.

Local search is a clear priority for Google. The GMB platform has been designed to appeal to the local mobile user with calling, scheduling, and “get directions” functionality. Google studies have shown that visitors searching for your business will often use GMB alone to contact you.

Business owners with a website linked to their GMB profiles received 25%-35% more traffic.¹⁹ Keeping your GMB information fresh for local search will be seen more valuable by Google and can contribute positively to your search rankings.

Action: Use every GMB feature that applies to your specific business, and keep profile content fresh.



**VOICE SEARCH
CONTINUES TO GAIN
POPULARITY**

SEVEN

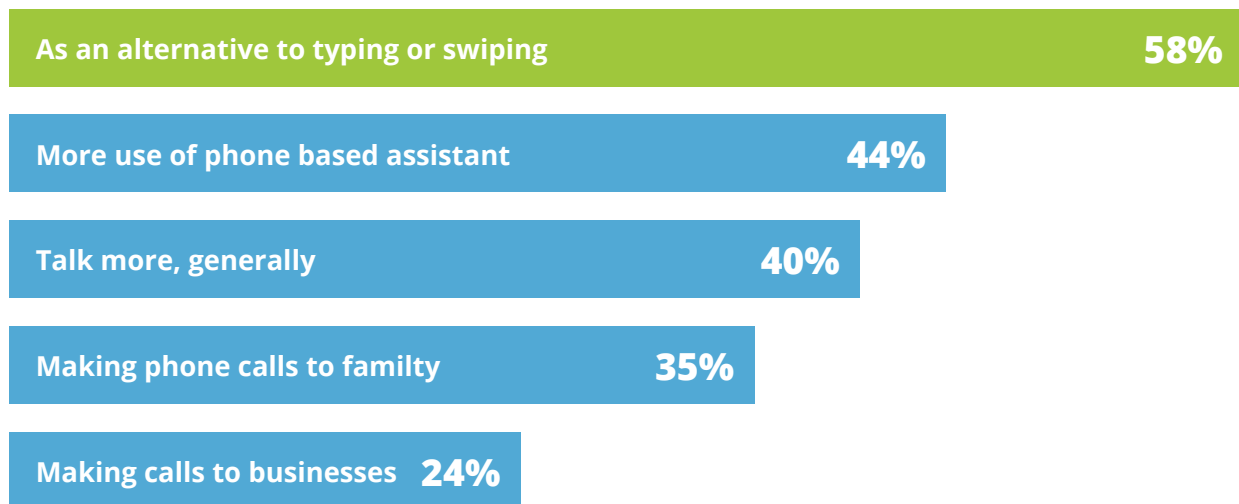


On October 4th, 2017, Google announced a range of Voice First devices, further indicating their commitment to advancing the capabilities of voice search technology. At the same time, Apple has made strides to improve Siri while Microsoft continues to make some outstanding improvements to their voice search service Cortana. Devices like Google Home and Amazon Echo put powerful search and purchasing capabilities into our living rooms. So, what does this mean to marketers?

Prediction: As voice search algorithms get better, more and more people will be using voice for search.

The use of voice search continued to gain ground in 2017 and will continue into 2018. In fact, 1 in every 5 searches on Google Android is a voice search, and 40% of adults now use voice search once per day.²⁰ That means we need to be building our content to meet the demands of voice search. The first big difference is that we don't search the same way with voice as we do when we are typing.

Voice trends for owners of digital assistants



Speech is gaining ground quickly over typing and texting because it is 3 times as fast with 20% fewer errors.²¹ Most voice searches are much longer and are very specific. What that means for us is that our content needs to answer questions and our product descriptions need to be more detailed and keyword rich.

Action: Write content for voice search that answers questions, utilizing longer tail keywords and phrases.

Prediction: Voice SEO will focus on Siri, Google Now, Amazon Echo, and Microsoft Cortana to generate more traffic.

It is important to know the types of results that your smartphone returns after a voice search. For instance, if you ask Siri on an iPhone "Find me a dentist near here," Yelp listings will be returned. Based on these results, it is well worth it to put work into building out your Yelp listings. The same may be true for other off-site directories for your industry.

Action: Optimize your listing for voice search to take advantage of local search traffic.



AI AND MACHINE LEARNING

EIGHT



Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are impacting the underlying fabric of digital marketing. Systems such as RankBrain introduced by Google are designed to better understand the needs of individuals to provide them a better user experience within your niche. The use of machine learning and artificial intelligence is being leveraged to build context around search queries to provide much more content-rich results. Even rich snippets on search results are automated now by Google.

Prediction: Google's focus on providing highly targeted search results with RankBrain will continue the need to produce rich, valuable, and highly targeted content.

The signals used by Google in search queries to provide results have grown, and ongoing search results are being refined through AI and machine learning to provide highly contextual search results. Beyond signals like keyword relevance, links, and anchor text, we also have domain authority, freshness, engagement, related topics, and content depth that all contribute to search rankings.

This means that Google wants to provide deep contextual results that people find engaging and valuable. RankBrain considers a number of factors to determine content value, including calculating dwell time being spent by user, how long users are staying on your content, as well as the click through rate of your content.²²

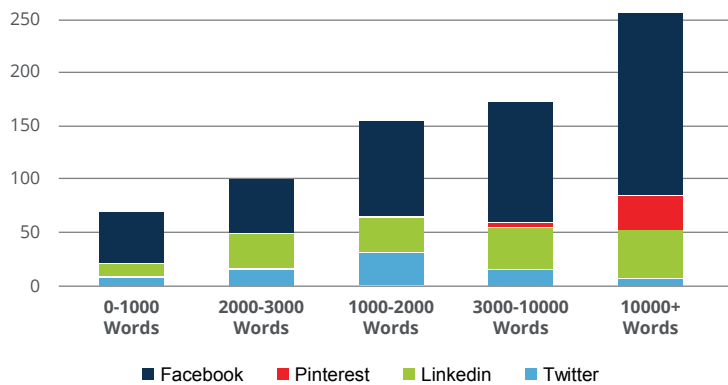
Machine learning also means that SEO ranking factors for content will vary significantly across industries. In the past you used to draw inferences across the web, today SEO is specific to industry. Your content quality and context are more valuable than the quantity with machine learning in the search process.





In analyzing content across three different industries:

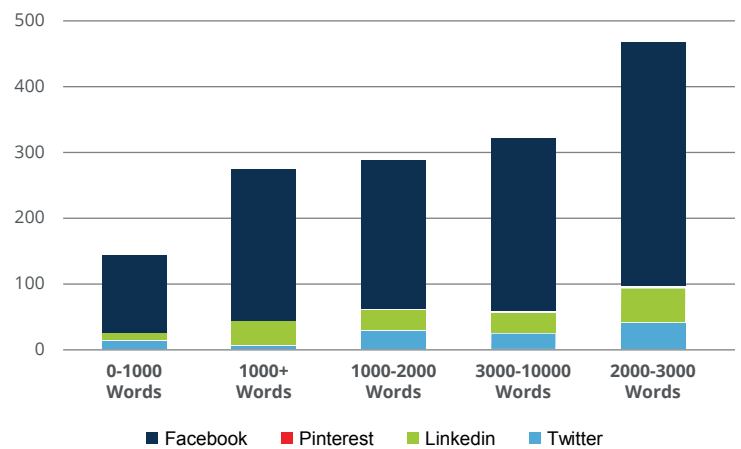
Law Firms average shares by content length



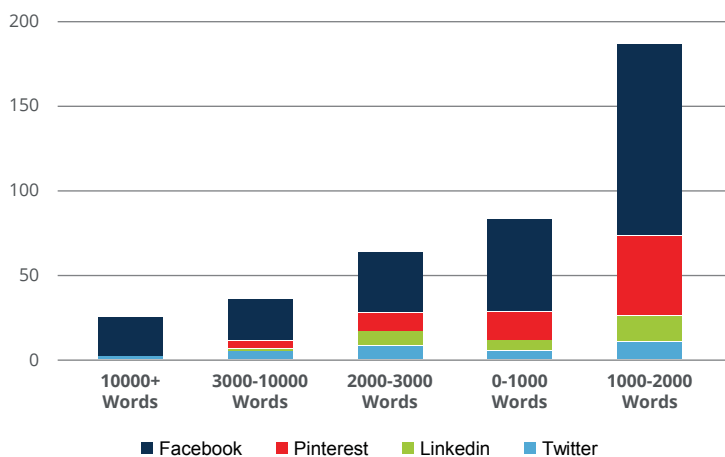
Content for law firms that provided the highest rate of shares and engagement was over 10,000 words in length.

Content centered around healthcare with the most shares and engagement was much shorter, between 2,000-3,000 words in length.

Healthcare average shares by content length



Home improvement average shares by content length



The best content for home improvement used 1,000-2,000 words – the lowest in word count of these three industries. Using a piece of content with 10,000 words for home improvement could hurt your SEO, being that this is not the preferred content length for this industry.



Action: Build highly targeted content that's contextually robust and the proper length for your industry.

Prediction: Creating value based content for RankBrain, AI, and machine learning in mind will provide a greater likelihood of showing up in search rankings in 2018.

As more search is done using voice, long tail keywords and keyword phrases will continue to be a priority. By focusing on specific keyword phrases in your content as well as subheaders to help narrow the contextual focus of your content, RankBrain rewards this type of information with higher search rankings. Focus on well researched original content and valuable educational content over simple sharing of content to better your search rankings.

Action: Build long tail keywords and phrases into your targeted content.

Prediction: AI and machine learning will drive more curated experiences for online mobile buyers.

Business with online marketing places, such as eCommerce sites, are looking to use these technologies to build custom shopping experiences across platforms. When considering the mobile audience, businesses that have implemented these technologies to provide more targeted "buying recommendations" have in some cases shown up to a 10% boost in purchase activity.²³ These technologies can also curate "complimentary" products for the buyer when making their purchase.

Action: Use AI to capitalize on buyer data to improve purchase activity.

Prediction: Chatbots and messaging powered by AI and machine learning will help businesses scale more quickly.

AI and machine learning are becoming more hands on with customers. Innovations like chatbots for messaging allow customers to interact with businesses quickly and accurately. Use of chatbots on websites and social media messaging continue to accelerate – by the end of 2018, 30% of our interactions with technology will be done through chatbot-based "conversations."²³ Development of chatbots for your business to answer FAQs, contextually based questions, or scheduling is a reality that you can capitalize on.

Action: Apply basic chatbots to streamline the customer experience.

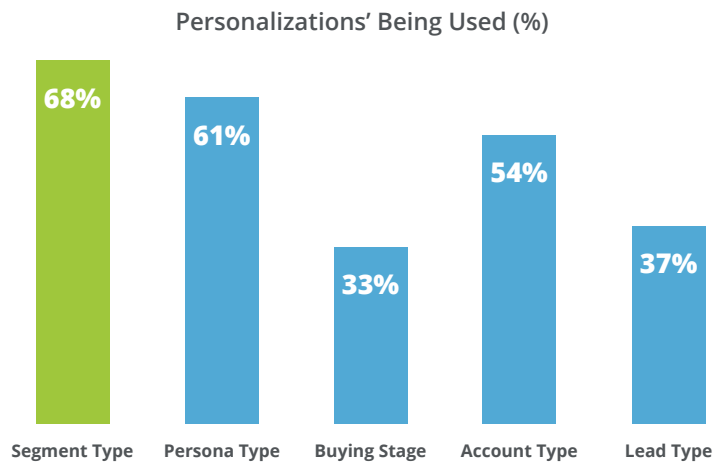


THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONALIZATION

NINE



Mobile devices have become an extension of our customers' personalities. These personalities often determine how they prefer to interact with a business on their mobile device. At the same time, our ability to adapt our messaging and mobile experiences for our customers has never been greater. Personalizing the individual customer journey helps customers feel as if we are an extension of their personality – if we can personalize the right way.



Prediction: eCommerce-based businesses will be able to use multiple data points to create more personalized experiences for customers.

Personalization still comes down to the data, harnessing it and applying it to the customer journey. Data collected from previous eCommerce purchases, social media, and mobile apps can be used to create personalized follow-ups, text push notifications, and personalized promotions. Personalization can improve our ability to nurture our clients and customers.

One study showed that 70% of people visiting your website are not ready to buy due to a lack of nurturing; additionally, 70% of businesses don't personalize their content.²⁴ This gap indicates an opportunity to gain market share by personalizing your content when nurturing your customers. Personalized nurturing comes from site content, email automation, Google and Facebook advertising, messaging, and much more.

Action: Personalize your client nurturing funnel for better ROI.

Prediction: Geo-fencing data will be used to leverage proximity marketing and differentiate personal customer journeys.

Geo-location and IP data can be utilized to create personalized location-based content. Geographic indicators and dynamic web content (such as local images) can be created and will change depending on where a user is viewing your site. You can also base your personalized messaging on local audiences by time of day or proximity to your location.²⁵ The ROI of personalization cannot be understated. In a study by Harvard Business Review, it was found that Individual customers who perceived brand content to be tailored to their specific needs were 40% more willing to buy than brands who didn't.²⁶

Action: Create personalized content based on geographic locations as well as buyer demographics. Apply automation technologies for streaming personalized customer journeys.



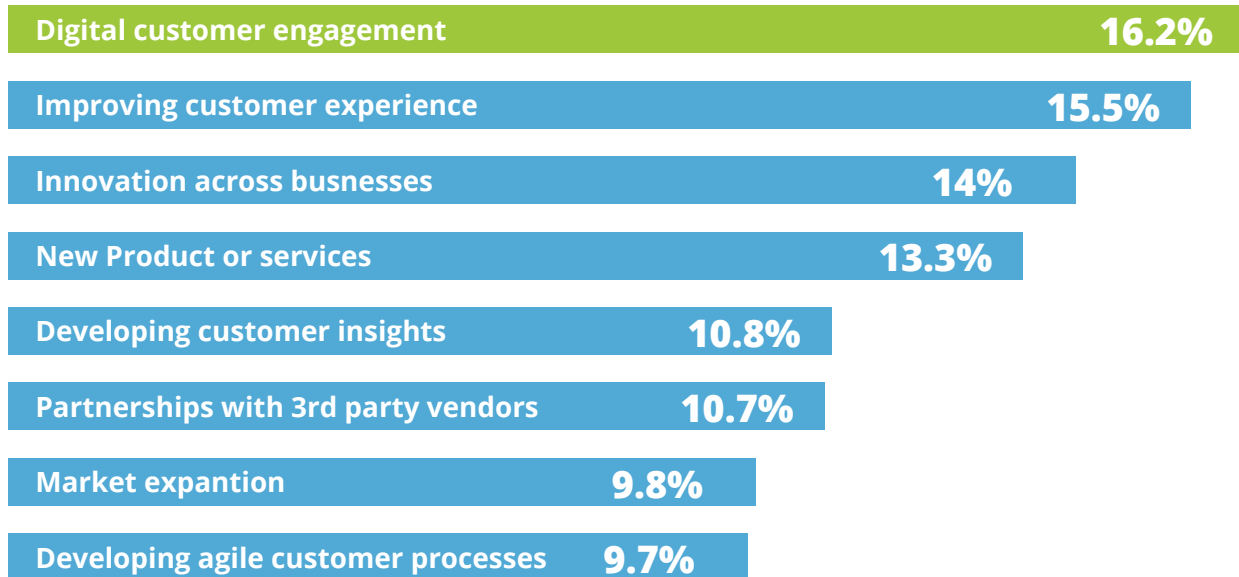
**AN INCREASED
EMPHASIS ON CLIENT
ENGAGEMENT**

TEN



Each year we talk about the importance of user experience and the ability to convert more visitors to customers through conversion optimization. As lead generation costs increase and competition intensifies, this strategy will continue to be important.

Prediction: Marketers will become more strategic about understanding how to increase the number of repeat interactions with their brand through conversion optimization and strategic content development.



In the coming year, we see marketers focusing more on the customer journey and how to increase engagement across the entire marketing funnel. As digital marketing becomes progressively more data driven, optimizing engagement means becoming clear about your KPIs.

A huge emphasis will be placed on measuring content engagement. This means better understanding your prospects and what content keeps them coming back for more. Which channels work best to help move clients through the sales funnel and which content medium strengthens your clients' psychological and emotional commitment to your brand. Finally, marketers in 2018 will continue to optimize activity across devices – to make sure that there is a smooth transition as users move from one device to another.

Actions: Consider moving beyond analytics to user experience tools that record and review visitor sessions across devices. Also add heatmaps, form analytics, and conversion funnels to improve your overall client engagement.

IN CONCLUSION

2018 is going to be a huge year for all of these trends, and the truth is we could make a top 10 trends list in each of these, but the common thread among all of them is mobile. There is no denying the power of mobile and the advantages you can gain by making it a prime focus of your 2018 marketing strategies. From the basics like thinking mobile first with your websites to the more advanced AI and machine learning technologies, it all comes down to what the most valuable trend is for your specific business model. So, watch these predictions closely, apply the most sensible, and have a fantastic 2018!



2018

DIGITAL MARKETING

TRENDS

For 14 years National Positions has been on the forefront of the digital marketing industry. We focus on combining the worlds of technology, data analysis, and creative design into our digital marketing strategies. Our data and know-how alone give us the edge required to effectively help our clients beat the competition. We focus our strategies on driving more traffic to your business, nurturing your lead pipeline, and helping convert your leads more rapidly. We look forward to helping your brand and business reach new heights in 2018 and beyond.

Contact Us for More Information:



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www.nationalpositions.com



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SOURCES

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