



Online Marketing Trends for 2015 and Beyond



Trends in the Volatile World of Internet Marketing

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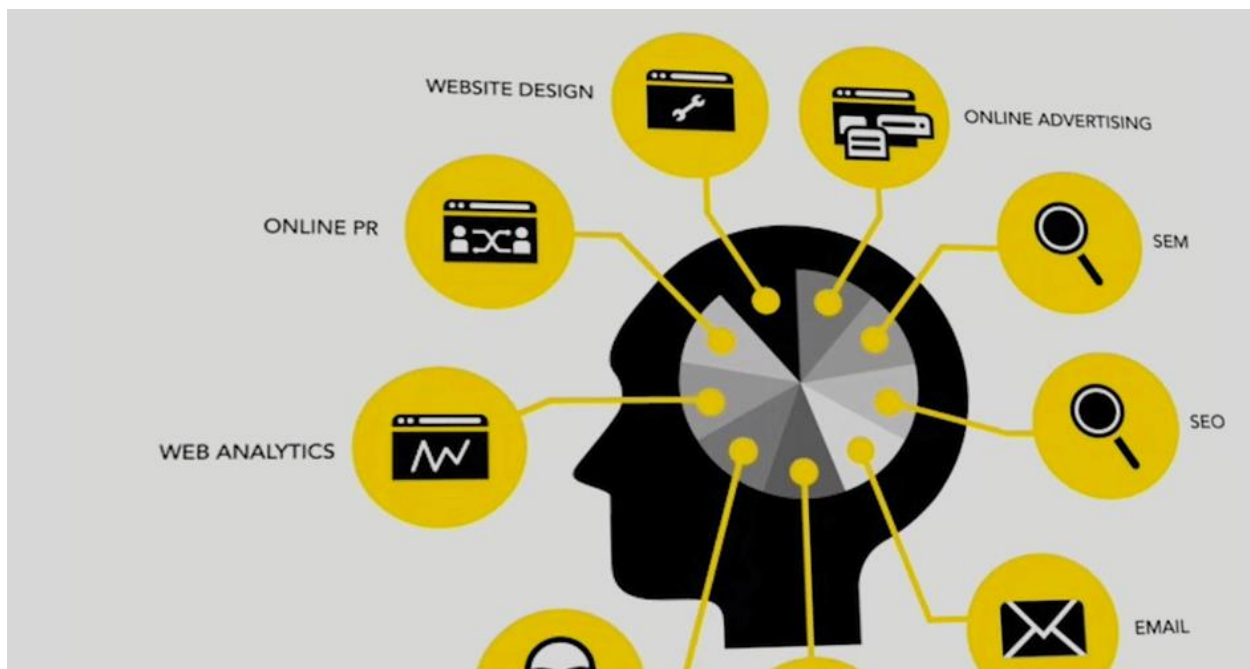
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Online Marketing Trends for 2015 and Beyond

In the world of online marketing, the only constant is change. In 2015, marketers will have access to more technologies, tactics and advertising channels to choose from than ever before, and finding a focus amid the rapidly evolving digital world is perhaps the greatest challenge of all that companies have to face. Today's marketers certainly have a lot to think about, considering fast-changing consumer behaviors and evolving business models.



As the online marketing tactics of old sink into obsolescence, businesses need to be constantly on the ball to take advantage of new technologies in order to create an optimal experience for their customers. Being quick to take up new technologies themselves, consumers are accessing the Internet in an ever-expanding variety of different ways, and businesses need to take advantage of this fact in order to increase their reach and solidify the position of their brands in the digital world.

Today, the most important metrics for determining a brand's performance include not only revenue growth, but also customer satisfaction, return on investment, customer acquisition and customer retention. In order to meet these goals, companies need to maintain a versatile strategy that takes the changing online marketing climate into account. Over the coming years, companies will continue

to see a growth in mobile and social media usage, social search and content that provides genuine value.

This white paper takes a look at the ongoing and upcoming trends in the volatile world of Internet marketing, beginning the most significant challenges that companies face in today's marketing climate. The subsequent sections discuss the most important marketing trends of 2015 and beyond, including the rise of content marketing, big data analytics, marketing automation, mobile marketing and conversion rate optimization among others.

Biggest Challenges in Online Marketing in 2015

According to research carried out for the 2015 State of Marketing report by Salesforce, ***the most significant challenge facing businesses this year will be new business development followed by quality of leads and staying up-to-date with technologies and trends related to online marketing.*** Many of these challenges concern the importance of quality over quantity, and while this is nothing new, the pressure on brands to deliver value to their audiences is constantly increasing.



In the fast-paced world of digital marketing, every year approaches with a new set of challenges as consumers have more and more power at their fingertips and brands have less control than they ever had before. For a brand to survive in the increasingly competitive online marketplace, it needs to strive to build up its image and earn trust and respect among its intended audience. As a result, the more promotionally-orientated marketing methods of old are no longer satisfactory alone.

With the increasing prevalence of social media and the fact that more people are spending more time online than ever before, brands must focus on providing emotional value to their customers by way of relevant content, social engagement and a personalized approach towards individual groups of customers. The pressure on companies to better understand their target audiences and connect with them in a meaningful way is perhaps the single-biggest challenge that brands face today.

Given the fast-moving world of technology and the emergence of new trends, it shouldn't come as many surprise that businesses all over the world are especially concerned about adapting their marketing strategies to keep up. According to information collected from more than 500 professional service firms for the 2015 Professional Services Marketing Priorities report published by the Hinge Research Institute, businesses prioritized the following top five challenges for the next year:

- **Attracting new business**
- **Finding and keeping valuable employees**
- **Satisfying client demands and expectations**
- **Dealing with economic downturn and increasing competition**
- **Strategizing marketing campaigns**

With 72.1% of companies citing the attraction and development of new business as the biggest challenge for the next year, businesses appear to be growing anxious about the increasing rate of change in the world of technology and the way it concerns their marketing strategies. By contrast, the other challenges facing businesses received less than half the amount of responses, making it clear that finding new business is undoubtedly the most pressing concern.

Mobile

According to the 2015 State of Marketing Report, around two thirds of respondents planned to spend more on social media advertising, social media marketing, social media engagement, location-based mobile marketing and mobile apps. In the US, only 20% of companies stated that they would be decreasing their overall marketing expenditures in 2015, compared to 12% in the UK, 15% in Australia and only 4% in Canada. Additionally, the majority of companies considered mobile and social media to form a critical part of their marketing campaigns.



As the lines between the various different areas of online marketing become ever-increasingly blurry, targeting mobile Internet users is already something that companies need to take into account with all areas of their marketing strategies. Mobile optimization has already been a major priority for many businesses for the last couple of years, but as mobile becomes ever more ubiquitous, many companies will find in 2015 that simply having a responsive website will not be enough.

Google has already stated that it takes mobile usability into account when ranking and indexing websites, so mobile-friendly content is clearly important for both the search engines and user experience. In other words, whether or not your website provides an optimal experience for mobile users helps to determine your standing in the search results. If you're still using things like Flash, small font sizes, poorly-optimized touch navigation and unresponsive layouts, you'll be left behind.

However, while every online marketer should already know about the importance of having a mobile-friendly website, the coming years will likely see many businesses integrating mobile into all sectors of their digital marketing strategies: *content marketing, social media marketing and paid mobile advertising*. It is also important to understand that social and mobile are inextricably linked when it comes to digital marketing, since businesses need to take into account how mobile users consume information and engage with content posted on social media when compared to desktop users.

If you are still not convinced that mobile is now an essential marketing medium, consider the fact that mobile is becoming a more common way for people to access the Internet than ever before. Technology research firm Gartner has projected that, by 2018, more than half of all Internet users around the world will be accessing the Web exclusively from mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. Given the freedom that they provide and the rapidly decreasing prices of mobile devices, this increase in popularity shouldn't really come as any surprise. Even in 2015, it is expected that around one-billion people globally will use a mobile device as their only way to access the Internet. Additionally, mobile is already the primary medium for shopping online, and it is statistics like these that continue to revolutionize the way in which companies reach out to their customers.

To conclude this section, it is important to stress that, while mobile sales are skyrocketing, that does not mean that you should disregard desktop users. You will no doubt have heard the excitable promises over the last few years that the next year will be the 'Year of the Mobile', but in reality, there never has been such a year, and there never will be. There are just different ways of accessing the Internet, and there always will be, whether by Smart TV, smartphone, tablet, gaming console or desktop computer. ***While mobile is set to dominate the online world, it will never do so exclusively for the simple reason that the best browsing experience will always be on the bigger screen.***

Social Media

As explained in the previous section, maintaining or increasing spending on social media marketing, particularly where it concerns mobile, is also a priority for around two thirds of businesses. The social media scene has seen enormous change over the last few years, and it seems hard to imagine now, that in spite of already having almost 900 million active daily users, Facebook has only been around since 2004.



However, the social networking giant is certainly not without its fair share of controversy, not least because consumers are growing increasingly tired of intrusive advertising and lack of online privacy.

With its vast built-in audience, Facebook certainly isn't going anywhere soon, but in spite of its increasing user base, the reach of Facebook posts from company pages is decreasing constantly. This decline can be largely attributed to Facebook's own changes, since it recently decided to limit the number of posts from company pages that actually appear on users' timelines. This change has a knock-on effect on paid Facebook advertising, which shouldn't come as any surprise.

The demand for paid advertising on the social network will no doubt increase as a result, posing a serious issue for companies with limited advertising budgets. Moreover, the cost of Facebook ads is also increasing, rising by as much as 10% between 2013 and 2014.

Twitter is also in the process of making some significant changes to its business advertising platform by offering increased flexibility with regards to publishing and targeting ads. The new platform even allows businesses to pay for specific performance-based actions instead of just relying on promoted tweets and pay-per-click advertising.

Though currently in its early stages, Twitter's new advertising model will be of particular interest to small businesses who are concerned with paying for results that directly lead to revenue, rather than those that merely serve to increase brand visibility.

There will no doubt be major changes effecting the other major social networks too. LinkedIn, traditionally the number-one network for B2B marketers, will likely become more popular for B2C marketers as well. With its more professional approach, LinkedIn will continue to be the Web's first stop for recruitment and professionally-orientated marketing. Image-based social media isn't slowing down either, with platforms like Instagram and Pinterest continuing to grow. With its 200 million users, Instagram in particular is of interest to many businesses, not least because of its recently launched in-feed video advertising and its fast-growing user base.

This section would not be complete without a mention of Google+, statistically the second-most popular social network after Facebook. However, the future of the network appears to be uncertain, and perhaps the reason why many people appear to be using it, is that it is closely integrated with Google's plethora of other services. As far as businesses are concerned, particularly local ones, Google+ remains an important social media platform, but it will likely face major changes over the next year or two. It is also worth noting that the related Google Authorship feature was discontinued entirely in 2014, in spite of it briefly being touted as an essential tool for online marketers.

On a final note, it is also worth mentioning the increasing demand of anonymity on the Internet. With new social media platforms, such as the ad-free Ello, threatening to shake up the online social scene in the coming years, brands may find themselves facing major problems as more and more users neglect the heavily corporate-orientated networks like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Content

It shouldn't come as any surprise that content marketing isn't going anywhere in the foreseeable future. In fact, it continues to get more important every year, and it is already well-established as the core of any successful online marketing campaign. However, content marketing still faces a struggle, not least because of the ever-increasing amount of content out there and the increasing emphasis on quality, relevancy and uniqueness.



With the rise of new mediums and the increasing popularity of social media and mobile Internet, 2015 will also see a shift towards more personalized content delivered towards specific audience segments. In fact, publication of great, value-adding content is only the first step: the way that said content is distributed will also become increasingly important. More than ever before, content will need to be published and distributed strategically so that it reaches the right people at the right time, whether it's in the form of an email newsletter, a social media post or even just a simple blog post. It should also go without saying that content must be optimized for both search and mobile so that the right people can find it and enjoy an optimal user experience.

The search engines continue to evolve, getting better every year at weeding out content that offers little of value to its target audience, including excessively promotional

content, thin content with very little substance, unoriginal content and irrelevant content. As has already been the case for some years now, less is more with regards to content marketing: quality is constantly being enforced as the number-one concern. Companies that embrace the potential of content marketing by publishing content that entertains or educates its audience will, on the other hand, continue to be rewarded by the search engines with higher rankings and visibility.

Guest blogging is another area of content marketing that will likely see major changes over the next year. After Google's Matt Cutts denounced guest blogging for the purposes of search engine optimization back in January, 2014, many marketers were understandably concerned. Over the last couple of years, guest blogging has been given a bad name, and this is certainly not without reason. While once a respected marketing strategy, guest blogging quickly became a quick and cheap way for impatient marketers to build backlinks to their websites and increase their visibility in the search engines. Needless to say, guest blogging quickly ended up being closely associated with spam. However, cleverer content marketers know that guest blogging for human readers by publishing value-adding content on reputable and relevant websites is a very different matter, and such content will not be penalized by Google either. Ultimately, guest blogging may just adapt and repair its reputation in the coming year.

Companies will also continue to diversify their content marketing strategies to take into account the increasing popularity of newer mediums. Long gone are the days when content marketing was largely about blogging, and while blogging certainly still has its place as a way to draw in a regular readership and increase brand reputation and awareness, other mediums should not be neglected. The Internet is more visual than ever before, and this carries over to mobile and social as well. The rapid increase in popularity of platforms like Instagram will likely see the importance of visual content matching that of written content, particularly in the case of B2C markets. Other forms of content, such as software, games, infographics, videos and in-depth written content such as whitepapers and case studies will also become more important.

Email will also continue to maintain a high profile, in spite of some people claiming that it is slowly disappearing as the primary way to keep in contact. In fact, according to the 2015 State of Marketing, email will become even more important in 2015, with some 73% of businesses considering it a critical part of their marketing strategies, a figure that is actually significantly higher than it was in 2014. The continuing importance of email is directly attributable to the rise of mobile and the fact that most people have constant access to their email accounts and are statistically more likely to subscribe to an email newsletter from a mobile device. As a result, the importance of responsively designed emails is also greater than ever.

Conclusion

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