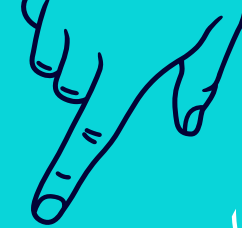
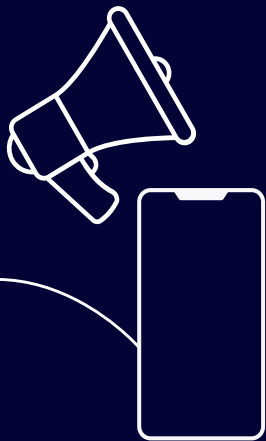


2020 Digital Marketing Trends.



What Does 2020 Have in Store for Digital Marketers?

Will 2020 be the “Year of Social Ecommerce?” The “Year of Messaging Apps?” Or, perhaps the “Year of Interactive Content?”

The answer is no. Too often, marketers make bold, overarching claims that the upcoming year will be dominated by a single, exciting trend.

But the reality is that today's digital marketing landscape is far too multifaceted to be reduced to a single buzzword. The truth is, in marketing, the theme of

every year is always the same: it's the “Year of the Customer.” The never-ending goal is to better reach, engage, and serve both your potential and existing customers. And, in 2020, there are a plethora of new developments across the digital marketing spectrum ultimately aimed at helping your organization accomplish that goal.

In this guide, we've compiled 15 of the most important digital marketing trends you should be paying attention to in 2020. Many companies are already capitalizing on these trends with great success. And, with strategic perseverance, your organization can reap the benefits of these trends as well.

Don't Miss Our Social Media Trends Webinar!

January 23, 2020

Together with social media industry commentator and consultant, Matt Navarra, we'll discuss the key social trends covered in this handbook and how you can harness them in the year to come.

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Matt Navarra

Social media industry
commentator and consultant.

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Private Messaging Apps.

When your customers need support, they'd rather message you.

There are now a whopping 1.3 billion active users on Messenger (the favorite in North America) and over 1.5 billion on Whatsapp worldwide. With this proliferation, messaging apps present an extraordinary opportunity for businesses to connect with customers.

In the modern marketing funnel, there's a crucial phase that comes after the sale: delighting the customer. The importance of customer experience (CX) in today's landscape has blurred the line between marketing and customer service. While many organizations know the value of CX, their customer service channels have not caught up to 2020 consumer preferences.

Since 2015, messaging apps have been steadily gaining traction as the preferred method for customers to contact businesses—and this trend isn't showing any signs of slowing down. 70% of people

will now choose a 'Message Us' button over a 'Call Us' button when seeking customer support. And with messaging, customer satisfaction improves by 25% compared to phone calls.

“Would you rather wait 10 minutes on hold or wait 10 minutes for an answer on Facebook Messenger?”

– Stan Chudnovsky, Former Head of Product for Facebook Messenger

Why does this matter? Convenient customer service is essential for brand loyalty and trust. 79% of consumers claim they are more loyal to organizations that are easy and simple to contact. And when it comes to messaging apps, 69% of US consumers say that the ability to message a business instills confidence in the brand.



Private Messaging Apps.

Continued.

Deploying messaging apps for customer service can greatly improve overall CX. But the benefits don't stop there. With messaging apps, you'll enjoy the security of end-to-end encryption and GDPR compliance. And, by implementing chatbots, you'll be poised to profit from increased efficiency, automation, and round-the-clock availability.

Additionally, the departure from traditional phone systems makes messaging apps a great solution for global applications, international businesses, and verticals that require rapid turnaround times (e.g. hospitality and airlines).

Despite these benefits, many companies have been slow to adopt private messaging apps in their customer service operations.

A Falcon.io survey found that 54% of businesses still aren't using messaging apps for customer support—which shows a lag in the corporate world's response to this trend.

Conversely, savvy organizations are now integrating messaging apps in their omnichannel stack to create seamless experiences that meet 2020 consumers' expectations.

2020 will also see Facebook monetize WhatsApp with ads within the 'Status' tab, following up on Messenger Ads. This will bring the apps' personalization value (see Trend #6) into the advertising sphere.

Across the board, consumers are changing the ways they want to interact with brands—and customer service is no exception. In 2020, messaging apps will continue to solidify their status as a preferred communication channel, and likely an advertising one too. Companies that make this a priority in their CX strategy (and effectively integrate messaging apps in their tech stack) will be rewarded with more satisfied, engaged customers.



Interactive Marketing.

With content, participants are more engaged than spectators.

Both marketers and consumers have wanted more personalized content for years. And, in 2020, tech is now catching up to this demand. New technology is facilitating an exciting evolution in digital content: *interactivity*. In the age of personalization, interactive content formats are now being used to increase engagement and create immersive, individualized experiences.

An overwhelming 93% of marketers agree that interactive content effectively engages consumers (versus 70% for static content). Why the difference?

With interactive content, users become active participants, rather than passive listeners/readers. This, in turn, boosts

interest, retention, and brand affinity. And, through the use of chatbots, polls, and surveys, you can collect user input to deliver hyper-relevant, personalized content.

With so many interactive content formats to choose from, the potential for creativity is at an all-time high. Common categories include polls/quizzes, calculators, apps, interactive infographics, and 360° video. Other formats worthy of attention include social TV, dynamic ads, and Snapchat broadcasts. The possibilities are virtually endless.

Take Nescafé, for example, which ran a personality quiz on a dedicated microsite to determine, “*What is the right coffee for your organization?*” For another example of the push toward interactivity, we can look to Netflix’s recent Bandersnatch film.

The movie requires viewers to make a series of decisions with their remote, which then dictates how the ensuing plot will unfold.

While Bandersnatch is confined to entertainment, it represents a larger shift in the digital world: encouraging user participation and responding to their activities accordingly. At its core, that’s what interactive marketing is all about. In 2020, with the diligent benchmarking and monitoring, you’ll be able to discover the ideal forms and levels of interactivity that are best suited to your brand.



Online Reputation Management.

Your customers are talking about you and your competitors...are you listening?



Social proof is one of the most influential factors in modern consumer behavior. On average, people read 10 online reviews before making a final purchase decision. In 2019, 94% of digital shoppers reported that positive customer reviews increase trust in a brand. On the flip side, 89% of those same shoppers lose trust in a brand with negative reviews. Ultimately, what your customers say about you is far more powerful than what you say about yourself.

Consumers aren't the only ones analyzing your company's reviews—Google is watching as well.

The Google algorithm penalizes you for every bad review and rewards your competitors when they receive positive recommendations. It's estimated that reviews are the second most powerful factor in Google's local rankings.

For these reasons, online reputation management has become a mission-critical endeavor in 2020. To confront this task, you'll need to arm yourself with tools and data to effectively oversee your brand's public image online and on social media.

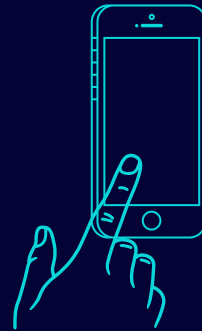
With the right software, you can take charge of your earned media management, mediating crises, benchmarking against the top-performing brands, and seizing opportunities across the digital spectrum.

Social media is the world's largest public forum (and focus group as Twitter calls itself). It's a goldmine of insights into the sentiment surrounding your brand (and your competitors). Such valuable insights cannot be ignored, so the challenge now lies in effective social media monitoring. In addition to monitoring, you should also be actively requesting/incentivizing customer feedback.

It's no secret that public perception and online reputation are vital to a brand's success—but it's becoming more important every year. In 2019, 17% of marketers spent over half their marketing budget on influencers. With so much emphasis on social proof, online reputation management in 2020 will continue to progress from a "nice-to-have" to a must-have.



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70% of people would choose a 'Message Us' button over a 'Call Us' button when looking for customer support.

- LivePerson

Authenticity & Diversity.

Glossy perfection is falling out of style.
It's time to get real.

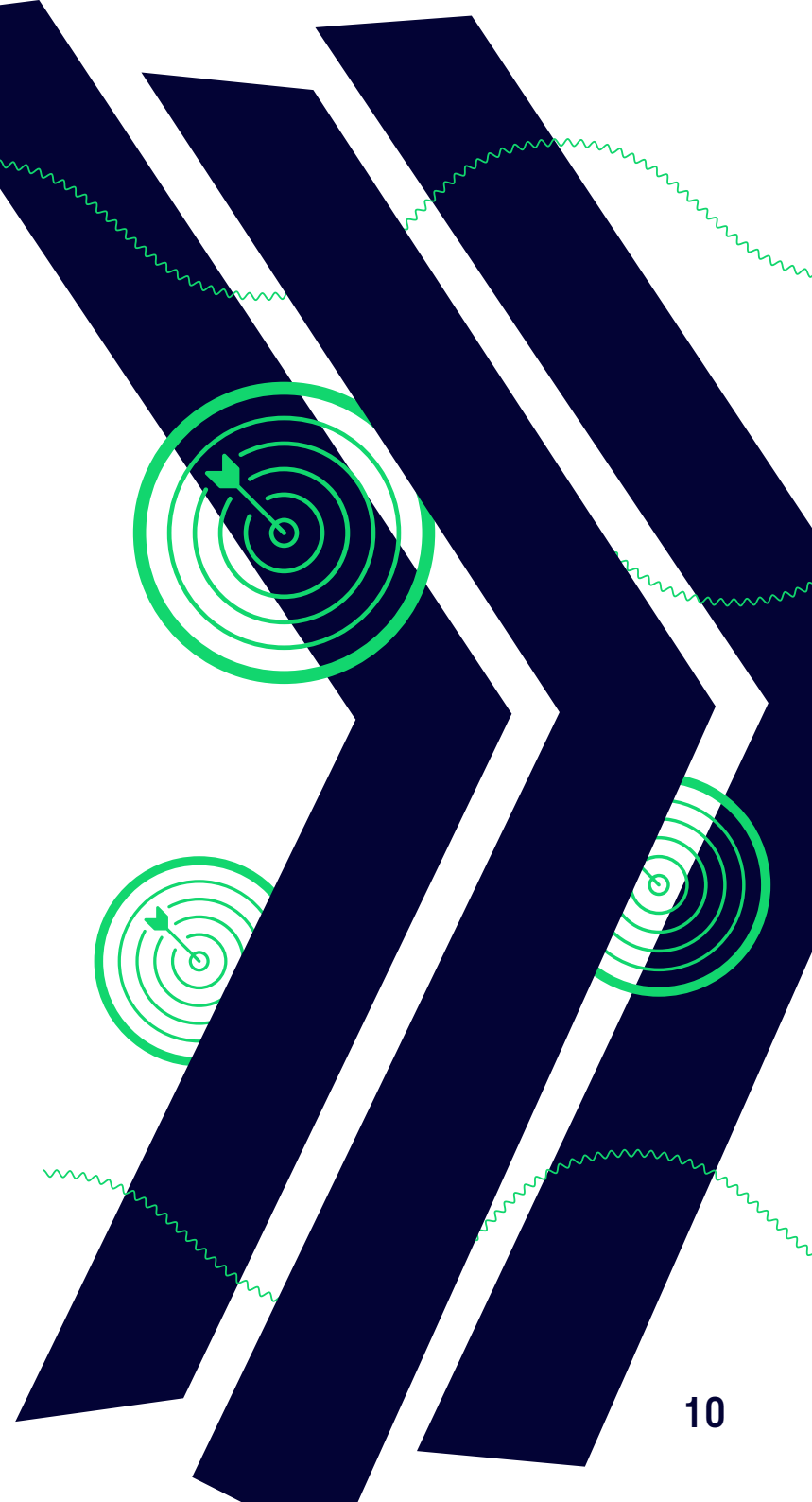
Overly-staged, carefully filtered social media posts are quickly losing their appeal. While many influencers have built their personal brands around flawless snapshots of Sunday brunches and “candid” rooftop poses, this vanity-driven style is no longer resonating like it used to. To make things worse, scammers have been notoriously flaunting fake wealth on Instagram to promote their get-rich-quick courses. In response to all this, younger audiences now value authenticity, purpose, and honest depictions of real people from diverse backgrounds.

To illustrate this, we can look to the Huji Cam app, which makes your photos look like they were taken on an old-school disposable camera. Why would people want to make their pics look worse?

Essentially, it's a revolt against glossy perfectionism. Today's consumers respond very positively to transparent, down-to-earth marketing and communication—and brands need to recognize this in 2020. One glaring counter-trend here is the rise of computer-generated virtual influencers. There are, however, inherent issues with this trend that some believe will make it a short-lived one.

“Influencers have also been actively speaking out themselves about burnout, mental health, and the stress that comes with maintaining perfection.”

– The Atlantic



Authenticity & Diversity.

Continued.

We can break this trend down into four main subcategories: genuineness, humanization, diversity, and purpose. An idealized life just isn't relatable, and brands that ignore this fact will fall out of touch with their audience.

The solution? It's time to get real. Humanize your brand by adding humor in your posts (shoutout to McDonald's), featuring inspirational employees, or revealing what goes on behind the scenes in your organization. And, perhaps most importantly, what better way to humanize your image than celebrating diversity? Millennials and Gen Z value diversity more than any prior generation. But if you're going to promote diversity in your marketing, authenticity is paramount.

The 2017 Kendall Jenner Pepsi ad was a glaring example of the backlash that can come from disingenuous attempts to profit from social issues.

That being said, purpose-driven marketing and inclusion remain at the forefront of 2020 marketing trends.

In the fashion world, we see the model diversity progressing at a steady rate. In Fall 2019, nearly 40% of the models in campaigns by the top 166 brands were women of color—the most racially diverse season ever. And, in the social justice realm, we saw Ben & Jerry's take a strong stance on #LiftTheBan issues facing UK asylum seekers.

We've all seen the #nofilter hashtag. But in 2020, #nofilter is a metaphor for something bigger: the increasing affinity for natural photos, diverse individuals, and purposeful messages that align with real-world issues. Audiences are losing interest in carefully curated color palettes and picture-perfect glamour shots. It's even become a widespread joke across the internet (Instagram vs. Reality).

In response to this trend, brands should strive to gain a deeper understanding of their followers, ultimately facilitating genuine marketing that will resonate with their customers on a more personal level.

Social SEO.

Search optimization now extends beyond Google. Enter SMO.

SEO and social media can no longer be regarded as entirely separate disciplines. Today, there's a significant overlap between the two, and the relationship is multifaceted. Social media and SEO are becoming increasingly intertwined, and brands that understand this fusion will have an advantage in 2020.

Social media platforms have become search engines in their own right. YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world, with over three billion monthly searches.

So, while traditional SEO is built around keywords, the same principles are now being applied to Social Media Optimization

(SMO) in the form of hashtags, keywords, and trending phrases. And, consequently, the increased engagement from your SMO efforts can yield more traditional SEO benefits (e.g. backlinks and SERP real estate).

There's also the question of whether social signals (likes, shares, etc.) can directly impact your SEO rankings. While Google doesn't *officially* factor social signals in its search results, the hotly debated topic has been going back and forth since 2010. So, even if Google hasn't formally announced it, they may do so in the future. This wouldn't be shocking, considering that Bing already acknowledges social signals in their ranking algorithm. Furthermore, studies have shown a significant correlation between social engagement and Google rankings.

SEO and social media now go hand-in-hand. Dissolve the barriers between the two by posting your SEO content on social media, optimizing SEO content for sharing, and cross-promoting your content across both channels. Driving visitors to your social profiles can now be just as worthwhile as boosting organic website traffic. For some brands, social media is an equally valuable source of new leads and revenue, making 'social SEO' a wise priority in 2020.



Personalized Marketing.

It's been a hot topic for years, but companies are still struggling to catch up.

Personalization is nothing new. Its buzzword usage can be seen as far back as 2012 (and perhaps even further). But while personalized marketing has been hyped for years, it can still be considered a “trend” because companies are still missing the mark. 2019 research revealed that the majority of North American consumers feel that brands struggle to create personalized experiences that live up to their expectations.

72% of consumers will now only engage with personalized marketing messages. But organizations are now faced with the challenge of how to effectively meet that demand.

In 2020, audience segmentation just doesn't cut it. Companies need to become

even more data-driven and tech-focused, deploying CRM/CX management platforms and unified martech stacks that can power the hyper-personalization today's consumers require.

To achieve this, cutting-edge companies are implementing customer data platforms (CDPs) to connect data sources with execution channels. These “smart hubs” enable precise personalization at scale, replacing fragmented data sources with cohesive automation, AI, and smarter decision-making. To go this route, it's important to choose a platform with an open API to allow for this type of integration.

To further enhance your personalization initiatives, Facebook's dynamic ads have been getting smarter with machine learning. AI now enables the platform to better predict which ad creative/format

the user is most likely to respond to. With dynamic ads, automation and AI do the heavy lifting for you, displaying the right products (in the right format) according to user interests and past activity.

There's no doubt personalized marketing is crucial. The shift to private messaging apps (see Trend #1) is just one of many examples of this. All it boils down to is the need to know your prospect or customer so you can be relevant to them.

The question in 2020 isn't *why* you should be doing it—it's *how*. Fortunately, the technology surrounding personalization, CX, and social CRMs will continue to develop and improve at a rapid pace. And this is necessary, given that consumer expectations are rising at a comparable rate.



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Micro-influencers with
10-50K followers have on
average **41.7% higher**
engagement rates than
macro-influencers with
500K-1M followers.

- AspireIQ

The State of Influencer Marketing 2019 report

Social eCommerce.

Social media apps are becoming full-fledged ecommerce hubs.

Social media isn't simply an online forum to chat, browse, and share—it's now a place to shop. Social platforms are striving to evolve into full-on marketplaces with native shoppable features. In the push toward social ecommerce, Instagram is leading the charge, but we also see Pinterest and Snapchat going in similar directions. A flurry of new features have been emerging, and in 2020 this presents an exciting opportunity for ecommerce brands to boost sales in creative ways.

It's well-known that Instagram is a powerhouse for product discovery. 70% of shopping enthusiasts use Instagram to explore trendy new items.

But the latest features are now allowing brands to more effectively capitalize on that pivotal moment when a product

catches a consumer's attention. 80% of young shoppers make impulsive buying decisions online, which is part of the reason why social ecommerce has so much potential.

That being said, here some of the latest social ecommerce trends to pay attention to in 2020.

The debut of Instagram's shoppable posts made a big splash in 2018 and they continue to play an important role in the social ecommerce revolution. A report from BigCommerce revealed that brands have had huge success with Instagram's shopping features. Upon adoption, fashion store, Magnolia Boutique, increased their Instagram revenue by 20%. Similarly, Natori (a women's clothing designer) boosted their Instagram traffic by a staggering 1,416%.



Social eCommerce.

Continued.

This shoppable trend isn't limited to posts. Instagram Stories have exploded as a preferred sharing format, which presents yet another social ecommerce opportunity. In addition to spurring engagement, business accounts and influencers can now add product stickers to stories, which display product names, descriptions, and prices.

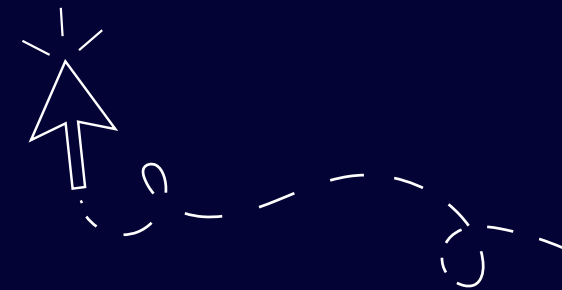
The bottom line? If you aren't taking advantage of Instagram Shopping, shoppable tags/posts, and product stickers yet, now is a good time to start.

Instagram always gets the bulk of the attention, and for good reason, but other platforms are making notable advancements in the social ecommerce space as well. In 2019, Pinterest announced the release of a variety of

shopping-oriented features, including catalogs, shopping ads, shopping search, and personalized shopping recommendations. TikTok is also getting in on the action, testing ecommerce links within posts. In addition to bio links, certain profiles will also be able to directly link posts to Amazon.

Snapchat is further integrating ecommerce into its platform by enabling select accounts to set up a store within the app. The native checkout option, which will be powered by Shopify, is in beta (and is limited to official US-based accounts). Instagram also announced its new native checkout capability, which allows users to complete a purchase without leaving the app. This feature is also in beta, but both examples are evidence that, in the future, in-app stores and native checkouts could be standard features on all the major platforms.

Social media is a tried-and-true channel for ecommerce marketing/advertising. But there was once a multi-step "bridge" that users had to cross to get from product discovery to checkout. In 2020, that bridge is evaporating, allowing for more streamlined (and potentially lucrative) ecommerce methodologies.



Data Privacy.

Do new regulations present roadblocks or opportunities?

The enactment of GDPR in 2018 sent a ripple felt around the business world. Companies were faced with the sizable task of updating their systems and operations to maintain compliance. And, with the upcoming California Consumer Privacy Act (which goes into action on January 1st), data privacy remains a top concern in 2020. But, depending on your approach, this could be an opportunity to strengthen your brand's trustworthiness in the eyes of consumers.

The Cambridge Analytica case sparked a consumer “awakening” in regards to personal data, leading to an amplified sensitivity surrounding the topic of data privacy.

Despite this, consumers are still quite open to sharing their personal information with companies—as long as it's for a good reason. Deloitte found that 79% of survey respondents would be *“willing to share their data if there was a clear benefit for them.”* So, if you want to collect personal data, **you need to earn it.**

Another survey revealed that 80% of North American consumers are comfortable sharing their personal information directly with a brand to enable more personalized marketing. However, that number drops to 17% when it comes to sharing that info with third parties, which is why trust and transparency are key. But balancing this transparency with user experience presents a new challenge for today's UX teams.

In 2020, your organization needs to be vigilantly enforcing data regulations and ensuring your third-party vendors do too. But don't just think of it as compliance. Showcasing your high-integrity standards can help foster consumer trust and bolster your brand image. Furthermore, these new regulations will inherently require a greater focus on collecting higher quality data, subsequently enhancing your personalized marketing initiatives.



Voice Search.

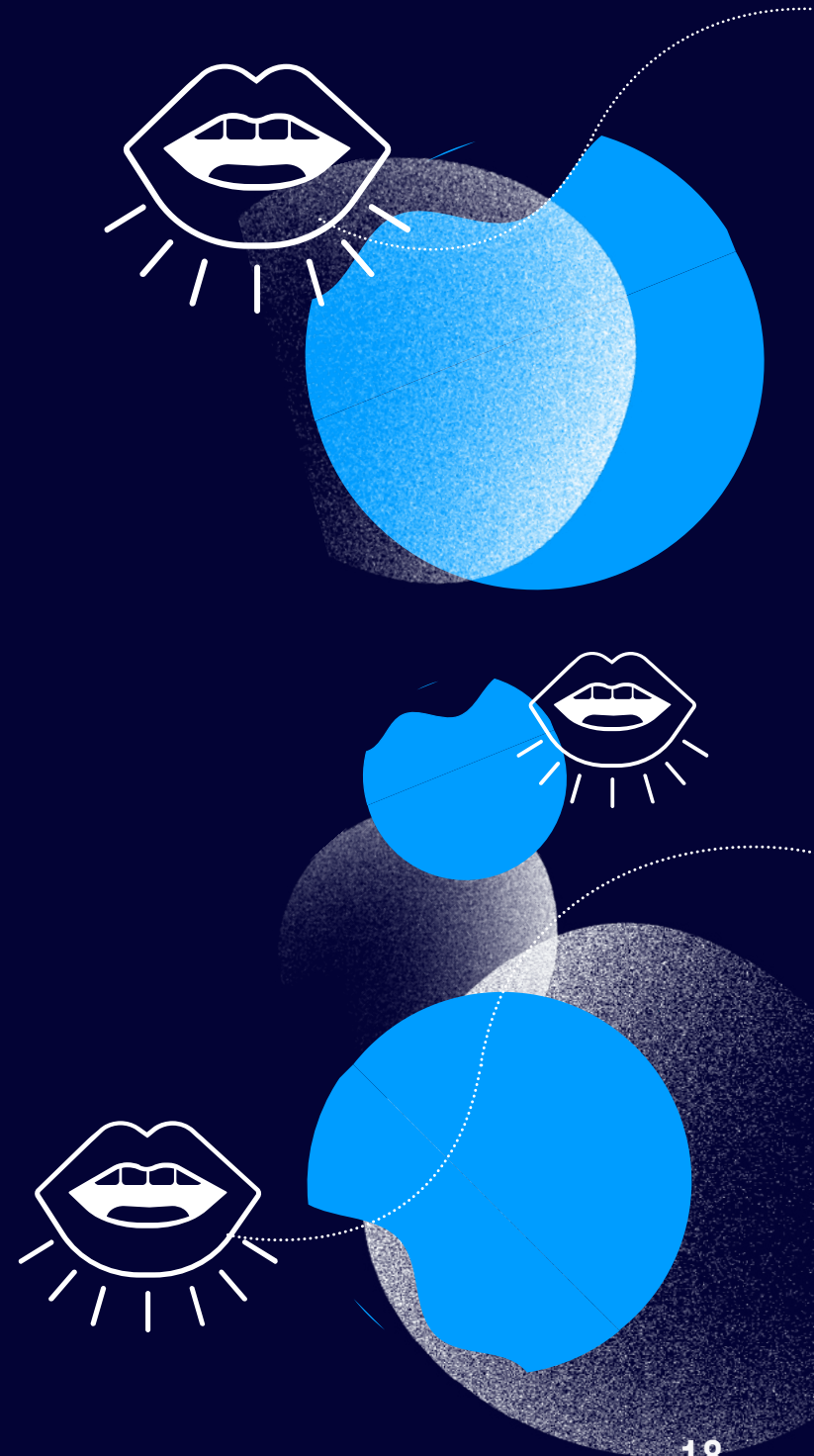
“Hey Alexa, what’s the best sushi restaurant near me?”

Speech is the most natural form of human communication, which is why companies have been eagerly developing voice-activated technologies to make interfacing with tech as fluid and convenient as possible. Consumers have responded very positively...Siri and Alexa have now become household names. And these new technologies have given rise to a very influential trend: voice search.

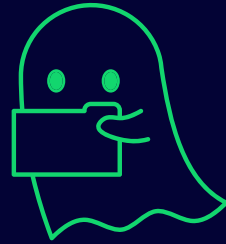
Today, 41% of adults use voice search at least once a day. And, in 2020, voice search is predicted to account for at least 50% of all online searches. In the marketing world, this translates to a quickly growing emphasis on “Voice Engine Optimization.” Like SEO, the goal of ‘VEO’ is to optimize your content to be among the top results in a user’s query. However, unlike text-based SERPs, a voice search will only yield one answer—so the stakes are high.

Voice search is often used with local intent, and device factors the user’s physical location in the search results. Now, people can simply ask Alexa, “*What’s the best Thai restaurant near me?*” From this example, we can see that voice search is inherently more conversational, so your VEO content needs to mimic natural language with more longtail phrases. You also need to ensure your content is properly structured and tagged from a technical standpoint.

Currently, the search results are communicated through the device’s operating voice. But, going forward, we’ll see the capability for brands to use their own speech and tone, adding a whole new meaning to the term ‘brand voice.’ VEO is advancing quickly, yet many companies have not kept up. In 2020, the choice is whether to join the early adopters or be left behind.



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**82.2% of marketers
will invest in more **video**
content in 2020.
55% will invest in **stories**.**

– AspireIQ

The State of Influencer Marketing 2019 report

Continued Dominance of the “Big 5” Networks.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn have not lost their foothold.

The backlash from the 2018 Cambridge Analytica incident caused some speculation on whether Facebook’s status as the ‘King of Social Media’ could soon be declining. Data privacy was (and still is) a hot topic, and many users were claiming they’d abandon Facebook to better safeguard their personal data. Amidst this firestorm, some marketers predicted a surge in the use of smaller social media networks like Snapchat, Pinterest, TikTok, etc. And, while some of these “micro-networks” have been picking up steam, the top platforms still look set to reign supreme in 2020.

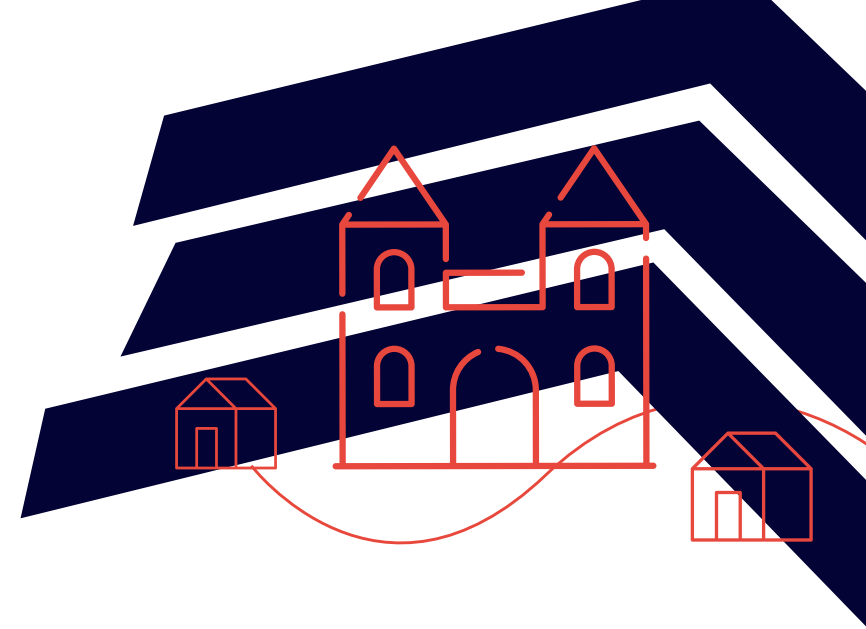
That being said, the smaller networks should not be ignored. TikTok was the most downloaded social media app in September 2019.

However, its trajectory may be waning, as we saw TikTok’s user base decline for the first time in November.

Snapchat also had a strong year in 2019, shattering predictions with 13 million new users in Q2.

It all depends on where your customers are spending their time. If your research shows they’re gravitating toward some of the smaller social networks, it could definitely be worthwhile to explore those avenues. But, while niche platforms have been posting some impressive numbers, 2019 will close with the familiar top five

(Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn) maintaining a stronghold on their dominance. Facebook’s robust advertising toolkit continues to appeal to brands, and LinkedIn has evolved into a powerful marketing channel as well. The smaller platforms have potential, and there remains a *possibility* of increased fragmentation via micro-networks. But for now, the “Big 5” networks are still the arenas where you’re most likely to have success.



Augmented Reality.

The (augmented) future looks bright.

Augmented Reality (AR) is among the most futuristic trends in digital marketing. It's been a buzzing topic for the past five years, but the tech to create AR experiences is now becoming more accessible. And, combined with skyrocketing popularity, AR is destined to be a powerful marketing tool in 2020 and beyond.

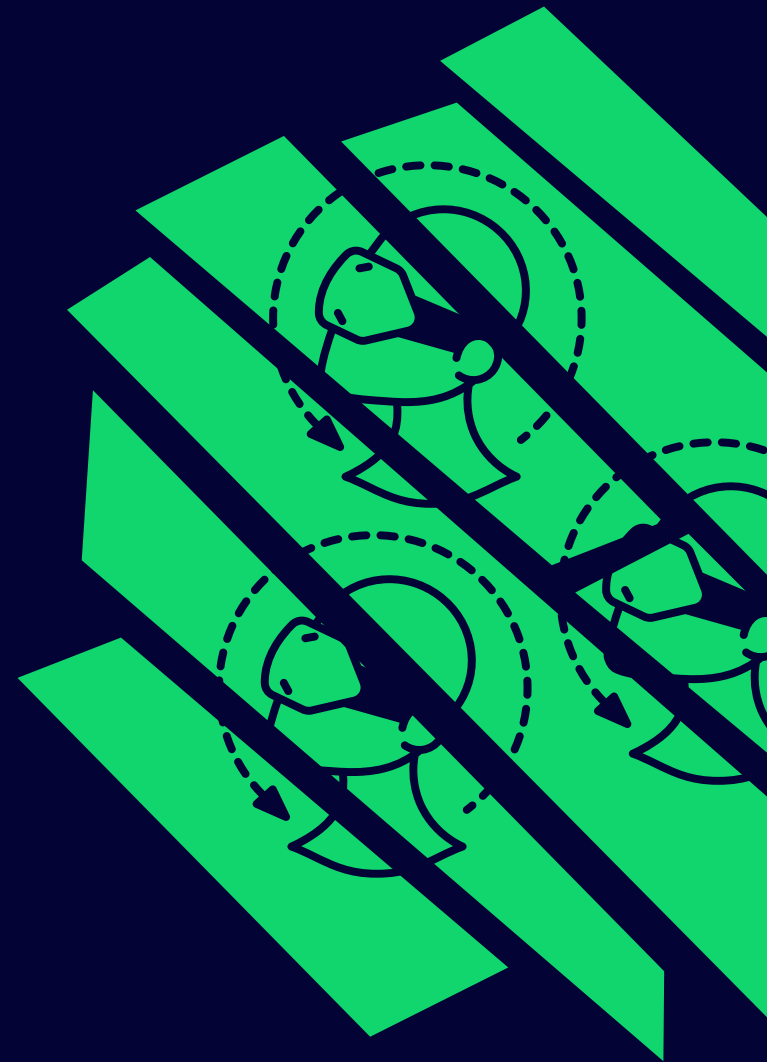
Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality are often lumped together—but AR is superseding its VR counterpart. In 2020, the number of AR users will reach one billion. There are now significantly more AR users than VR users (13% of the population vs. 8% respectively). Furthermore, AR revenues will surpass VR revenues in 2020. What does this mean for marketers?

AR isn't limited to games and entertainment—it drives purchase behavior. Today, roughly 50% of consumers would be more likely to shop at retailers that offer AR/VR experiences. IKEA was quick to take advantage, now offering an

AR app that allows users to “fill” their living spaces with AR-imposed furniture. Sephora was another early adopter, creating an app that virtually applies various skin products to an uploaded selfie. And, for an even more high-tech example, Apple's AR glasses are anticipated in the first half of 2020.

The AR conversation wouldn't be complete without mentioning Snapchat. The platform's AR filters are a big hit among users and include a diverse set of capabilities (e.g. geofilters and moment filters). Taco Bell had massive success with its Cinco de Mayo sponsored geofilter campaign, which received 224 million views in one day.

So, if you're wondering how to integrate AR into your marketing efforts, let these examples demonstrate just how versatile this new technology can be. Versatility empowers creativity, so don't be afraid to think outside the box.



Ephemeral Marketing.

Short-lived stories are a path to increased engagement.

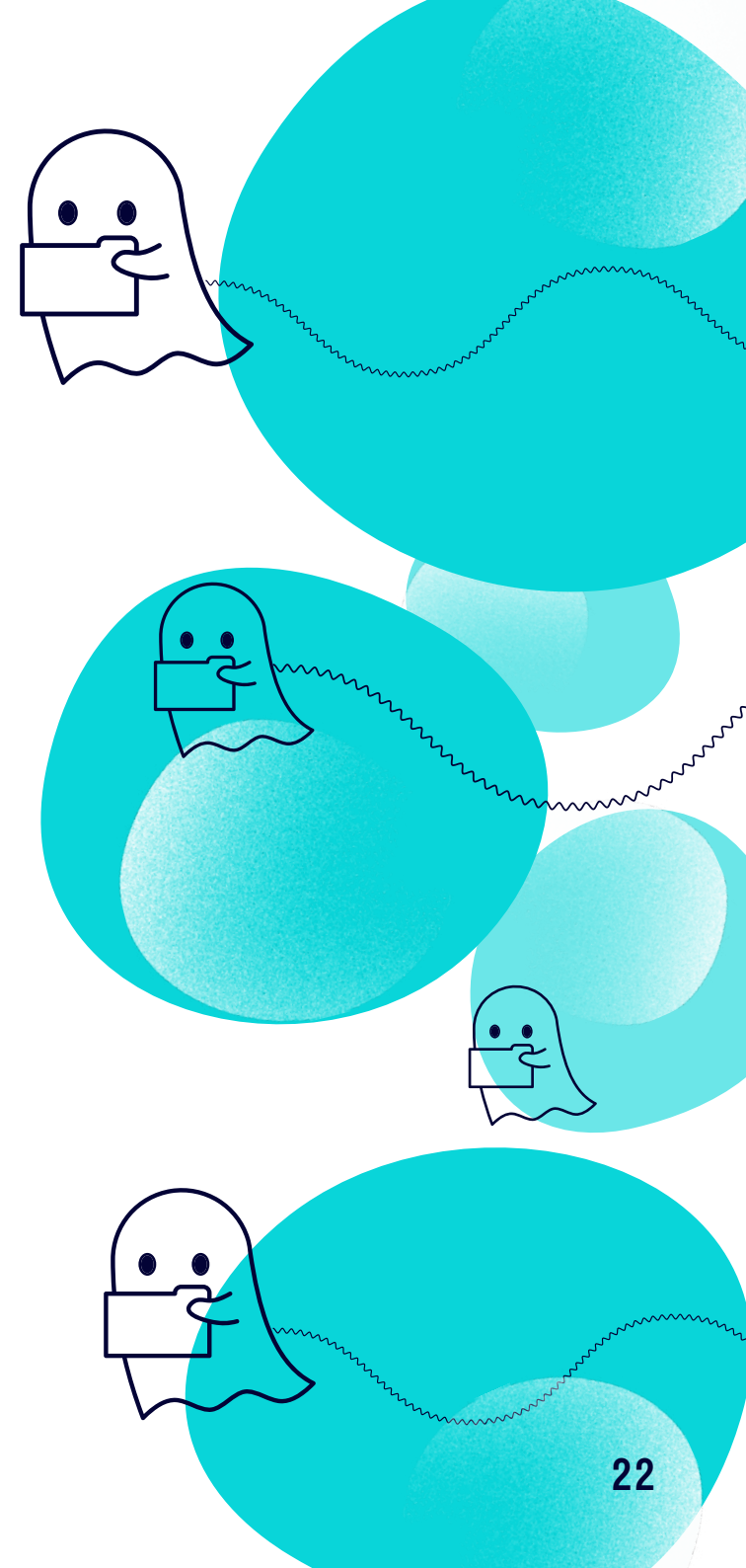
Ephemeral content (which refers to posts/messages that vanish within 24 hours) was first introduced by Snapchat in 2013. Since then, Snap has grown to 200 million users, and ephemeral content has been exploding in popularity. Today, we see the widespread use of Stories, which have become key features on both Facebook and Instagram. With all the hype, Whatsapp is now testing disappearing messages as well. So, the question marketers should be asking is, *"Why is this trend important, and how should we respond?"*

Ephemeral content has had a profound effect on user engagement. It's roughly doubled the amount of time people spend on Instagram. This is partly due to the "FOMO" factor, with users checking in more frequently to avoid being left out. Stories are also a great way to boost engagement via interactivity and user-generated content. This can be accomplished with

branded filters, geofilters, and polls. And, with live-stream videos, you can connect with your audience on a more candid level.

Stories carry the additional benefit of a brighter spotlight. Rather than being buried among your other posts, stories are pinned at the top of the page. Given this high-visibility, you'll want to ensure you're creating stories that truly resonate. The key here is authenticity. Perfectionism is losing its appeal (see Trend #4). Instead, focus on telling your brand's story from a genuine perspective.

To demonstrate the power of ephemeral marketing, we can look to Lacoste. Their carousel ads on Instagram Stories received a 2X higher return on ad spend compared to an alternate ad format. So, in 2020, savvy brands will certainly be succeeding with ephemeral marketing...will yours?



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Social media
ad spend reached \$84
billion worldwide this
year – finally overtaking
print advertising spend.

– Zenith Media

Social Media Advertising.

Paid social is now the third-largest advertising channel worldwide.

Social media ad spend has been steadily climbing for years and has now officially surpassed print, making it the third-largest advertising channel.

In 2020, US advertisers will spend roughly \$38 billion on social media ads—an increase of more than 100% since 2016.

This growth is largely attributed to the influx of small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) using paid social ads in their marketing efforts.

Facebook's ad platform is accessible to companies with small budgets. Furthermore, the platform's advanced targeting/localization capabilities make it a highly appealing advertising tool. With this

attractive cost-to-benefit ratio, businesses of all shapes and sizes are flocking to take advantage of social media ads. In an earnings call, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg explained that Facebook's top 100 advertisers make up less than 20% of the company's ad revenue. This is further evidence that the swell in social media advertising is being fueled by SMBs.

The space is still rich with opportunity, but the competition is fierce. To stay in the game, brands will need to expand their ad budgets to keep up. But spending more doesn't guarantee success. You need a sophisticated social media advertising strategy to ensure your marketing dollars aren't going to waste. Benchmarking tools are also essential, helping you learn from the top-performers you're competing against.

Is organic dead? No...but it needs the support of social ad spend. Organic campaigns can serve as a testing ground, subsequently guiding your paid advertising initiatives. If an organic campaign performs well, it can become a strong candidate for a paid campaign. In this way, the two can work in tandem. Organic still has its place. But, in today's digital ecosystem, the importance of paid social ads cannot be understated.

Real-Time Marketing.

Consumers crave live content, so marketing is now happening in the moment.

In the “always-on” digital era, people move fast. One-third of consumers expect a response within 30 minutes after voicing a customer service complaint via social media. But this rapid hyperconnectivity extends far beyond customer support. The internet is becoming an increasingly live environment, and this phenomenon can be seen in gaming, live video, and even ecommerce.

Video game streaming is wildly popular. In Q2 2019, gamers spent a combined 3.77 billion hours watching other gamers play. There are now many live game streaming platforms, with Twitch as the dominant market leader. This ties into the broader theme of user-generated content (UGC). Consumers love content created by *other consumers*...which is why influencers exist!

Live video is also exploding in terms of both popularity and functionality. Today, we see live video features on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and other micro-networks. Audiences are captivated by real-time content.

80% would rather watch a brand's live video than read a blog, making this trend imperative from a marketing standpoint.

And, in China, technology is now enabling Live Stream Shopping, which combines elements of the Home Shopping Network, influencers, live video, and entertainment. Merchants have had remarkable results

with this technique, which accounted for 7.5% of total sales on Alibaba's massive Singles' Day event.

Consumers now crave real-time engagement, and companies are responding with in-the-moment digital campaigns that connect people, wherever they are in the world, through live, often ephemeral content. There are many innovative sub-trends here that are still in their infancy, so brands still have the opportunity to be early adopters in 2020.



Life After Likes.

‘Likes’ and ‘Loves’ may be disappearing.
But does it really matter?

When a user’s social media post receives a ton of ‘likes,’ they get a burst of dopamine. They feel socially validated—and this validation has become a pillar of social media. Conversely, if a user receives very few ‘likes,’ they may feel socially disconnected, which can negatively affect their mental health. To alleviate this pressure, Instagram is testing a momentous change to its platform: hiding the number of ‘likes’ a post receives.

Influencers hoped it was only a rumor, but Adam Mosseri confirmed the hidden ‘like’ count tests at Facebook’s F8 Conference. Users will still be able to see their own post metrics, but those stats won’t be visible to followers. The official purpose of this initiative is to make social media less of a popularity contest. Menlo Park execs want to shift the focus back to the content itself, rather than its “likes score.” But there’s also speculation that the move has a secondary

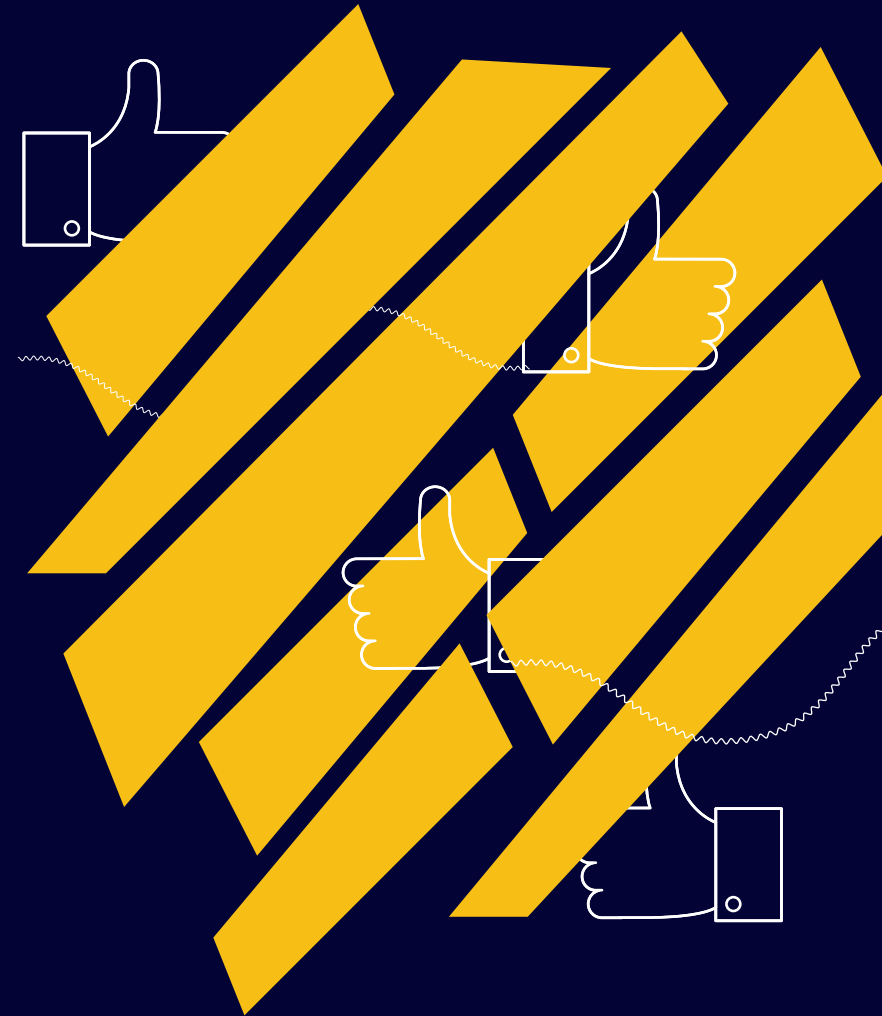
motive: to encourage users towards Instagram’s other offerings (e.g. IGTV and Stories).

“(The test is) about creating a less pressurized environment where people feel comfortable expressing themselves”

– Adam Mosseri, Head of Instagram

In the early days, social media was a community-oriented forum that fostered legitimate peer-to-peer connection. But it has morphed into an ad-fueled space that feeds on social validation. The test to hide ‘likes’ (which will begin in Canada) is a push to re-establish the *social* aspect that made social media so disruptive in the first place.

What does this mean for brands? Honestly, not much.



Life After Likes.

Continued.

'Likes' and reactions are vanity metrics. Receiving thousands of 'likes' can be exciting, but it's not a particularly valuable business KPI. At the end of the day, 'likes' are a cheap currency. Other metrics, such as comments, shares, and clicks, are much clearer indicators of authentic engagement. And, ultimately, that's what brands should be striving for, tracking and benchmarking against competitors.

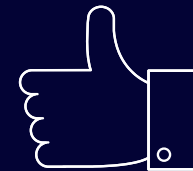
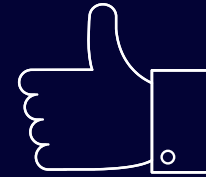
This potential loss of 'likes' is part of a larger shift from vanity to authenticity (which has been a theme throughout this report). Consumers are yearning for a more genuine experience on social media, and many are welcoming the hidden 'likes' count.

"I love not seeing the like count...It feels a bit weird to say, but I've stopped comparing myself to bigger accounts. I've also been more personal with the things I actually like versus what everyone else is liking. This feels like more of what Instagram should be rather than an advertisement of ourselves on our page."

– [Sarah Roberts via HuffPost](#)

The reduced emphasis on 'likes' could affect the way feeds are ordered. Algorithms currently use engagement signals to prioritize posts in the feed (as opposed to chronological ordering). So, we may see changes to the algorithms as networks find new ways to prioritize content without using 'likes' as a primary metric.

However, even if 2020 is the year we lose 'likes,' this should not impact your social strategy. Vanity metrics should never have been a primary success indicator in the first place. So, if 'likes' disappear, the best thing to do is simply let them go.

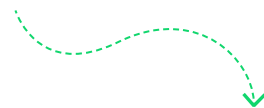


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