2015 DIGITAL TRENDS

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Introduction

The pace of change within the digital marketing landscape accelerates each year. It seems that every new app is adopted more quickly than the last, and it all translates into more opportunities for brands to leverage. In this, the sixth edition of our trends report, we cover the developments that will most impact your business. Initiatives you can put into action right away, and long-term opportunities that require strategic planning now.

This year we address several industry challenges, including online ad viewability and the rise of messaging platforms that don’t include a clear path for brand involvement. Yet, we see opportunity in the change that’s ahead. New social advertising opportunities arise each year as the platforms we know mature. The digital industry continues to evolve, and brands must evolve with it.

Through all that change, there’s one overarching theme we see in our trends: the battle between story and data. The industry has proven we can do each separately, but the real opportunity is doing both well. We hope you’ll read on to learn more about what we see in store for 2015.
People see the digital world differently than brands do. The separation between online and offline experiences and interactions has blurred. People no longer distinguish between an article read on a website and one seen in a magazine. As digital media have filtered into the days, surroundings, and even the bodies of consumers, they have begun to see them – if at all – only as an undercurrent, seamlessly supplementing more and more moments in their days.

As the influence of digital media and technology grows, the solutions that brands create to address the needs of modern consumers are likely to be digital. As a result, the way brands work must evolve.

Forward-thinking brands have already started adopting new approaches. Teams have integrated to reflect the fading distinction between “traditional” and “digital.” Modern campaigns must meet the expectations of consumers who devour a vast array of media in a single day. Meeting those expectations requires new approaches to marketing.

A New Approach

Brands are under intense pressure to adapt and evolve in today’s fast-paced marketplace. Companies and agencies alike must concept, design, and prototype innovative products and services to compete against traditional competitors and rising start-ups. Agility is the key to keeping up with the real-time challenges that technology brings.

Agile development processes are a good example of how some companies are getting work done in a new way. Spotify has proven that working together in cross-functional teams, which they call tribes, not only creates more efficient projects, but also improves the work itself. Building smaller, self-organizing teams will drive this type of work for all aspects of the business.

Progressive work processes will drive the ways marketers and agencies will need to produce that work. Traditional planning will need to adapt or soon fail from lengthy timelines and high costs. Marketers will need to work small and flexible to test and learn from campaigns in real time. This approach will not only shape the internal processes to get the work done, but will also shape external communications to clients and partners.

The client side of the brand must see the value in being adaptive. Quick and clear communication will be the key to driving results. Budgets will no longer be set in stone. Adaptive campaigns will mean allowing flexible processes to quickly ensure the brand message is being delivered the best way in real time.

These processes will include fast-paced ideation and concepting, developing and prototyping, testing and pilot programs, tweaking and updating, and overall rethinking of how your entire business is structured, even down to the company culture itself. We’re no longer talking about months to test and roll out new products or campaigns; we’re talking about weeks and sometimes even days.

Some large brands are already taking advantage of real-time testing by using native ad platforms such as Sharethrough. With platforms like these, marketers can test creative, communications channels, and even targeting before launching, and do so in a matter of days. From what headline works best on which social network to what subsegment is most receptive to a national campaign, real-time data is the answer.

Thus, real-time data becomes the new currency of Agile Brands. This information can now help to drive strategic decisions, both small and large in their implications.

The brands with this agile competitive advantage will prevail, though in most cases they won’t be able to do it alone.
Partnering to Harness Complexity

The way people navigate online and offline media has fragmented. New types of publishers and content shape and answer the desires of digitally connected consumers. Information and feedback from these consumers have become available in the form of data. Brands are embracing complexity. To market effectively, modern brands must deal with an almost overwhelming number of media channels, ad products, and data sources.

Partnership is one solution. Increasingly, brands are creating advantages for themselves and supplementing their capabilities through unprecedented relationships with vendors and partners.

Content Partnerships

Trends from past years have highlighted the value of brand journalism, brand-published editorial and video content, and visual online storytelling. These pose a unique challenge: brands need to create new types of content, often on platforms they have never used.

Today, most partnerships with content creators provide both channel-specific expertise and access to partners’ existing reputations and audiences. Content creators operate as ambassadors, using their knowledge of unique audience expectations to guide advertising on new platforms such as Vine that can be difficult for brands to master.

It is easy to point to burgeoning content producers such as Vine or online stars such as Michelle Phan and say that they would be useful partners. But fully harnessing the capabilities of these individuals and organizations requires a different type of partnership.

Tomorrow’s content partnerships will become broader. In Oreo Wonderfilled, Mondelēz demonstrated the value of partnering with a broad set of influencers within a single campaign. To create videos for the campaign, Oreo tapped a variety of musicians who had engaged YouTube audiences. Each musician recorded their own version of the new Oreo jingle, amassing over 10 million combined views.

In the future, this process of selecting an array of short-term partners to reach audiences will become even simpler. Instead of brands hand-selecting and reaching out to each partner individually, vendors such as Fullscreen and GrapeStory will make it possible for brands to identify and partner with sets of online creators, stars, and celebrities. Inevitably, these partners and their audiences will be suggested to brands programmatically based on campaign goals, preferred media channels, and target audiences.

On the other end of the spectrum, tomorrow’s content partnerships may also become more involved. Red Bull builds long-term programs with a number of athletes and cultural influencers. Some of these partnerships have evolved into ownership. Red Bull has invested so deeply in its partners and associated events that it can now afford to offer access to its partners and the content they have helped create as a service to other brands.

This new approach reflects a greater movement: where the task of reaching audiences once revolved around share of voice, now it is share of attention that matters. As modern consumers continue to shift from broadcast media to fragmented channels and content that better fit their personal tastes, Agile Brands will need to provide a greater amount of more engaging content. In the future, a mix of broad and involved content partnerships will be a necessity for brands looking to capture the attention of consumers.

Media Partnerships

“Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black.” – Henry T. Ford

Traditionally, ad inventory has been developed and sold with a similar mindset. But standardized ad products rarely fit the unique needs of a specific brand and the preferences of its target. To compete for consumer attention, brands must also partner with media platforms and vendors to influence how ad products are developed.
In recent years, we have seen brands work with advertising agencies to drastically expand the depth of these partnerships. While the dollar amounts in these agreements have grown to surprising levels, truly deep partnerships go far beyond a high-dollar up-front. Agile Brands will create more valuable unions by treating partnership differently:

- **Frequent Trials.** Strong partnerships can be costly. They take time to mature and prove their value. But modern brands cannot forgo the advantages of partnership by remaining merely customers. As the market for high-quality online ad space becomes more competitive, the value of influence on publishers and platforms will increase. The brands of tomorrow will be constantly developing a portfolio of partners.

- **Partnered Teams.** When attempting to conduct research or influence the products and services a partner creates, brands must interface with their teams directly. In the future, more brands will use liaisons, satellite teams, or office hours in the place of email when partnering with publishers and online platforms.

- **Shared Data.** Arguably, an ad product is only as useful as the data by which a brand can measure its effectiveness. Beyond optimizing campaigns, brands need data to teach them about the evolving behaviors and preferences of their audiences. Tomorrow, brands will heavily favor media partners who can enrich their understanding of consumers and campaign performance through data.

- **Creative Influence.** Web stars are not the only ones who can help brands create better content in new spaces. Media providers, online platform managers, and publishers are experts on the types of content that resonate with their audiences. These experts also have a singular grasp on the changing capabilities of their unique space. In the coming years, we will see more media partners leveraged to help develop campaigns.

- **Bespoke Products.** Unlike offline media, online ad space is constantly evolving. With access to development teams from a media partner, many brands have already helped create new ad products for specific campaigns and products. However, developing these custom products takes time and money. As bespoke ad products become more commonplace, Agile Brands will treat the form of their ads as a creative and strategic decision rather than a media constraint.
Innovate Like a Start-Up

Companies looking to stay ahead of trends in their industry often do so through sizable R&D budgets. With the addition of digital technologies, brands can take their R&D experiments and put them into the market faster than ever before, letting customers decide between winners and losers. This has led to large companies shifting from R&D labs to start-up incubators, chasing after the benefits that small companies have over their larger competition.

For start-ups, the prevailing mantra is “Fail fast.” The idea is that if you’re going to fail eventually, then it’s better to know sooner rather than later, so you can either course-correct or move on to the next idea. For large companies, that concept can be hard to fathom, since failures show up on the balance sheet and investors start to ask questions. However, with digital technologies allowing companies to test ideas using minimal resources at lower costs, new ideas can be tested that would have been previously abandoned. The result is that big companies are starting to test more innovative, and thus more risky, ideas.

One example of this is General Mills, which created an innovation department called 301 Inc. While its traditional business segments of cereal, yogurt, and prepackaged meals all have their own innovation teams, 301 Inc. was charged with creating “new business models beyond the core things we normally do at General Mills,” according to Martin Abrams, 301’s marketing director. One of the first products to emerge from 301 Inc. was Nibblr, a direct-to-consumer, subscription-based snack food company that exists outside General Mills’ traditional distribution channels. Nibblr was allowed to fend for itself, never referencing on its site the financial backing and distribution support that one of the world’s largest food companies provides to it, even if it would have helped consumers trust the new brand. Instead, the only connection between the two companies was a brief press release from General Mills and a round of press interviews.

Another example is General Electric, which partnered with Frost Data Capital to form Frost I3, an incubator tasked with funding and growing 30 big data start-ups in the areas of healthcare, industrial, and foundation. While most incubators are designed to fuel existing companies, Frost I3 creates companies from scratch, with new companies receiving not just funding, but access to GE’s network of 5,000 research assistants and 8,000 software professionals. The process of creating a new company begins with the incubator team identifying areas where GE’s and Frost’s shared customers have a need but operational efficiencies are lacking. From there, they recruit CEOs and CTOs to help lead and scale the company, hiring as needed along the way. These companies might not be sexy consumer-focused products that grab headlines on TechCrunch and The New York Times, but they have the potential to affect
markets worth billions and even trillions of dollars. For example, one funded company combines weather data and operational data to analyze the efficiency of wind turbines and change the curvature of blades, a move that will yield as much as 5% additional electricity. So why is an industrial giant making big investments in small software companies? According to Bill Ruh, Vice President at GE Software, “Software will be a key center point to managing a power plant or managing an airline or managing a rail company. We believe the industrial world is going to change and look more like the consumer Internet.” If they're right, and the industrial world does change, GE is going to be right where they need to be, thanks to the investments made through their Frost incubator.

For companies looking to incubate new ideas and test the start-up waters, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- Investing in start-ups can have benefits beyond just an eventual payout. It opens lines of communication to innovative and motivated people, it provides insight into where business categories are headed, and it takes some of the risk out of trying to start a similar company from scratch. If there’s a fit between the start-up and the larger company, an investment can be the first step in an eventual acquisition, and, if not, there’s still an opportunity for both parties to benefit from the resources they can provide each other during their time together.

- Ideas should live on their own, with unique branding, websites, marketing, and promotion. Successful ideas can be integrated later, but when an idea is getting off the ground, it’s important not to cloud the consumer’s perception with more integration than is necessary.

- Empower a small group of people to bring the idea to life, and let them act outside the normal approval process. The reason new ideas are easier to hatch with small, nimble teams is that the market is unknown, and changes need to be made quickly as new information is gathered. A small team is more likely to have the passion needed to put in the time required to make an idea a success and can take ownership of the process if given the chance.

- Don’t be afraid to fail. Failure doesn’t mean that an idea wasn’t worth the effort, it just means that the market wasn’t ready. Maybe the timing was off. Maybe the competition was too strong. Maybe there were other factors at play. Regardless of the reason, the key to failure is to learn as many lessons as you can and apply those lessons to the next idea.

- Reward risk taking and show support from the top. Facebook hung posters that said “Move fast and break things” on their walls. The goal was to reinforce the concept that Facebook as an organization expects people to take risks, even if those risks break things along the way. Fear of risk can lead to stagnation, which hampers growth, so it’s important to keep moving forward, even if the path forward is not clear.

Looking Forward

To reach the modern consumer, the way brands work must evolve, and new approaches to marketing are required. Adapting to change has always been part of marketing, but that change is happening faster now than ever before. Thankfully, brands looking to become more agile don’t have to do so on their own. Agencies have been redefining the way they work for years, becoming more agile in response to the changing ad landscape and the rise of digital marketing. This experience allows them to serve as a guide and help brand partners become more agile by speeding up legacy processes, filling gaps in internal resources, recommending mutually beneficial partnerships, acting as the interdepartmental communication pipeline, or even helping launch a start-up incubator. For modern brands, agility is no longer an option, it's a necessity, which means that now is the time to rethink business as usual.
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SOCIAL ADVERTISING IN 2015

While Facebook, because of its massive reach and scale, will continue to be the majority leader in social advertising in 2015, advertisers will begin to see the rise of niche social sites. As these sites, such as Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram, continue to grow their user base, the more they will develop ad products that will enable marketers to reach these users. Using Facebook as a blueprint for success in 2015, these social sites will begin creating and rolling out ad products to bring brands front and center in the consumer’s life. Understanding not only the advertising opportunities available on each site, but how to effectively use them, will allow brands to better reach the people that matter the most.

Pinterest and Instagram: The Rise of Photo Advertisements

Increasingly, content is becoming a key barometer on whether a social ad will succeed. Coincidentally, image-heavy content is driving the conversation on social. The old saying “an image is worth a thousand words” is perfectly illustrated within social media today. Within Facebook and Twitter alone, posts with photos achieve 54% more likes, 104% more comments, and 84% more clickthroughs on links than posts with only text. Understanding this and utilizing their niche audiences, Pinterest and Instagram are beginning to showcase just how valuable an image can be.

Pinterest, which was created in 2009, now reaches over 70 million users (80% of which are women). Moving into 2015, Pinterest is beginning to test ad products on its platform. Initially priced using a CPM (cost-per-thousand) model, Promoted Pins, as Pinterest calls them, are now purchased on a cost-per-website click. This essentially means that brands receive free impressions and are only charged when a user clicks the URL within the pin.

Already in 2014, Pinterest is making a name for itself in terms of generating revenue and sales for brands. Studies continue to show that Pinterest is the go-to social site for generating sales. For example, 47% of online consumers in the U.S. have bought products online based on Pinterest recommendations. Another key statistic to consider is that online consumers spend more per order when they convert from a referral on Pinterest than any other social network. In fact, a Pinterest referral is 113% more valuable in terms of average order value than the next social site, Facebook. While understanding the importance of content quality over quantity, any brand that is either consumer packaged goods heavy and/or is looking to reach women online will find that Pinterest’s ads allow them to reach that audience effectively and with great impact.

Since being purchased by Facebook in 2012, Instagram has been rumored to push out ad opportunities to its advertisers. In 2015, we’ll finally see the rumors come to fruition. Available to brands in 2015, Instagram has already begun rolling out its ad product in the form of a promoted photo with larger brands. As with Pinterest, a brand’s success will be determined by the quality of its content, not the quantity.
Expected to be priced on a CPM model, Instagram allows advertisers to maximize their branding and awareness efforts. Ideally for larger brands with an already established fan base, Instagram allows brands to become top of mind within Instagram’s impactful feed.

So far, brands such as Levi’s, Ben & Jerry’s, Mercedes-Benz, Taco Bell, and Chobani have already seen success from their ads. In 2014, Taco Bell’s “Live Más” campaign reached 12.5 million U.S. adults 18-44 over a four-week time period and saw a 29 point lift in ad recall (which was four times higher than the control group). Relying heavily on the creative process and understanding Instagram’s environment allowed Taco Bell to create a unique and engaging campaign that resonated within the Instagram community.

Brands looking to maximize awareness and make a splash within the younger demographic should be considering Instagram within their marketing efforts. Because of its growing size and share-of-voice potential, Instagram gives brands the ability to strengthen recall and awareness.

**Twitter: More Than Just a Conversation**

Founded in 2006, Twitter continues to build upon its very loyal fan base. Concentrating first on building a platform that maximizes conversation between users, Twitter first introduced ads — in the form of Promoted Tweets — in the summer of 2010. Since then, Twitter continues to offer brands unique ways to reach a talkative and opinionated user. Following in Facebook’s footsteps, Twitter has begun to roll out programmatic buying on its platform. This means that for the first time advertisers are able to bid directly on specific engagements ranging from clicks to a website to retweets. While this may seem like more of the same thing, enabling advertisers to pick and choose what actions they want to pay for can turn Twitter into a valuable direct-response solution. For example, brands looking to increase online sales can now bid on that specific action and begin optimizing toward the lowest cost-per-action. Twitter is essentially now allowing advertisers to see just what their advertising efforts are really doing within its platform. This is especially important when you consider the nature of Twitter. In 2014, 86% of the time spent on Twitter came from a mobile device, meaning the normal Twitter user is either out of their home or using their mobile device as a second screen.

Moving ahead, brands can utilize Twitter in a variety of ways. First, brands can now look at Twitter as a potential direct-response platform. With the upcoming addition of new ad products, such as a mobile-app install unit, call-to-click unit, and “Buy Now” unit, Twitter aims to compete with Facebook for any direct-response campaigns. Second, because of its size and audience, brands can continue to use Twitter as a branding and conversation platform. Taking into account that Twitter is beefing up its targeting capabilities, which now includes look-alike, mobile numbers, Twitter usernames, and Twitter user IDs, brands will be able to segment and create audiences like never before. By taking advantage of these new features and aligning them with national events, holidays, and other highly conversational moments, brands could potentially create that “moment in time.” Finally, brands and advertisers should be on the lookout for a Twitter algorithm. Currently, Twitter users only see tweets from people they follow and specific ads in reverse chronological order. With the introduction of an algorithm, Twitter will be aiming to give brands more opportunity to appear in a user’s feed — regardless of whether they follow the brand. However, similar to Facebook’s algorithm, brands and advertisers will begin seeing paid media playing a larger role in reaching users.
What Does It Mean? Implications for Brands

Looking ahead, 2015 promises to be a great year for social ad opportunities. While Facebook will continue to update and expand its already sizable ad offering, niche sites Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram will begin introducing new and different ways for brands to reach consumers. Considering that these sites account for anywhere between 17% to 21% of online adults, investing in strategy and creative for social media will be more important than ever. Also, because of the scale of these sites, brands are now more than ever able to reach their target audiences. In 2015, while the elements of paid social media continue to rise, brands and advertisers should be cognizant of the following:

1. **Social Is Mobile.** Because the majority of social traffic is mobile, not having a mobile-optimized site while running social ads could ruin a campaign. Understanding social users and their behaviors will allow brands and advertisers to create better experiences for users.

2. **Invest in Great Content.** Gone are the days of quantity of ads in social. Moving forward, quality will be key because of various factors. First, because of social algorithms rewarding engaging and quality content, brands that focus on quality, virality, and engagement will begin to see greater success. Second, now that brands have the opportunity to drive larger reach in social, putting their best foot forward, investing in quality content, and optimizing toward scale will push the best message to their target audience.

3. **Set Clear Goals for Paid Social.** Whether a brand’s/advertiser’s goal is to achieve awareness, increase engagement and visibility, or drive conversions, having a clear goal will allow them to better decide not only which platform to utilize, but which ad products will best achieve their goals.

4. **Test, Test, and Test.** Because of the potential of high risk, high reward within paid social, testing creative and copy variations (A/B testing) using smaller budgets before implementing large campaigns is recommended. Also, testing different audience segments will help brands/advertisers better understand what types of people are really interested in your ads. Using these different aspects will allow for larger campaigns to be more successful.

References


**Jeff Kauffman**
Brand Media/Planner

As a group media director, Jeff spearheads planning in both traditional and digital media for The Salvation Army and Rice Select. He also leads the agency’s planning group in charge of paid social media. Whatever the medium, he makes it his mission to deliver the right message to the right person at just the right time and to track the results to the nth degree.

**Tyler Norton**
Digital Strategist

Tyler is a jack of all trades who also happens to be the master of several, from branding to paid social media to social strategy. Since helping create an agency-wide paid social team, Tyler currently manages social strategy and content creation for Chuck E. Cheese’s, The Salvation Army, and AAA, among others.
In 2015, it will be easier than ever for anyone to design and develop an app. Major platforms are taking major steps in simplifying the entire process from programming to design to testing. These stages are changing with the launch of Apple's programming language, Swift, and Google's design language, Material Design. These advancements not only increase the visual appeal of future apps, but also improve their functionality and consistency with additional brand channels. Because of this advancement, mobile brand efforts will be affected, both positively and negatively.

First, it positively affects brands because it increases the opportunity for brands to launch applications on a much shorter time frame. Second, it means creating a seamless experience across channels is much easier, with design enhancements in particular. However, with these development changes, it is important to recognize that developing and launching an app is still a cumbersome process that must be handled carefully by a trained developer when doing so on a grand scale. An increasing number of apps in the market also means an increase in competition and user demand for apps that accommodate their needs.

Google demonstrates the modernized and simplistic look and feel when using Material Design.
Apple Swift

Apple’s newest programming language, Swift, is intended to be more “programmer-friendly” in particular. One of the key enhancements is the ability for developers to not only write simplified code, but also debug, test, and create their application much quicker. One of Swift’s benefits is utilizing an updated “integrated development environment” featuring the Playground tool. Playground provides the developers a tool to see their coding results in real time, making it quicker and easier to modify the code to reflect their desired output. Secondly, Swift also has the benefit of compiling and executing quickly; in other words, Swift has the ability to create complex features while still making it easy to edit code and test quickly. Lastly, Swift is extremely beneficial because it is a way to create an iOS app without learning cumbersome Objective-C. Therefore, its simple testing capabilities, ability to create complex features, and overall straightforward syntax make it an ideal language for creating apps.

![Apple’s Playground feature.](image)

Android Material Design

Google’s Material Design language has two main goals: merge design principles with technological functionality and create a consistent experience across devices. Google even released its design guide broken into multiple categories for guidance on the best way to use it with animation, style, layout, components, patterns, usability, and resources. Overall, this design language is intended to create a more modernized look for the Android operating system, making apps more aesthetically pleasing and easier to navigate. With the simple design language and design guide, developers are able to customize their app, while still creating an even more consistent experience across apps and programs.

Two of the most well-known operating systems are removing the development barrier to allow for a quicker turnaround in high-quality apps. As brands recognize consumer needs, fulfilling them with apps will become a simpler solution in the future. However, it is important to recognize it still takes a major investment to develop an app that functions properly.

![Material Design creates seamlessness across devices.](image)
Reality Check

Although development is becoming much more streamlined and simplified, it is doing so in different methods on both the Android and iOS platforms. Meaning, just because the Swift programming language simplifies development for iOS apps, brands still need to create Android apps and must do so separately. However, even with Material Design available, it takes a completely separate amount of time to create and launch the app on both platforms. Brands must adapt in order to have a presence on both platforms. Also, even with the simplifications, programming and app development require training and experience. Specifically, ZDNet mentions how even though Swift might require less coding, it is still a dense and difficult process. Therefore, app development has not been simplified enough for an inexperienced programmer, at least not just yet.

Implications for Brands

Implications for brands vary based on a brand’s experience with apps:

• Brands new to the app game are entering at a great time. Developing and testing an app to make sure it is the appropriate fit for their audience is now easier than before. Even if launching the app is out of budget, beginning development and testing capabilities should now be considered an option to start dipping their toes into the app space.

• Brands with apps in their portfolio are able to devote more time testing and designing to ensure the apps they launch in the future are meeting their needs. Less time can be devoted to the “coding” piece, with more time for testing and prototyping.

• Lastly, with this simplification of development and design, now is the time for brands to work alongside their developers to get creative with their apps. Test out a new concept, release something experimental, and explore opportunities for creating something innovative that capitalizes on apps’ native mobile features.

Brands are directly affected by this trend, particularly as their efforts become more digital. Developing applications will continue to evolve and brands must remain up to date to evolve their digital strategy as well.

References


Gary Anderson
Production Manager

Gary brings more than 14 years of agency experience to his role as production manager at Click Here Labs. In his 24 years in the communications business, he’s dabbled in journalism, editing, writing, and graphic design – always in pursuit of the best way to tell a story. At Click Here Labs, Gary oversees production for The Home Depot, Biltmore, Chuck E. Cheese’s, Go RVing, and many more.

Jamie Alvrus
Digital Strategist

Look for data, and you won’t have to look far to find Jamie giving it a good, thorough going-over. She spends her time analyzing data and digital trends for clients including Chuck E. Cheese’s, Orkin, and MD Anderson.
CAN BRANDS BE BOTH?

The sound of a 56K modem dialing into a bulletin board system. Sadly, many will never experience this. Nor will they experience the thrill of jumping into an anonymous message board and speaking freely about their thoughts for the day. Unwinding online as it were, frankly, with strangers or a supportive community, depending on how you look at it. In the early days of online communication, even before the World Wide Web, in the world of bulletin boards, going online was an anonymous place. We had user names such as tinypig999 and cowboys_fan, and hid our identities. There really was no way to utilize your real name, and if you did, that would have been considered bad form in the space. It worked, until we started to move beyond just simple dialogue.

Fast forward to the mid-2000s and enter Facebook. Mark Zuckerberg believed that the Web should no longer be anonymous, that if we truly wanted to connect with our friends, we needed to ensure that we were connecting with the right people. That if you wanted to find John Smith from Arkansas, you could find the John Smith for whom you were looking. Also, if we wanted to complete other transactions such as renting out a room in our house, we needed to know with whom we were interacting and allowing into our homes. We needed our online presences to reflect who we were. Facebook believed that we should not have two identities and that our names should be connected to our thoughts. Once our names were out there, we could connect with Grandma, our high school acquaintances, and even Joe down in Accounting. But if everyone was listening, could we truly be open with our feelings?

We move in cycles; the world reacts to a movement in one direction by going in the opposite direction. Maybe we don’t want everyone to know who we are. Maybe we want to share our thoughts with the world and not have the repercussions of having those thoughts tied to our identity. Thanks to a series of newer applications, we are going back to being anonymous. Back to the early days of the Internet and those dial-up modems. But there are new twists; we can be anonymous with everyone or we can be anonymous within our circle of friends. Sites such as Secret, Whisper, Ask.fm, Yik Yak, and many others that pop up daily in the app stores are being created that allow users to express themselves freely. Without Grandma reading it.

As marketers, the question becomes... are we invited into the mix? Will users connect with brands on anonymous networks? Or as marketers, will we need to get our advocates to do the talking for our brands? Let’s break it down and understand the implications and opportunities.

The use of social media in our lives and how we utilize it as a form of communication continue to change our daily interaction. The thought of a status update was actually spurred by the idea of leaving a witty message when one was away from an instant messaging client. The line between conversation that is meant for all and the thoughts that are meant for the few has blurred.

In fact, many of the popular social networks give us the ability to shout out a message at any time. But once we hit submit on the keyboard, what is the first thing we check? We look to see if anyone has liked it or replied because we want the validation that someone actually heard our message. We are shouting into the bullhorn, but we really do not know if anyone is listening.

So we have evolved, and now there are three forms of communication happening. One, the primary social networks, Facebook and Twitter, allow us to broadcast our message to our friends, co-workers, and even our aunts. Or Twitter, which broadcasts to the people who follow us (or at least their old accounts, their spam bots, etc.). Two, there are messaging networks that allow us to communicate with a smaller group of individuals, mainly our real friends. To some, this is nothing more than group texts, but it’s more: These networks offer their own communication style, whether in a disappearing photo, a doodle, or emoticons. And three, we have a new place to share our feelings, a place where we can say what we truly believe without the worry of it being traced back to our online profile. These anonymous networks allow us to say anything without the repercussions.

There are many of these anonymous apps, but a few have risen to the top: Whisper and Secret fall into the category of totally anonymous. But then there are a few that fall into the category of the ephemeral: Snapchat and Confide. And, finally, popular messaging networks that do not require a real name: Yik Yak and Kik.

So, what is happening with these networks? Are they really being used? There are so many different sites that it’s hard to see if there is a clear winner in the space. In fact, the line is blurry between the private messaging and anonymous networks. For example, Kik has been noted as being very popular in the messaging space, but because the application does not require your profile to be tied to a social
network or require anything more than a user name, it has become very popular as an alternative to Facebook or Twitter, especially for younger generations of users that are looking for an outlet away from Mom and Dad.

Here is a breakdown of the top social networks for this Millennial audience, the audience that everyone is trying to figure out and the audience that many brands are trying to reach.

These apps are slowly climbing the charts and continue to be discussed as marketers understand the next generation of social users.

**So, How Can Brands Participate? Well, You Can’t Exactly.**

That might be a little strong, but unlike the large social networks, there are no fan pages or ways for brands to enter the conversation. Yet, on various networks around the world, these messaging apps are looking for ways to monetize the audiences they have created. Like Facebook or Twitter, they are looking to do things differently compared to the display ads that clutter websites. But these apps are stating that the best way to get a message in front of their audiences is to buy that placement. In other words, if you pay us, we will send the message to our user base. Also, these networks may offer the opportunity to place an ad next to keyword-based content. If a user posts that they forgot to wear their deodorant today, an ad for Old Spice could be shown in a banner-like format.

**Brands Should Look for Their Advocates to Share Experiences with the Brand**

But if we do not have the ability to be in this conversation, brands should look to get their audiences to include the brand in the one-to-one conversations these individuals are already having. This is a shift in thinking, moving from brand broadcasting to many to creating and encouraging one-to-one conversations. MillerCoors VP of Marketing Jackie Woodward summed this up nicely, “Ultimately, our marketing always has been and always will be about the conversation that happens between friends.” Digital fuels word-of-mouth conversations, and brands should look to do things that are talk-worthy.
Plus, getting these advocates to advocate is stronger than a communication from a brand. These personal recommendations carry more weight than a simple post from a brand that looks and feels like advertising.

**How Else Can Brands Use These Networks? To Listen.**

If people are given the ability to speak freely about a subject, they will really tell you their deepest, most secret thoughts. The things they would say if they didn’t have a filter and knew it could not be tied to their identity. Networks such as Secret and Whisper allow brand managers to learn about the category, their specific comments, or even potential new products and usage. Think of it as a way to get inside the mind of your audience and understand their deepest thoughts. Digital ethnography on any subject.

Check out this example.

*Could this help Chapstick develop a product that would be easier to keep around? (Yes, you do get another purchase when they buy another one, but shouldn’t you be the brand that solves this problem for the customer?)*

**Plant Your Flag and Experiment**

Sure, brands get a little worrisome about creating profiles on social networks, but with many of these new networks, brands should create a profile to at least secure the user name on the network. On networks like Snapchat, the brand name is just a user name and brands like Taco Bell have done nothing more than secure the name “tacobell” before someone in Ohio does. Plus, by creating a user name on the network, this allows the brand to experiment, at least view the content, and perhaps interact with others. Part of the initial thrill of social networking with brands was the ability for a brand to reach out to the user and start a conversation. “Adidas just sent me a message” is a dream to a teenage user, and the same holds true for these new anonymous networks. If the network dies, or does not take off, nothing is lost; it will just float in the digital wind. Be a first mover, not a late follower.

**Be Prepared to Iterate Your Plan**

These networks are in the early stages of their development and are changing based on user adoption and emerging monetization strategies. Be nimble and ready for change. And be ready to be a first mover by understanding the space and the potential opportunities. Many networks are creating monetization efforts that build on the functionality of the network and how the community has embraced the tool.
Much Like Any Social Network, Your Strategy Should Be Reflective of the Rules of the Community

Study the network and the digital behaviors, and make sure to take more than a passive role. Perhaps under another account, understand the communication patterns, the lingo, and look for opportunities for brands. These networks often pivot and start to develop ways for brands to participate in a way that is fitting for the community. Watch for these opportunities.

Decide if the Anonymous Communities Are Right for Your Brand

Recently, these networks have come under fire as a haven for cyber-bullying. Ask.fm and Whisper have put controls in place to attempt to curb these behaviors. Brands should ask themselves if they can tolerate the risk of being associated with and supporting these networks. As with many new technologies, we are just scratching the surface in understanding how these apps will be used and their overall longevity. Depending on your risk tolerance (and your legal counsel), this may not be the right space for your brand.

Note, as with keeping up with any trend, this is an ever-changing environment. Recently, the confidentiality and security of the data has come into question for both Snapchat and Whisper. In mid-October, Snapchat was hacked via a third-party app, and Whisper was rumored to track more data about the user than previously thought. We feel that these networks need to be careful about how much of a cloak of anonymity they advertise, and how much privacy and security they provide in terms of the data that is shared. If these networks prove not to be completely anonymous, the user base may move elsewhere to ensure they can have private or anonymous conversations. In fact, in late October, Facebook announced Facebook Rooms, an anonymous app, which harkens back to the days of the anonymous chat room around various subjects, so new options will continue to surface. We will continue to monitor how users are interacting with these tools, the possible migration away from those that have security or privacy issues, and, of course, how this affects those brands that choose to participate in the conversation.

References


Matt Whitaker
Digital Strategist

Before joining The Richards Group in 2014, Matt led the creation of social and digital strategies for clients such as Louisville Slugger, Verizon FIOS, and Wells Fargo. In his short tenure with us, he’s already making strategic contributions for a range of clients including TGI Fridays, Orkin, and MetroPCS.
An Internet of Things is here. Some predict that 25 billion devices will be Internet-connected by 2015, with 50 billion connected devices by 2020. A comprehensive digital ecosystem is being created now. It will cover, connect, inform, and influence...everything. And we humans are very much connected to and affected by this massive ecosystem. The amount of information that will be available to us, the astonishing conveniences, the speed of communication, and the unique experiences to discover in a new connected world promise to completely change the relationship between the digital and the physical.

Digital Ubiquity

No one said it better of our age of digital ubiquity than Nicholas Negroponte, founder and Chairman Emeritus of MIT’s Media Lab. In 1998 he said, “Like air and drinking water, being digital will be noticed only by its absence, not its presence.” Digital ubiquity is here, and currently at the core of the experience are our mobile devices. The mobile hub is developing rapidly and will continue to be a critical centerpiece for some time, but as the Internet of Things continues to grow and weave itself into every aspect of our lives, the connection to the average person’s mobile device becomes less critical. Our connections to these new digital experiences will be innumerable and will go far beyond our mobile phones.

The rapid growth of this digital ecosystem is staggering. According to a white paper from Dave Evans of Cisco, “The Internet of Things: How the Next Evolution of the Internet Is Changing Everything,” the number of connected devices exceeded the number of humans several years ago in 2008 and has been expanding dramatically every year since.

The Pew Research Center reports in a recent study about digital life that the Internet of Things will be evident and impactful across almost every aspect of our lives.

- **Bodies.** Many people will wear devices that let them connect to the Internet to get feedback on their activities, health, and fitness. They will also monitor others (their children or employees, for instance) who are wearing sensors or moving in and out of places that have sensors.

- **Homes.** People will be able to control nearly everything remotely, from how their residences are heated and cooled to how often their gardens are watered. Homes will also have sensors that warn about everything from prowlers to broken water pipes.

- **Communities.** Embedded devices and smartphone apps will enable more efficient transportation and give readouts on pollution levels. “Smart systems” might deliver electricity and water more efficiently and warn about infrastructure problems.

- **Goods and Services.** Factories and supply chains will have sensors and readers that more precisely track materials to speed up and smooth out the manufacture and distribution of goods.

- **Environment.** There will be real-time readings from fields, forests, oceans, and cities about pollution levels, soil moisture, and resource extraction that allow for closer monitoring of problems.

From the Internet of Things to the Internet of Experiences

This new age of digital connectedness means far more than an Internet of Things, of devices, of apps. It means an Internet of Experiences. As the digital and physical begin to merge in new, innovative ways, it will be the unique experiences created that will be the most meaningful and valuable. The technology will become increasingly invisible, delivering a more direct connection between the user and the desired experience. But all of this digital connectedness can overwhelm. For many people, it drives a desire to disconnect and simplify just to gain back control in an increasingly cluttered digital life. The challenge for marketers will be in trying to find ways to help people gain more control over their digitally connected lives and find ways that technology can enhance and complement more “real” experiences.
Getting Real

We seek authenticity, individual craft, and experiences that connect us in more “real” ways to people and experiences. More and more, the time we spend in our digital realm seems less valuable, less meaningful. Becoming undigital is a new adventure to which many are drawn. So if our apps, social media, Internet-connected homes, and other digital connections sometimes get in the way or leave us unfulfilled, what do we really want? Looking closer, some themes and reasons emerge:

- People want more control of time.
- Being present in key moments, being undistracted.
- “Real” experiences make people worldly, knowledgeable, and interesting.
- Disconnecting feels different and pulls people out of the everyday routine. It helps them engage and do something meaningful.
- People want real, exclusive, never-repeated experiences with friends and family.

Creating Connected Experiences That Feel “Real”

The basis of creating more “real” experiences means that we must find elegant, artful, and technologically advanced ways to merge the digital with physical experiences. Bridging these two, usually separate, domains of our lives requires a meshing of software and hardware. To get it right, the personal and contextual elements of the experience must be meaningful, simple, and intelligent, and the technology needs to be invisible. Only then will the definition of what’s “real” be redefined.
Software Applications

Currently, applications providing this digitally augmented “real” experience are rarely found simply because of the immense amount of data needed to understand and personalize a user’s experience. There are, however, a few applications pioneering contextual experiences from digital data. Microsoft Cortana, Google Now, and Google Inbox are leading the category in understanding users’ digital data, providing anticipatory and contextual information from traditionally unconnected touchpoints. These represent early success in bringing contextual and anticipatory digital layers to experiences that typically require user input. The magic of this technology is its ability to anticipate user needs based on preferences, search history, and email contents.

These apps are giving users the feeling of a true personal digital concierge, and they get out of the way of the “real” experience that users are trying to have. The initial possibilities of this age of invisible and anticipatory computing are being demonstrated, but this technology is developing and evolving rapidly with increasingly integrated experiences on the horizon. There is still a gap, however. These apps have a weak connection to the physical world where more valuable experiences are possible.

Hardware

Sensors are unlocking our ability to connect with the physical world in ways like never before. With sensors like the beacons created by Estimote, we have already seen the technology evolve, in a matter of months, from large, location-sensing blocks to nearly unnoticeable sensors the size of stickers that will help make nearly anything a smart thing. As these sensors become smarter, and smaller, we will have a flood of data available from our physical surroundings and our experiences with them. As the physical and digital merge, it will bring new context and relevancy and create a new kind of experience.

Operating System for Connected Devices

The final piece to creating more “real” digital experiences is an operating system to effectively connect the physical and digital channels, and support a simple user interface to help drive mass adoption and innovation. There are many operating systems being developed for the Internet of Things; one of the most versatile and easiest to use is If This Then That (IFTTT) has been reimagined to allow users to create unique recipes by connecting data gathered from software and hardware with the purpose of minimizing or eliminating user input.

The recipes structure is built on Tasks, Triggers, and Actions. For example, “IF I am leaving this location[Trigger], THEN Prompt me to text my significant other[Action]. The entire recipe is a Task. IFTTT is setting the bar for how to build these connections and for what people expect as they create their own custom experiences that combine the digital and physical realms. Systems such as IFTTT will bring connected devices and users’ networks together at a large scale. Users decide what they need each device to do, how it fits into their network’s goals, and then let it run on its own. This is how the more valuable “real” and contextual digital experiences will evolve.
Finding “Real” in Branded Experiences

As brands find their way into this growing ecosystem of digital connections, they must remember that the real potential is in facilitating an Internet of meaningful, trusted experiences for people who are increasingly wary of our new digital ubiquity. We must help people identify and implement better ways to control their digital domain, connect on their own terms, and create more meaningful experiences in a world where disconnecting will be easier said than done.

Guidelines for the new hyper-connected world:

- Uncover opportunities where your brand can create more “real” experiences, where the digital layer always enhances and makes the physical experience more meaningful.
- Resolve to never be part of the digital noise. How? Focus on anticipation and providing relevant information right in the moment that a person needs it.
- Develop and leverage technology that helps enable everyday experiences to be unique and gives people a sense of exploration and discovery.
- Provide and hide. Put contextual information and opportunities in front of people, then get out of the way. Let the experience happen in a personal way.
- Don’t try to touch every moment. Find the natural connections and leverage those.
- Prepare for a massive amount of new data that will be gathered and analyzed for opportunities. Long-term success in creating these new connected experiences will depend on the insights that surface in this data.

References


Brennen Schlueter
Digital Strategist

Brennen crafts digital strategy for AAA, TXU Energy, Motel 6, and Pancreatic Cancer Action Network. When not predicting the future and shaping strategy for his clients, Brennen enjoys dabbling with new digital technology and non-virtual life experiences such as music festivals, travel, and sports.

Todd Unruh
Digital Strategist

After 13 years of navigating the digital marketing landscape, Todd can pinpoint exactly where you need to be with your digital strategy. Since graduating from Oklahoma State University, he’s been feverishly charting new strategic territory for brands including Nokia, Samsung Mobile, National Geographic, CarMax, Pizza Hut, AAA, and Pier 1 Imports.
WHAT’S IMPORTANT?

Since the beginning of advertising, verification has been at the forefront of our industry. In the 1960s, the Media Ratings Council (MRC) was developed for these very reasons: as a congressional directive to self-regulate the TV and radio industries. Today, things remain mostly the same – except for the nuances of the interactive landscape. The industry is evolving and pushing for different standards and regulation of verification, with an emphasis on viewability.

Viewability is currently defined as a display impression with at least 50% of the ad, measured by pixels, rendered for at least one continuous second once the ad has been delivered by the ad server. For video, at least 50% of the ad must render for at least two continuous seconds.

A buzzword for the past few years, viewability has reached a new level of importance. Marketers and agencies are walking on unchartered territory based on a key milestone that took place this year. In 2014, the MRC officially allowed the buying and selling of viewable impressions for display and video. With this news, the industry had expected many marketers and their agencies to jump on the bandwagon of buying viewable impressions immediately. However, purchasing viewable impressions comes with a steep premium that, in many cases, can nearly double the cost of media inventory. Furthermore, it is still very uncommon to guarantee 100% viewability. Most companies are providing guarantees closer to 80% since there are still no industry norms or benchmarks.

With all of these nuances, we’re left with a couple of questions. First, “Is digital advertising worth the investment if only 50%-80% of my messages will be seen?” Second, “Is it worth it to buy viewable impressions at a premium? If not, what is the alternative solution?”

So, is it worth it? In the U.S., consumers are still spending 5.46 hours daily with digital across all devices, and that number will only increase in the coming years. Therefore, leaving this out of a marketing mix would result in a significant gap.

Digital also allows us to track how consumers are engaging with our messages and our brands, and its impact on awareness, favorability, or purchase behavior. There are countless brands that are tracking the direct return on their digital investment and seeing great success.

Now the question remains, what should we do about viewability? While it’s been proven that viewability drives improvement across all success metrics, should we buy viewable impressions to guarantee we’re getting what we pay for? The answer is, maybe. There needs to be some initial work done to find out. The first step for all advertisers, whether branding or direct response, is to take full advantage of verification technology. While there are likely too many players in this space, the MRC has done a great job in providing information to help compare their capabilities. Some of the top players are Integral Ad Science, utilized by The Richards Group, as well as Moat, DoubleVerify, and Sizmek. These companies attach their technology to the ads themselves, and in the case of Integral Ad Science, can measure an ad’s viewability and overall environment at the impression level. This level of granularity is important as some technology will measure at the site or domain level, which can lead to a misrepresentation of a site’s overall traffic and viewability. As an added bonus, we’re also able to block a large percent of the impressions that would be served to non-human traffic, or bots, before an ad is served onto a page. This also increases viewability since all non-human traffic is non-viewable, illustrating the importance of pairing the assessment of both viewability and fraud, or non-human activity. The following chart shows the correlation.
This practice also saves advertisers valuable media spend. When used correctly, verification technology will give you the visibility that you need to see where your campaign stands for viewability. As with most other metrics, you can start to establish benchmarks of where all your media vendors should fall when it comes to the percent of your ads that are “viewable” per the definition that we’ve discussed.

Once your baseline is established, the next step is to optimize toward better viewability, leveraging media investment to reward the media partners that are doing best. Once you’ve maximized your efforts through optimizations, you’ll have enough information to assess whether the premium placed against the media cost for guaranteed viewable impressions is worth it. There are several factors that contribute to better viewability. The factors that are most likely to impact viewability are controlling non-human traffic, assessing ad sizes or size of video players, and understanding the best ad placements on the page based on the format of the page. For example, some pages are more likely to be scrolled down versus others that have most of the main content “above the fold.” Therefore, it’s important to ask media partners how they approach each one of these factors, starting with their auditing practices for both their inventory sources as well as fraud detection and assessment.
Now, What Can We Expect in the Next Year?

Some tactics, such as mobile, native, and social, will see a more aggressive increase in spend based on their increased viewability. Mobile in-app is 100% viewable based on ad placement, while native ads have much better viewability for the same reason. Lastly, social will remain less of a focus when looking at viewability given that their inventory is much less commoditized, allowing for more control.

The industry will likely start to see traction behind the sale of viewable impressions across display, video, and even mobile Web, especially for clients that are more focused on branding strategies. Once the initial wave subsides, benchmarks will quickly follow. Currently, over 75% of top digital spenders, according to Nielsen, are already tracking viewability, so we’re well on our way. When there are norms in the marketplace, publishers will have a better handle on how to optimize for viewability in conjunction with other key performance indicators, and the choice to buy viewable impressions will become another option in a myriad of digital pricing models along with cost-per-thousand and cost-per-acquisition. The best practice of tying buying model and metrics of success directly to your business objective will remain.

The good news is that this step was necessary for brands and agencies to better understand the outcome of their efforts, and for publishers, networks, and demand-side platforms to have a higher level of accountability to their partners. The one trend that will remain is that all brands and agencies will have viewability as a basic technology that is attached to any and all campaigns, especially those that are not site-direct. Both parties should ensure that the technology being used (1) is granular down to the impression or URL level, (2) is proactive in assessing impressions prior to serving or as they serve, and (3) blocks non-human traffic whenever possible to continuously improve the outcome of any and all campaigns.

As the industry continues to evolve and identify norms in this new space, it’s important that we keep the following things in mind. All brands should be taking full advantage of verification technology to start mandating accountability from all media partners. Second, we should be requiring that all media partners provide visibility into their auditing practices for viewability and fraud across all inventory sources. Lastly, we all need to start to set benchmarks and determine whether buying guaranteed viewable impressions will ultimately pay out based on our varying business objectives.

References

Jaquie Hoyos
Brand Media/Planner
Jaquie plans, implements, and manages traditional and digital media for a diverse roster of clients: Biltmore, Edible Arrangements, Suddenlink, The Maids, NuPlexa, and Sea Island. Speaking of “diverse,” she’s strong in both the traditional and digital arenas, and is the agency’s clear voice for verification and viewability, a key area of interest for her.
With the release of iOS 8 and OS X Yosemite, Apple introduced a set of features it refers to as “Continuity Computing.” Within continuity computing, there is a feature called “Handoff” that lets a user pick up a task on one device that was started on another. This seemingly simple concept has powerful implications for all things digital.

**Continuity Computing Explained**

The concept behind continuity computing isn’t new, but requires the type of integration between mobile and desktop operating systems that, until now, was effectively impossible. Apple was uniquely positioned to build such a system because it has sole control of iOS, the operating system for all iPhones and iPads, and OS X, the operating system for all Apple computers.

As briefly described above, continuity computing “lets a user pick up a task on one device that was started on another.” It’s easiest to understand with an example. Say you are composing an email on your mobile phone.

While writing this email, you arrive at your desk. In the past, you would have either had to finish this email on your phone, or scrap it and start over on your desktop computer. Now you can “hand off” that task to your desktop, or your iPad, or any other device nearby that is logged in to your iCloud account. You don’t have to do anything special on your phone to initiate the handoff, you just pick up the task on one of your other devices. On your desktop computer, the task will appear as an extension of your dock…

…and also as an extension on the command+tab task-switching menu.
On an iPad or iPhone, you will see an icon in the lower left of the unlock screen. You can swipe that icon upward to open the handoff, or, similar to the desktop, you can access the handoff by double-tapping the home button to access the recently used apps. The handoff activity will be to the left of your desktop.

When you open the email handoff, your local email application will pull up the email you were writing, at the same point you left it, right down to the last letter typed.

Although not used in the example, it is important to note that Handoff can do more than just hand off a task; it can also set up a data stream between apps on two different devices, thereby allowing real-time interaction between them.

The Handoff feature is now built into many of Apple’s own applications (Mail, Safari, Pages, Numbers, Keynote, Maps, Messages, Reminders, Calendar, and Contacts). Apple has also made the feature available for all developers to take advantage of. In fact, a quick review of the required code shows that Apple has made it relatively easy to implement.
Handoff and the Web

It’s probably no surprise that you can use Handoff within Safari to pick up right where you left off on another device. Less obvious, though, is that a website can hand off to an app, and an app can hand off to a website.

This opens up amazing new opportunities.

Any time an app announces that it is available for handoff, it can provide a web address as an alternate handoff destination. That way, even if one of your other devices doesn’t have the related app, it can still continue the task using its web browser. The converse is also true. A website can be registered such that, when it is loaded into your web browser, it can hand off to an app. (Note: Apple has made the API to do this public, so that other browsers can play. Apple states specifically that this is to support those who use something other than Safari as their default browser.)

Security and Convenience

Apple makes use of Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) and iCloud to make the handoff seamless and secure. There are two basic requirements that have to be met for the handoff to work. First, the two, or more, devices must be near each other. This is determined using BLE. Unlike older Bluetooth standards, BLE doesn’t require the user to pair the devices. Second, both devices must be logged in to the same iCloud account. To be clear, BLE is only used to determine proximity. The actual communication between devices is handled through iCloud.

By using proximity, and requiring that both devices be logged in to iCloud, Apple has created a secure way for devices to connect in the background. In the past, similar connections required interaction from the user on both devices, a requirement that would kill adoption of Handoff. Instead, the handshake and authorization between devices happen in the background, providing the user with the “it just works” experience.
Design Will Drive Adoption

Think about how you switch between tasks on an iPhone or iPad. You double-tap the home button, and a graphical list of all recent apps appears. You then swipe to the desired app and tap it. Now, if there is a Handoff-capable app running on another device, that same list of recent apps will include the task from the other device. Handoff on the desktop works similarly in that it integrates into the native task/app-switching mechanic for that platform. Handoff tasks appear in the dock and in the command+tab pop-up just like any other running application.

Users don’t easily change their behavior. Apple has dealt with this in the best way possible: Handoff doesn’t require a change in behavior. It requires no special knowledge or additional effort from the user. The workflow is identical to how users switch between tasks today. The feature works in a way that feels like you are launching an app on one device, and it is magically available on all your devices.

Taking Advantage of Handoff

From a marketing standpoint, there are two basic ways that Handoff can be used: Enhancing the user’s experience and tracking the user’s experience. (If you are a marketer, guess which one you should be most excited about.)

Enhancing the User’s Experience

As it relates to marketing, enhancing the experience of filling out a form is probably the most obvious way to use Handoff. Filling out a form on mobile, or even a tablet, is far from ideal. Yet, over 50% of web traffic is now from mobile devices. Imagine a user starting to fill out a form on their phone, giving up partway through, and tucking the phone in their pocket. They get to their office and when they first open their phone, a Handoff task appears on their desktop. They click it, and the form opens up, picking up right where they left off.

Another example would be presenting related ads for the same product from device to device. Imagine how much more attention an ad would get if it were specifically tailored for each platform and followed the user from mobile to tablet to desktop.

The data stream capabilities of Handoff could be used to create a novel interactive experience where branded content on two devices can be made to interact with one another. Imagine using your phone to control an interactive experience displayed on your desktop.

Tracking the User’s Experience

In the last few years, the desire of marketers to take advantage of the multi-device experience, known as omnichannel marketing, has been on the rise. According to the 2013 ANA Nielsen Multi-Screen Survey Report, media spend attributed to multi-screen advertising campaigns was expected to grow from 20% of budgets, at the time of the survey in August 2013, to 50% by 2016. However, as captured in the summary of that same report, the biggest worry among marketers is measurement and tracking. Handoff doesn’t just provide a way to seamlessly move between devices, but it also allows us to track when a user moves between devices, and what device and app they move to.

Today, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are among the few effective ways to tackle the omnichannel experience. This is because they can reliably identify a user as they change from platform to platform. With Handoff, for the first time we will be able to effectively track the user, not just from platform to platform, but also from task to task. Not only will we be able to adjust our message to reflect the best practices for each platform, we will also be able to tailor that message to reflect the sequence, task, and timing of each transition. It will take some time for the various analytics and personalization platforms to integrate Handoff tracking, but given the tremendous potential, I don’t think we will have to wait for long.

Workflow-Aware Marketing

So with all that in mind, let’s take the previous examples up a notch. Instead of passively enabling the Handoff feature, let’s outright use not just the user’s workflow, but also the known capabilities of Handoff itself.

Instead of “just” allowing a user to complete a form on their desktop, let’s tell the user that they have that option. Tell them they can “continue filling out this form on your desktop at any time using Handoff.”

That ad that followed the user from device to device could also prompt the user to take action via Handoff. “Hand off to your desktop to see an interactive 3-D visualization of our product…and use your phone to control it.”

Imagine a user going to a business’ website searching for a location near them. When viewing the found location’s details, there is a prompt to “check your phone now for driving directions.”

Many sites remove content and/or functionality from their mobile-responsive views because of the limitations of the mobile form factor. When viewing one of those sites on a mobile device, a user that comes within proximity of their desktop or iPad can be prompted to use the other platform to “access these additional features.”
One Last Thing

This is a bit of speculation, but consider the following. We know that with iPhone 6, Apple has announced iPay. We also know that the phones that support it have fingerprint recognition. We also know that iPay has app integration, allowing iOS apps to use the iPay system for in-app purchases. Handoff potentially could be used to provide iPay verification for website purchases on your desktop. Fill your cart on your desktop, and get prompted to “check your phone now to conveniently complete your transaction.” No credit card or address info needed; just touch the fingerprint scanner.

Recommendations

Organizations doing any kind of digital marketing should pay keen attention to continuity computing and, specifically, Apple’s Handoff feature. Here are some suggestions for how to proceed.

1. Get your strategists, developers, and user experience people updated to the latest versions of iOS and OS X. They need to be hands-on to intimately understand how the workflow they are designing will or will not be effective for targeted users.

2. Pick a small pilot project to familiarize your team with the implementation process. Some basic experience will go a long way to better understanding the possibilities, limitations, and costs of implementation.

3. Try to think about multi-device workflow early in your strategy and experience planning process. Trying to “integrate” the feature after ideas have already been solidified will prevent you from taking best advantage of the feature.

4. Think outside the box, but validate your ideas technically before pitching them to a client/stakeholder. As with any new technology, understanding the possibilities early in the game sometimes requires a bit of feature speculation. Once you have what sounds like a brilliant idea, make sure the technology will actually do what you are suggesting before putting your idea out there.

References


Brian Edgin
User Experience Architect

At Click Here Labs, Brian acts as the voice of the user for clients including Biltmore, TGI Fridays, and The Salvation Army. This involves planning information architecture, generating site maps and wireframes, and conducting usability testing—all to ensure the best possible user experience. In his spare time, Brian enjoys writing iPhone and iPad apps, playing Minecraft with his kids, and looking through his telescope at the night sky.
Marketers love storytelling. The rise of social and subsequent popularity of content marketing has meant a renewed interest in story for many brands and agencies.

Rightfully so. Story is how some of the most powerful advertising creates an emotional connection. Story is persuasive. It puts us in the shoes of others and makes messages more relevant and relatable.

Yet story is also a legacy of the linear and uncomplicated world of traditional advertising. Digital campaigns built on story tend to use new channels in ways that closely mirror linear media without thinking of the new context provided by the digital world. Stories in digital are being told across many platforms and in many different formats. Here’s how we must revisit the way we approach storytelling in 2015.

Think Beyond Message

We’ve been trained through traditional media to think in terms of messages. Briefs are built to craft messages that will change perceptions or communicate essential information. This kind of thinking sells short the unique benefits of digital – where marketers can create experiences or drive behaviors.

This unique opportunity can be seen even in the digital opportunity we first turn to when thinking of story – video. Simply creating long-form or short-form video and running it online is just the broadcast paradigm applied to digital. The real opportunity is in creating nonlinear, multiplatform stories.

Honda’s “The Other Side” video is a great example of a simple step beyond standard storytelling. The viewer can toggle between two concurrent videos by pressing “R” on their keyboard. That simple interaction brings the viewer into the story rather than telling it to them.
Create Value Through Experience

The most memorable stories for your customers will be created by the real experiences they have with your brand. The experience someone has on your app is just as real as the interaction they have in person with an employee, and certainly more impactful than a message they see in a pre-roll ad.

The best way to start is by thinking about the behaviors you want to drive, and build stories that lead to or are integrated with these experiences. One of the most underutilized cross-platform storytelling devices is sequential messaging. It allows you to build narrative across multiple devices, but it also allows you to string story over multiple engagements. For example, you could target a video only to customers who had already downloaded and had an experience on your app. In 2015, brands must set behavioral objectives to get the most out of digital.

Build Story Generators

Since storytelling is a participatory sport, one of the real opportunities in digital is to create experiences that generate stories.

The EA Sports Madden GIFERATOR is a great example of a story generator. The platform creates GIF highlights in real time when NFL games are happening. Fans can then generate more than 100,000 different combinations on the fly.

Discover, Don’t Impose

Brand perceptions are shaped more by customer conversation than advertising. Digital has made this possible, and it’s also the best first step in revisiting your approach to storytelling. Start with the customer. What are your customers saying about your brand? What else do they talk about? Simply listening will make it clear what’s resonating with them, or it will make obvious the important pieces of your story that aren’t being told.

2015 is the perfect time to begin putting these principles into practice. Companies that have evolved their approach to storytelling are already redefining what it means to make a lasting connection with their customers.

References

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John works tirelessly to set directions for our clients’ brands in the digital space. Together with his team, John helps them establish unique digital ecosystems that stretch across a variety of touchpoints, including websites, mobile, social media, online advertising, and whatever’s emerging in this ever-changing landscape. He’s a digital veteran who’s led digital strategy for clients such as The Home Depot, Hyundai, Amstel Light, Travelocity, and Walmart, to name a few.
The hot buzzword in 2014 was content. Everywhere you turned, brands were rushing to produce a large quantity of quality content. But it’s harder than it sounds. The first challenge is that many brands still don’t fully understand what content marketing is, let alone how to produce it. The second challenge is when brands try to use traditional advertising processes to create content. Spoiler alert: It doesn’t work.

The good news is that there are people who can help. People with the skills to make interesting, high-quality content, quickly, in a cost-effective way. And on top of that, they come with a built-in audience. So not only can they help to produce branded content, but they can also serve as a media distribution channel.

We call these folks content creators. “Influencers” was the buzzword du jour in 2013 and 2014 – but these guys are more than influencers. They’re creative types – publishers even – who produce interesting, creative content across a variety of media. And in 2015, they’ll begin not only to create digital and social content – but offline content, too.

What Is a Content Creator?

They’re not new to the brand scene – bloggers and YouTube content creators have been around. Users used to be considered content creators when they produced user-generated content – but the race for high-quality, on-brand content has banished user-generated content to the contest/sweeps space. Much like the blogger boom several years ago, in 2015 we’ll see a new crop of professional content creators make a living from producing branded content.

These are videographers who got their start on YouTube, photographers who began on Instagram, designers who networked on Tumblr, and storytellers who cut their teeth in the blogosphere. But it also includes a new kind of industry expert. Consider the travel space. No longer do you need an expensive photographer to capture beautiful landscape scenery and placement in a high-profile travel magazine to share the work. Now, Instagram photographers infected with wanderlust, such as @colerise and @fosterhunting, can capture the shots in interesting, branded ways without a huge crew and share it with their nearly one million followers – and tell their stories about where they went and the crazy things that happened along the way.

It’s these guys who will creep in on the territory of big-name directors, photographers, and producers because they’re cheaper, they have built-in followers, their work resonates on the Web, and they can do soup-to-nuts photography, storytelling, and publishing.

### TAXONOMY OF CONTENT CREATORS

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Here’s a look at the many types of content creators for brand use.
How Will Brands Use Them?

As a one-stop shop for branded content: both production and distribution.

Consider makeup.com, a full online publication created and sponsored by L’Oréal. But it’s not just the L’Oréal team that’s creating the daily content—it’s a group of influencers that includes YouTube stars Eva Gutowski and Michelle Phan, and blogger networks such as Beautystreams. In short, they’re blending content and commerce with a new type of editorial team—part brand team, part influencers.

Same with our friends at TGI Fridays. To launch its new handcrafted menu this summer, we helped Fridays take the food and drink to the streets with two food trucks that traveled the nation on a summer road trip. Along the way, we met with handcrafters of all kinds—in food, fashion, music, and art. And to broaden the reach of the campaign, we sent four photographers and videographers along for the 10-week ride to capture and share photos and videos of every festival we went to and every handcraft we met. The stories were carefully handcrafted by the content creators and brand team back at headquarters, and then shared with followers on the creators’ channels and on Summer of Fridays.

What Does the Future of Content Creation Look Like?

We’ll see this space get much more sophisticated in the next year. So far, creators’ work has been mostly used for social and digital content. Brands are adept at using influencers for social media content because social content is often allowed to be a little rougher in production value than on other channels. But while content creators don’t follow the traditional production process (i.e., full production crews and editing houses), every day the quality of their work is getting closer and closer to that of the pros.
And what that means is we’ll start to see content creators working across all channels – offline, online, and in the experiential realm. We’ll see influencer-created content promoting brands on TV, in print, and at branded events.

The new model also applies to talent – replacing celebrity talent are YouTube stars (e.g., Michelle Phan), blog celebs (e.g., Ree Drummond), and Snapchat up-and-comes (e.g., Shonduras).

Just as brands, agencies, and production houses have networks of directors, photographers, editors, and producers with whom they like to work, we’ll see content creator networks become more prominent. Talent agencies such as Tinker Street will grow. And agencies and brands will create relationships with the videographers, Instagram photographers, and social media celebs that are right for their brands, their targets, and their budget.

What Does This Mean for the Future of Advertising?

It means that production is changing and that the lines between online and offline continue to blur. It’s time to look outside the little black production books and expand the network. Expand to social media influencers, to producers sitting in creative co-working spaces. And to the people that you follow online because you can’t get enough of their stories.

Three Takeaways for Brands

1. Selecting Your Content Creators. Depending on whether you’re seeking content creators for a specific project or simply building a database of creators for your brand, your process may vary. But here are a few ways to get started no matter the project. Find out which social media power users are popular with your target audience – who do they follow on YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter? Now, separate those into categories – some may be celebrities, others may be Instagram photographers, others may be comedians, bloggers, or writers. Breaking these into categories will help you determine when and where to use them. Now, consider your industry. If you’re a food brand, a quick search for “top Instagram food photographers” can be a great starting place. Use your social listening tool or influencer tools such as Traackr to find people who are influential online in food photography, videography, styling, or blogging. If you’re a beauty or fashion brand, find out who’s making waves online in street fashion. Sometimes it’s the unexpected, up-and-coming creators who are the best fit – like this tiny style icon. Then, cast a wider net. Connect with talent agencies and production houses, and get their recommendations. Get to know the creatives in co-working spaces in your area. Lastly, but most importantly, get in the practice of following content creators on a daily basis from your personal accounts. The people and publishers you follow will lead you to their friends, contacts, and favorite creators – making your network even larger.

2. Content Creation Should Be Overseen by a Nimble Brand Team. Don’t just send creators out into the wild without a brand guide. Any content creation project needs to be overseen by a team who truly understands your brand, knows what quality content looks like, and has a keen understanding of the digital content space. Without people in place who know how to identify, brief, and manage the right mix of creators, you risk diluting your brand and confusing your audience.

3. Don’t Forget to Support Content with Paid Media. Yes, it’s an added value that these content-producing influencers have a built-in audience, but make sure you’re allocating a portion of the budget to promoting content in the same way you promote advertising pieces – with paid media across your own social channels, with editorial partners as sponsored content or native ads, rich media buys, and online video placements.

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Stephanie helps keep The Richards Group ahead of new social and digital trends while hatching new ideas and content campaigns for clients such as TGI Fridays, Ruth’s Chris Steak House, Chuck E. Cheese’s, and Zephyr Gin. When she’s not cooking up a digital plan or foodstagramming for her clients, you can find this food-loving strategist concocting something yummy in her own kitchen or burning it off at the gym.
MESSAGING APPS TAKE OFF

In the past couple of years, one-to-one messaging has taken off with social apps such as Snapchat and WhatsApp. These apps have seen tremendous growth in the past year. Snapchat has now even outpaced Twitter among 18-34 year olds.

These popular messaging apps have created new opportunities for brands to interact with consumers with “one-to-one” messaging, a much more intimate and potentially engaging opportunity. Some brands, such as Taco Bell, have already seen the benefits of one-to-one messaging. Taco Bell was one of the early adopters of Snapchat and, with a following of almost 200,000 friends on the app, Taco Bell says it has seen an estimated 80% of friends opening each snap and 90% of those friends viewing the snap in its entirety. Other brands have also begun to make use of these popular messaging apps, but many of them haven’t quite figured out how to get scale from their efforts.

What could be better than one-to-one messaging with consumers that like you enough to directly communicate with your brand? Well, there is one thing: One-to-one messaging that gives your brand enough scale to reach consumers in a big way. To be successful and achieve scale with messaging apps, brands must check the following boxes:

Analyze Existing User Bases

You have to know where your target audience is – you cannot expect a Boomer audience to download Snapchat. Getting people to use the app should not be the barrier to entry; instead, the challenge should be getting consumers to find you. You must analyze your existing user bases across all of your social platforms and decide if it makes sense for your brand and target audience to move into the new messaging app platform.

For example, the ABC Family show “Pretty Little Liars” is catered toward Millennials, making Snapchat a perfect outlet for connecting with the show’s viewers. During the Season 5 premiere, official social media sponsor Audi sent snaps that featured exclusive bonus content in real time. While Audi typically does not target itself to the Millennial market, it used this as an opportunity to appear as a younger brand and alter its reputation. Thus, Audi specifically took into consideration the “Pretty Little Liars” market to determine that Snapchat was the best outlet for this initiative, and it leveraged the existing “Pretty Little Liars” user base to achieve its goal.
Become an Occasion-Based Destination for Exclusive Content

Popular messaging apps have changed the way we look at social as a whole. As a 24/7 medium, social media typically require brands to be very active in posting and engaging with consumers on each of their owned channels. Take Facebook and Twitter, for example; following best practices, brands must create a constant content stream and interact with users on a frequent basis. Messaging apps, however, do not require this same steady stream of content day in and day out. Instead, messaging platforms lend themselves more to being leveraged as an occasion-based destination for social campaigns or exclusive content.

WeChat, touted as the Chinese alternative to WhatsApp, has almost 400 million active users and a growing global audience. Michael Kors developed a customized WeChat channel to capitalize on an occasion. The fashion brand called its customized WeChat channel “Jet Set” and leveraged it to share live updates from the fashion show with fans. Fans could like the content and then share via other social networks.

Pull Participants into the Brand Story

After you have made a commitment to become an occasion-based destination on these new messaging apps, your brand then needs to figure out how to best pull consumers into the brand story. In other words, what can your brand do to encourage consumers to respond and interact in a two-way conversation.

This year at Coachella, Heineken sent cropped snaps to its followers as clues to surprise shows on any given day during the festival. Users who responded with the right band or artist got an early confirmation of an act that was scheduled to appear at the Heineken House, the beer sponsor’s stage. This worked well because it pulled participants into the brand story and allowed them to participate.

Hellmann’s Mayonnaise is another brand that has taken to WhatsApp to interact with and assist consumers. Using WhatsApp, Hellmann’s launched a live recipe service where users can chat with cooking experts on how to prepare meals in real time. In addition to setting up these “help sessions,” this recipe service also allows users to send a photo of ingredients purchased, and the WhatsCook team can help come up with a recipe using those items.

Experiment with New Platform Updates

Messaging apps are new to the social scene; therefore, it is extremely important as a brand to keep up with new platform updates. Keeping up with new platform updates will give your brand a competitive edge and will allow it to tailor your campaigns and content for the platforms.

On August 29, 2014, Snapchat announced it was releasing an update to its product called “Our Story.” Underneath users’ recent updates, users came across a new “live” section that features “Our Story.” In “Our Story,” users are able to experience stories contributed by the Snapchat community at all sorts of events around the world. This update to the platform showcases Snapchat’s media distribution capabilities. It was officially launched during the World Cup as Rio Live. For the World Cup, Snapchat users received a series of snaps from Rio Live despite not having added the account to their list of contacts. This account sent users curated photos and videos taken by users at the event.
In October 2015, Universal Pictures was the first brand to test ads on Snapchat with a 20-second trailer for the movie “Ouija.” The “Ouija” ad appeared under the Recent Updates tab next to other snaps from users’ friends and stated that it was a sponsored snap; the ad disappeared a day later. Universal Pictures has stated that its first advertising run on Snapchat was successful, with millions of views. As Snapchat ads and analytics become more sophisticated, a key metric for brands will be how many people are exposed to the ads versus how many views the ads received. In 2015, it will be interesting to watch how brands adapt to the new ad platform. Long gone are the days of just putting your media dollars behind TV. Snapchat should now be in your consideration set when buying digital and social ads.

WhatsApp will be an interesting platform to watch in the upcoming year. Historically, WhatsApp’s motto has been: No ads, no games, and no gimmicks. Since being purchased by Facebook, that sentiment may change. Forbes has reported that WhatsApp is already experimenting with how to work with marketers. WhatsApp is considering charging airlines and brands such as Uber to message users. The mobile messaging space is full of rivals such as Kik, LINE, WeChat, and Tango. All companies are coming up with interesting ways to invite brands in on the fun as a way to monetize.

Make a Commitment to Promote

Just because you build it does not mean consumers will come. Breaking into these new messaging platforms requires a commitment to cross-promotion and ad support. Many brands have already taken advantage of their existing social communities as a way to spread the word about breaking into new messaging app platforms. Taco Bell and Wendy’s are two popular brands that have spent ad dollars on Facebook to cross-promote Snapchat efforts.

While advertising efforts are still in the infancy stage with messaging apps, there are interesting and innovative ways to garner significant reach to tell your brand story. 2015 will be an interesting year to watch for messaging apps, as advertising opportunities are continuing to grow and evolve. Is your brand ready to snap to scale?

References

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As a social strategist, Caitlin lives and breathes social media. Her curiosity, vivacious personality, and prodigious multitasking serve her well in a social media world that never sleeps or slows down. Her clients include Chick-fil-A, QuikTrip, Reunion Tower, Pier 1 Imports, and Dr Pepper Snapple Group.